

EXPOSITORY ESSAY:  
**Fruitful Growth in the Faith** (based on 2 Peter 1:5-11)  
by Tina A. Coddington

Through the divine power of God, Christ has given believers everything needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Therefore, God expects every Christian to add spiritual elements of growth to his faith. When the spiritual elements of faith are added to the life of a believer, the believer will not be spiritually blind or ineffective for Christ. The elements added to the foundation of faith will cause a Christ-like life and produce fruitful growth.

Faith is the foundation for all spiritual growth (2 Peter 1:5). 'Faith' is the Greek word 'pistis', which means "conviction, veracity, or reliance upon Christ for salvation" (Zodhiates 1162; Strong's #4102). An individual receives faith by: recognizing his sinful condition before God (Romans 3:23); understanding and believing the Gospel message of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3,4); and opening the door of his life to allow Christ to come in and save him from eternal punishment (Revelations 3:20; John 3:16). A person must begin with the foundation of faith because without faith, fruitful growth is impossible.

A believer does not 'spontaneously' grow spiritually. A believer must make every effort to add elements of spiritual growth to his faith. The phrase 'to make every effort' is the Greek word 'spoude', which means "diligence, eagerness, earnestness or zeal" (2 Peter 1:5; Strong's #4710; Zodhiates 1306). With zeal a believer must seek to add the elements of spiritual growth to his life. An example of zeal can be found in a Green Bay Packers football fan. If a person is a zealous football fan, he would watch and record every televised game that the Packers played. The enthusiastic fan would watch the game on tape, scrutinizing and analyzing the plays. The ardent individual would get so wrapped up in the football game that he would conceivably talk to himself, yell at the referees, or even jump up and down with joy over a touch down or in exasperation over a fumble by his revered team. When this person is watching a game, his entire focus is on the game. The person ignores all distractions or views them as irritations. Just as a football fan has zeal for his team, a believer should have a passion, zeal, and an intense focus for adding elements to his faith that promotes fruitful growth.

The seven elements of fruitful growth, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly love, and love, should progressively be added to a spiritually-healthy believer's life (Green 75; Blum 1065). The first five elements of growth reflect a believer's inner life and his relationship with God. And the last two elements relate to a believer's relationship with other people (Gangel 866).

The first element added to faith is goodness (2 Peter 2:5). 'Goodness' is the Greek word 'arete', which means "moral excellency or goodness of action" (Strong's #703; Zodhiates 252). An example of Christ's goodness is found in John 8:3. Due to the woman's adulterous act, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law brought a woman before Jesus to be stoned (John 8:2,3). The Pharisees and the Teachers of the law condemned the woman (John 8:5). However, Jesus did not condemn the woman but released her with instructions to leave her life of sin (John 8:11). Therefore, if a believer is going to mirror the moral excellence of Christ, he should not condemn or judge sinners. However, the believer should encourage the sinner to leave his life of sin. Through a believer's actions, he can possess moral excellence and reflect the attractive character of God (Green 77).

The second element added to faith and goodness is knowledge (2 Peter 2:5). The Greek word for 'knowledge' is 'gnosis', which means the act of knowing (Strong's #1108; Zodhiates 346). Knowledge gained by the believer comes through the Holy Spirit and focuses on the

person of Christ and the Word of God (Gangel 865). With wisdom and discernment gained through knowledge, a person will be able to counter false teaching (Barton 1132; Barbieri 118). An example of a person obtaining knowledge is spending quality time in God's Word. This person would continually read and study every book of the Bible. The study this individual would do is more than simply reading the text. A person seeking knowledge would do an extended exegesis of the text, retain the information, and make personal application to his life. When a person gains this kind of knowledge, it leads to a fuller understanding and knowledge of Jesus Christ (Green 77).

The third element added to faith, goodness, and knowledge is self-control (2 Peter 2:6). The Greek word for 'self-control' is 'egkrateia', which means self-restraint or temperance (Strong's #1466; Zodhiates 499). A believer should have mastery over every sinful human desire, in every aspect of his life (Green 77; Barton). A believer should have his passions under control (Gangel 865). Examples of areas where believers should have self-control are spending, eating, gossip, laziness, rebellion, language, and honesty. However, gaining self-control is not easy for believers to do. In order to obtain self-control, a believer needs to deny the evil desires and gain control through the work of the Holy Spirit (Baker 1172; Barton 1133).

The fourth element added to faith, goodness, knowledge, and self-control is perseverance (2 Peter 1:6). The Greek word for 'perseverance' is 'hupomone', which means "patience, endurance, and constancy under suffering in faith and duty" (Strong's #5281; Zodhiates 1425). A mature believer does not give up but keeps the goal of heaven in sight and resists the pressures of the world system (Green 78; Gangel 866; Wheaton 1390). An example of perseverance is found in the life of the apostle Paul and his companion Silas (Acts 16:16-34). In Philippi, Paul and Silas were on their way to pray (Acts 16:16). However, a possessed girl tormented Paul and Silas and disrupted their ministry (Acts 16:18). In the name of Christ, Paul commanded the spirit to leave the girl (Acts 16:18). The spirit left the girl, but the owners of the girl were upset with Paul and Silas because of their lost profit (Acts 16:19). The owners of the slave girl brought Paul and Silas before the authorities (Acts 16:19). Although Paul and Silas were innocent of all accusations, the authorities ordered them stripped, beaten, and placed in prison in chains (Acts 16:22). Paul and Silas did not give up on their ministry for God but persevered by prayer and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25). Paul and Silas kept their ministry goal in mind despite their suffering. Because of the perseverance of Paul and Silas, the jailer and all his household believed in Jesus (Acts 16:34). A believer should persevere through suffering, keep the goal of his ministry in focus, and be strong in his faith (Barton 1133).

The fifth element that should be added to faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance is godliness (2 Peter 1:6). The Greek word for 'godliness' is 'eusebeia', which means piety and devotion toward God (Strong's #2150; Zodhiates 682). A believer must have an awareness of God in all areas of his life and live a life empowered by God (Barton 1133).

In order for a believer to be empowered by God, a believer must confess his sin before God (1 John 1:9) and offer himself to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Using this process of empowerment, a believer should have the right attitude toward God. The right attitude toward God makes a believer aware of God's standards and requirements for his life that produces fruitful growth (Barbieri 118; Barton 1133).

The sixth element that should be added to faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, and godliness is brotherly love (2 Peter 1:7). The Greek word for 'brotherly love' is 'philadelphia', which means fraternal affection or love for one another (Strong's #4360; Zodhiates 1444). Brotherly love is demonstrated through acts of kindness that show

fervent caring for others (Gangel 866; Baker 1173; Barbieri 119). Examples of brotherly love are: sharing garden produce; helping a neighbor repair a car; taking an elderly individual to church; providing hospitality; and caring for another person's child.

The final element to be added to faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness and brotherly love is love (2 Peter 1:7). The Greek word for 'love' is 'agape', which means affection toward one another or benevolence (Strong's #26; Zodhiates 66; Vine's 381). The type of love spoken about in this verse is a self-sacrificial love and is the capstone to all the other virtues (Baker 1173; Barton 1133). An earthly example of a person sacrificing his comfort and convenience for another can be found in the actions of a person who loves cats. A person that is crazy about cats will inconvenience himself for the comfort of his cat. For example, the beloved cat is sleeping on the pillow right next to the person. The person wants to roll over or move, but in making those actions the cat would be disturbed. So instead of moving, the person continues to inconvenience himself and sacrifices some of his sleep and comfort so that he does not disturb the cat. The cat owner puts the cat's need above his own. This is the kind of love that should be shown to other people. A person's love for others should be deeper than mere affection and reach the level of self-sacrificial love (Barton 1133).

When a believer possesses the seven qualities of fruitful growth in increasing measures, the qualities will keep the believer from being ineffective and unproductive for Christ (2 Peter 1:8). The term 'ineffective' is the Greek word 'argos', which means lazy, useless, not employed or slothful in Christian duty (Strong's #692; Zodhiates 249). The term 'unproductive' is the Greek word 'akarpos', which means barren or unfruitful (Strong's #175; Zodhiates 109). If a believer does not possess these qualities in increasing quantities, his spiritual life is stagnant, and he does nothing or very little to further the kingdom of God.

Therefore, the person who does not produce fruitful growth is "nearsighted, blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2 Peter 1:9). The word 'nearsighted' is the Greek word 'muopazo', which metaphorically means for a person to shut his eyes (Strong's #3467; Zodhiates 1000). The word 'blind' is the Greek word 'tuphlos', which figuratively means in "respect to the mind as being blind, ignorant, stupid, or slow of understanding" (Strong's # 5185; Zodhiates 1400). A believer who is nearsighted and blind lacks spiritual insight. The unfruitful believer is open to the influence of evil (Barbieri 120). The repercussions of being an unfruitful believer follows the believer into eternal life. The spiritually immature believer will arrive into the kingdom of God like those escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:15; Blum 1066).

Fruitful believers who add elements of growth to their faith should be eager to make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). The word 'calling' is the Greek word 'klesis', which means an invitation (Strong's #2821). The word 'election' is the Greek word 'ekloge', which means divine selection, picked out, or chosen (Strong's #1589; Vine's 196). 2 Peter 1:20 stresses the responsibility of the Christian to live in conformity to his new nature in Jesus Christ (Zodhiates 546). 2 Peter 1:11 gives two results of living a Christian life filled with spiritual growth (Barbieri 121). The first result is that the believer will be spared disastrous grief and will not stumble (Barbieri 121; Green 84). The second result is the rich welcome spiritually mature believers will receive upon entering the eternal kingdom of God (Green 84). The welcome the mature believer receives from God is "well done good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21; Blum 1066).

2 Peter 1:5-11 shows the believer that he should be zealously adding elements of spiritual growth to his faith on a continual basis in order to have a fruitful growth in faith. The elements added to faith will develop a life that is pleasing to God and productive for

the kingdom of God. The ultimate motivation for the believer to have fruitful growth is God's promise of a warm welcome into eternity (Barton 1134).

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