Derek Prince

Be Perfect

But How?



Discover the building blocks God's power provides

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BE PERFECT—*BUT HOW?*

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INTRODUCTION

One of the simplest commandments Jesus ever gave can be stated in two words, "Be perfect." This command is simple in number of words but certainly not so simple to carry out—just two direct words, "Be perfect."

In addition, Jesus didn't say *try* to be perfect, He said ***be*** perfect. He never told us to *try* to obey any of His commandments. He never said *try* to love your enemies; He said *love* your enemies. Why? Because He knew if we were to rely on our own ability to be perfect, we might as well give up in frustration and failure. It is impossible.

Where Grace Begins

You see, the requirements of the New Testament are all based on the grace of God—grace which is made available to us through Jesus Christ. I have made this statement many times and I will say it again: Grace begins where human ability ends. When we can do something in our own strength, our own wisdom or our own righteousness, we don't need God's grace. But when we come to the end of the best we can do, we come to the beginning of grace.

God says, "My grace is sufficient" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Do you believe that? Do you really believe His grace is sufficient? Do you believe it will enable you to do anything He has told you to do?

In this booklet we will learn that it is only by grace that we can obey Jesus' simple command. It is only by grace that we can "Be perfect."

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "BE PERFECT"?

To begin our study, let's look at the actual words of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount He says:

> *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*
>
> *Matthew 5:48*

Many people have tried to explain the word ***perfect*** in a way that is different from its true meaning. But the standard that is set for us in this Scripture eliminates any doubt as to what Jesus was saying; we are to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

If we consider this command in the context of a few earlier verses, it indicates two truths. First of all, perfection in this sense means dealing rightly—not just with some people, but with everybody. And secondly, it is summed up in one word—***love***. Perfection and love cannot be separated.

Let's read the preceding statements Jesus made in Matthew 5, beginning with verse 43:

> *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."*
>
> *verses 43–45*

Let me ask you: Do you take that seriously? You see, God is perfect in His dealings with everybody: with the wicked people and with good people. He is perfect in every attitude and relationship.

> *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*

To grasp the meaning of perfection, I find it helpful to think of the example of a circle. Circles come in all sizes, all dimensions, all diameters. But no matter how small a circle is, it can still be a perfect circle. In this picture, I see God as the great perfect circle that encompasses the universe. We do not have the same greatness or power to encompass the universe, but each of us, in our own particular allotted place can be a small, perfect circle. My point is, you don't have to be big to be perfect.

Maturity and Completeness

The word *perfect* comprises two related aspects. One is maturity and the second completeness. To be perfect you must combine both qualities.

Picture, if you will, a little green apple on the branch. It is small, round, green and hard. In one sense, it is perfect because there is nothing wrong with the apple. In another sense it is not perfect because it has not come to maturity.

Or consider a boy of twelve who is completely well and whole, physically. Like the apple, he is perfect, but he has not yet reached maturity. On the other hand, a grown man of forty may be mature, but if he has lost one of his fingers he is not complete. To be perfect you have to be both mature and complete. Obviously this involves a process.

Let's look now at a few Scriptures that teach us about these aspects of coming to maturity and completeness. A good place to begin our search is Romans 5:5, where Paul makes one of those amazing statements that is difficult to comprehend fully:

> *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

We hear this verse quoted often, but I wonder if we really absorb its meaning? Paul does not say *some* of God's love, but *the* love of God—the *total* love of God—is poured out in our hearts. He also makes the distinction that this love is not just *being* poured out, but *has been* poured out by the Holy Spirit. I believe every person who is baptized in the Spirit receives this outpouring of God's love, and on occasion I have seen people behave in the strangest way as a result.

Years ago there was a Presbyterian elder in a congregation where my first wife, Lydia, and I were ministering. He was what you might consider the standard Presbyterian, a very fine gentleman, very dignified and self-possessed. But he was hungry for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Lydia and I began to pray

for him, and as Lydia put her hand on him, he received the baptism. For a little while, he quietly enjoyed God's presence. But then he jumped to his feet and embraced my wife! I don't think he ever got over it! The love of God had suddenly gushed up inside him, and he did the first thing that came to his mind —which happened to be hugging Lydia.

I believe that is true of everybody who is baptized in the Holy Spirit. Potentially, we have the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When that happens, the overflow can produce some surprising results.

However, it is one thing to have it poured out; it is another thing to have it *worked* out. The initial experience is glorious. Sometimes, when a person experiences this infilling of God's love, he can't imagine that he would ever have any problems again. When someone asked my friend, Bob Mumford, "What is the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit?" he would answer, "Trouble!" So, if you are just in the early stages of the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit in your life, let me warn you—the receiving is only the initial stage, and there's much more to come.

This wonderful love that has been poured into you—divine, complete, perfect —now has to be worked out. A Scripture in Philippians is very helpful in this respect:

> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who* ***works in*** *you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*
>
> *Philippians 2:12–13, emphasis added*

Notice the two phrases ***work out*** and *work in.* They go together. God *works in,* then we have to ***work out*** what God has *worked in.* If God did not *work it in,* we would have nothing to *work out*. But if we don't *work it out,* God can't work any more *in.*

I hope you can grasp this important point. The limit of what God can work in us is set by that which we work out. If we cease to *work out* what the Lord has done in us, there is no reason for God to continue *working in.* But if we go on *working out,* then God goes on *working in.* The initiative comes from God, as it always does. But the outworking is our responsibility.

Even Jesus Was Perfected

Referring back to the book of Romans, in chapter 8, we find these words from

Paul:

> *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*
>
> *Romans 8:9*

I understand this to mean that when we are born again, we receive the Spirit of Christ. The actual nature of Christ is born into us by the new birth—but then it has to be worked out.

This tells us that two processes are initiated through the new birth. First, I believe every one of us receives the nature of Christ. Second, it must then become part of our character—that is a process of development.

Interestingly this was the experience of Jesus Himself. There is a very remarkable Scripture in Hebrews 5 that clearly makes this point:

> *Though He was a son [the Son of God], yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*
>
> *Hebrews 5:8–9*

Amazingly, even Jesus had to be perfected. He was never imperfect, but the beautiful nature of Jesus had to be worked out in His character. It was worked out by one activity, which is the same for all of us. The key word in Hebrews 5:8 is *obedience.* You could also say "suffering leading to obedience" or "obedience leading to suffering." But basically, there is no other way. I am glad the word *suffer* appears there, otherwise I could have given you too easy a picture.

Jesus *learned* obedience, and there is only one way to learn obedience. Do you know what that is? It is by obeying. Even Jesus had to learn it. He never disobeyed; He never was prone to disobey. But you cannot learn obedience without obeying. Would you accept that as true? If you are going through something difficult at the present time, just remember, you are learning obedience. There is no way to learn obedience but to obey.

It is the same with endurance. There is no way to learn endurance but to endure. It is all very well to have it in theory, but it has to be worked out in your character.

Learning to Love

Many years ago I was confronted by the connection of love with perfection and obedience. I happen to have been an only child. I had no brothers or sisters. As a result, I tended to set my own direction. One of my friends once said of me

that I was the most self-sufficient person he had ever met.

I was not used to catering to others. I made my own way in life. I was successful, academically and in other respects, but I had never learned to give way to others. I never learned to "share my toys," because I had no one to share them with. I went through the old traditional British system of education, which is compete, compete, compete—pass your exams, get to the top of the class, and get ahead.

When I came to know the Lord Jesus, I was confronted by these truths which I am now sharing with you. For the first time, I realized I was far behind a lot of people when it came to love, sharing with others and unselfishness. So I really sought the Lord, saying, "God, what do I do about this?" I believe the Lord gave me a very simple answer, which I want to share with you. It is in 1 John 2:5:

> *But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

I saw that there are two sides to this Scripture. (The Bible says in Hebrews 4:12 that the Word of God is a two-edged sword and this particular Scripture has two edges to it.) First of all, the evidence that you love God is that you keep His Word. Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them it is he who loves Me" (John 14:21). Don't deceive yourself—you don't love God any more than you obey His Word. The point at which you disobey His Word is the point at which you stop loving God. The proof that you are loving God is that you are obeying His Word.

Second is this aspect of having God's Word perfected (or worked) in you. It is not just that you love Him by obeying His Word, but it is also the means by which God's love is perfected in you. The word *love* stated here in this passage from the New Testament is the word *agape* in Greek. It is not an emotion. It is not the fact that you simply *feel* loving. Rather, *agape* love is worked deep in your character and expresses itself in the way you live.

So I said to myself, "I may not always *feel* loving, but I *can obey* the Word of God." And that has been my principle ever since. (I will let others judge how successful I have been.) My way of seeking the love of God is to obey His Word.

When I was converted, I made up my mind about the Bible. I had been a professional philosopher and had studied many books and various languages. But then I said to myself, "The Bible is the book with the answer; in fact, it is the *only* book that really has the answer. Why should I waste my time on all those other subjects? I am going to read the Bible, believe it, and do what it says."

As long as I have followed that principle, I have been successful. The only times I have not been successful are the times when I have departed from the

Word of God. My suggestion to you is this: don't try to *feel* loving. Don't be sloppy and sentimental. You may have heard the phrase, "sloppy *agape*"—there is a lot of that around. Instead, just be obedient. Obey the Word of God. Do what it says.

Ruth and I were in Malaysia years ago, and I didn't plan to, but I found myself speaking on this subject. At the end of my message a lady walked up to me and said, in effect, "You've come a long way. I knew you twenty years ago and you are a lot better now than you were then!" That encouraged me, and I hope it may encourage you as well.

Why don't we end this chapter with a prayer of commitment? If you sincerely desire to take a step in the process of developing a closer relationship with the Lord, please pray this prayer with me:

> *Dear Father in heaven, I recognize that I cannot be perfect in my own strength. Pour out Your love and grace in my heart in such a way that I may walk with You in obedience. I want to learn obedience as Jesus did, and I commit myself to study Your Word and obey it, loving You and learning to love others by what You teach me from Your Word. Thank you in advance for helping me to take this step. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

CHAPTER 2

THE PERFECTION PROCESS

The Bible is a very practical book. It does not merely tell us to "be perfect," but it gives us a program to follow to become perfect. This step-by-step process is outlined for us in 2 Peter. Chapter one of 2 Peter begins with some basic truths to prepare us for the process, followed by specific "building blocks" involved in the process of maturity. In this chapter, we will look at the preliminary truths that give us insight on the building process.

Let's begin our study with the first verse.

> *Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ*
>
> *2 Peter 1:1*

I would like to pause here and mention that the word *servant,* in the original Greek, is "slave." Have you ever noticed that the New Testament apostles always called themselves first a slave and then an apostle? If you meet anybody who calls themselves an apostle first and then a servant, you could question whether that person really is an apostle.

For years I had a friend in the ministry who grew up in a particular denomination in Wales. He had become rather disillusioned by some of the people who called themselves apostles. He felt that to a certain extent they were basically dominating the people they were leading. Whether or not that was actually the case, this was his impression. He said, "I realized something. In the New Jerusalem, the apostles are the foundation. They are not people on the top holding you down; they are people on the bottom holding you up." That perspective would make a lot of difference to someone who aspires to be an apostle. Wouldn't you agree?

Many years ago I was teaching on the main ministry gifts from Ephesians 4. I had intended to briefly touch upon the ministry of apostles and then go on with the rest. Somehow, I got stuck on the topic of apostles. As I taught, I could see some of the young men in the audience getting more and more excited. They were all envisaging themselves as apostles. So I thought, "I had better do something about this."

I asked the audience, “How many of you would like to be an apostle?” A lot of people put their hands up. Then I said, “Hold on a moment. Let me read you the job description.” I read the following verses out of the New International Version, which is so vivid in its wording. I read 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, beginning at verse 8, where Paul is writing to the Corinthian Christians:

> *Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have become a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*
>
> *1 Corinthians 4:8–13 NIV*

Then I asked the question again: “How many people want to be an apostle?” Not so many hands went up the second time I asked.

This discussion of apostles as servants who sacrifice for God’s people is a bit of a digression, but I believe it is an issue that is on God’s heart.

The Process of Perfection

Let’s continue now with the first verse of 2 Peter, which introduces truth number one in the process of perfection:

> *Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

1. A Life of Multiplication

This epistle is addressed to all of us who are true believers in Jesus. Then we read in verse 2:

> *Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus*

our Lord . . .

Please notice that the first word of this Scripture is *grace*. That immediately lifts us out of the level of our own ability. As we noted in chapter 1, becoming perfect is not something we can do without God. Peter is talking here about something that is possible only through the supernatural enabling of God.

Do you remember what I stated earlier? Grace begins where human ability ends. As long as you can do it, why should God give you His grace? God deliberately confronts us with many tasks we cannot accomplish by our own strength in order that we may open up to His grace. In the end, the church is left with two alternatives. Either we do the right thing and open up to the grace of God, or we reduce the level of God's requirement down to something we can do by our own efforts. To do the latter is dishonest—it is misrepresenting God.

In the verse above, after the word "grace" comes the word "peace." The Hebrew word for "peace," *shalom,* is directly related to the word for "complete." Please remember what we covered earlier. We said that perfection requires completeness. In the final analysis, we really don't have true peace until we are complete. So the verse is actually saying, "grace and *completeness* be multiplied to you." The Christian life is a life of multiplication and progression. It is not a static condition; it is a process of multiplication.

Let's now look at the rest of verse 2:

. . . in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; . . .

Everything is wrapped up in knowing God and Jesus. Jesus said in John 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." We don't need anything outside of God and Jesus Christ. Everything we need is in God and Jesus. That is truth number two in the process of perfection.

2. Everything Is Already Provided

We see this clearly in the next passage:

. . . as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness . . .

verse 3

Notice the tense. It is not "will give," it is "has given." That is a breathtaking statement—but if you bypass it, you will miss what God has for you. God has *already given* us everything we are ever going to need for time and eternity.

Please take a moment and say those words out loud right now: “God has already given me everything I am ever going to need for time and eternity.”

If you keep asking God to give you something He has already given to you, you are operating on a misunderstanding.

3. Through Knowing Jesus

Let’s explore this further as we read the second part of verse 3, which leads into truth number three in the process of perfection:

> *. . . through the knowledge of Him who called us by* [His own] *glory and virtue . . .*
>
> *verse 3*

As we saw in the last half of verse 2, every aspect of our lives is all in knowing Jesus. Not knowing theology, but knowing God.

I remember when I was studying the French language in school. Even though I made very good marks in French, when I actually went to France I wondered what language it was that I had actually learned! One of the things they drilled into us was that French has two words for “to know”: *savoir,* to know a fact, and *connaître,* to know a person. Please bear in mind that the kind of knowledge we are talking about in this Scripture is not *savoir*, but *connaître.* It is knowing a person—Christ Jesus.

4. The Provision Is in the Promises

In the previous verses we are told that it is through the knowledge of Him who calls us that we have been given all things. You may be wondering: How has God given me everything I will ever need? I don’t think I have it. The next verse makes the answer very clear:

> *. . . by which [by His glory and virtue] have been given to us [notice, have been given] exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*
>
> *verse 4*

Where is God’s provision for us? The provision is in the promises. This is truth number four in the process of perfection, and I would like you to say it out

loud: “The provision is in the promises.”

Our provision is in the promises of God. As we believe them and obey them, we find we have total provision for every need. The result of believing and obeying the promises is staggering.

I have looked very carefully at the Greek text of the aspect of this verse I will cover next, because I want to be sure I don’t misrepresent it. (Actually, our English translations almost understate it.)

> . . . *that through these* [“these” being the promises] *you may be partakers of* [or share in] *the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

What is the meaning of “the divine nature”? It means the actual nature of God. Through believing and obeying the promises, we can receive the very nature of God within us. Consequently, in the same proportion that we receive the nature of God, we are delivered from the corruption which is in the world through lust. The nature of God and corruption are incompatible. Where one is, the other cannot be.

Do you remember the story of Jacob and his brother Esau? When Jacob was fleeing from Esau, he had nothing in his hand but a staff and nothing to lay his head on but a stone. As he was sleeping out in the open desert, he had a dream of heaven. (I remember hearing a preacher once say many years ago, “If I could have a dream of heaven, I’d be willing to sleep on a stone!”)

In this dream Jacob saw a ladder. The foot of the ladder was on the earth; the top of the ladder was in heaven; and the angels of God were descending and ascending on the ladder.

In a sense, the promises of God are like that ladder. Every rung is a promise. As you put your foot on the promise you go one step higher. Promise by promise by promise, you are progressively becoming a partaker of the nature of God. If that isn’t exciting, I don’t know what is!

5. Diligence vs. Laziness

As we noted earlier in this booklet, the Bible has given us a step-by-step process that we can follow in obedience to the command to “Be perfect.”

One of the key overall components needed throughout the entire process is mentioned in verse 5 of our main text. The text we’ll be quoting from as we present each of these building blocks for your consideration will be 2 Peter 1:5–8, which we will quote in its entirety at the beginning of the next chapter. Here is

the beginning thought of that passage, expressed in verse 5:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence . . .

The word *diligence* is a very important word that occurs several times in this chapter. Sometimes to define a word, it is helpful to look at its opposite. The opposite of diligence is slothfulness or, in more contemporary English, laziness.

You may search the Bible from cover to cover, but you will never find one good word spoken about laziness. Most Christians agree that drunkenness is a sin. But the Bible is much more severe in its condemnation of laziness than it is of drunkenness. You may not agree, but I would assert that there are many churches that wouldn't tolerate a drunkard, but they would readily tolerate a host of lazy people. Our point is that diligence is an essential component in the building process we are about to describe.

The Foundation of Faith

Armed with diligence, we now come to a process of adding. In a certain sense, you could compare the process to the construction of a building. What do you begin with? A foundation. And what is our foundation in this building process? Faith.

There is no other starting point in your relationship with God. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith it is *impossible* to please God. Not just difficult, but impossible. The one who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who *diligently* seek Him.

There is no other starting point in this process to perfection but faith. That is the foundation on which every other building block rests. There is no other foundation in the Christian life but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His atonement on our behalf.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST BUILDING BLOCK: EXCELLENCE

In this chapter and the ones following we will look closely at each of the "building blocks" we mentioned earlier. But before we do that, let me give you the entire Scripture from 2 Peter:

> *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*
>
> *2 Peter 1:5–7*

As Peter begins the adding process to our foundation of faith, we discover the first building block he cites is in verse 5:

> *. . . add to your faith virtue . . .verse 5*

Almost all the translations say "virtue"— though some say "moral excellence" or "goodness." I prefer to use the word *excellence*, and I like to leave out the word "moral" because I don't think excellence is a purely religious term. In the Greek language, the word for "excellence," which is ***arote***, is very widely used. For instance: The *arote*, or the excellence, of a horse is to run fast. The word means to do well, whatever you do.

If you call it *moral* excellence, some people who may have a tendency toward laziness might use it as an excuse to only participate in religious activities, like going to church and saying their prayers. But they will not cultivate excellence in other areas of their lives, such as in their jobs. The excellence with which you do your job at work reveals much more about you than what happens in church. In church the only people who see you are basically other churchgoers.

Army Training

God imprinted this truth upon me very early after I was saved while serving in the British Army. Believe me when I tell you that I did not like the British Army.

I thought, *Now that I'm saved, God will get me out. Certainly, I should be doing something more spiritual.*

Well, He didn't get me out. I spent another four and a half years in the service. Gradually, I came to realize that the validity of my Christian testimony would be judged by how well I served in the army.

I volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and became a medical orderly because I did not want to kill people. That was my attitude before I was saved. I was a philosopher, a rebel, and a hippie before my time. Even though there weren't any hippies in my day, I would have been described by an equivalent term for it in my day. I understand the hippie mindset thoroughly, because I would have been one! For example, I had an electric-blue "teddy bear" coat made of thick, fake fur! Wearing that coat was my way of protesting against society.

So, I ended up as a medical orderly in the Royal Army Medical Corps with a lot of academic qualifications, none of which did me any good. In the RAMC, God was really dealing with me because all the male members of my family had been officers in the British Army. I had been totally accustomed to mingling with officers. But, as a corporal, I did not mingle with officers, and I learned something very significant. People look very different when you are "beneath" them from what they look like when you are on their level. I was shocked by the behavior I saw in some of the officers. And I realized God was dealing with those same issues in me.

Eventually, I was discharged from the British Army, at which time they give you an evaluation. I don't say this to boast, but it is a meaningful part of my testimony. When I was discharged, my conduct was evaluated with one word, ***exemplary***. During my service, I had never concealed the fact that I was a Christian. I spoke to the commanding officers and others about the Lord. I lived my life for God, and at the end the army gave me its top grade; that is excellence.

It was not excellence by measurement of spiritual or academic accomplishments, but in doing humble and mundane tasks like emptying bedpans and taking temperatures. As a matter of fact, when they discovered that after I was saved I no longer smoked or drank, they put me in the most obvious place of all. I was placed in charge of the canteen, because I was the only one who could be trusted not to steal! So I spent a lot of my time in the canteen.

Cigarettes, Beer and Chocolate

I'd like to share one interesting personal experience I had as a side note to the personal testimony I am sharing here. I took part in the longest retreat in the history of the British Army. Our division was in North Africa, retreating from a place called El Agheila to El Alamein. I was on a lorry, theoretically in charge of a squad of eight stretcher bearers who were known throughout the unit as "Prince's Pioneers." We carried the canteen on the lorry—beer, cigarettes, chocolate, and all sorts of other items. Most of the time we were really hungry because we often didn't get our rations as we should have.

As it happened, we retreated so rapidly that we ran into one of our own mine fields. There had not been enough time for our specialists to clear it away. It was a vehicle mine field, so it was all right to walk through on foot. But that meant we had to evacuate our lorry. Since the lorry was my responsibility, I wrestled with the necessity of leaving the beer, cigarettes and chocolate behind for the enemy to enjoy when they came upon it. I just could not bring myself to do that. So, in the middle of the night, right there in the mine field, I sold out the whole content of the canteen. And I had to sell all the stuff on credit, because nobody had any money. Afterward, I regretted that many times—I had an awful job getting that money back from all those men! But somehow, I did, and I hung onto the payment book for years to prove it.

That was regarded as exemplary conduct—and I just want to suggest that sometimes you may need to examine how you deal in non-religious situations. It does matter.

Excellence in All Things

Many of my books are sold through Christian bookstores. Over time we have learned that the "Jesus bookstore" is the most unlikely to pay its bills. Did you know that? Once we were trying to arrange the purchase of cardboard cases for packing. The director of our ministry found a firm, but then he looked at me apologetically and said, ". . . but they're not Christians." I said, "Thank God!" Unfortunately, that is the way it is because many Christians don't really understand excellence.

At another time I was the principal of a training college for African teachers. My personal goal for being there was to win them to the Lord, and I thank God that most years every student who graduated was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit. But one year we also achieved recognition in another area relevant to the point I'm making. We established a record in the whole educational system of Kenya because every student of ours passed in every subject.

I treasured the letter I received from the representative of the education department thanking me for this unique achievement. Because we were Pentecostal Christians, nobody believed that we could do something like that. In terms of excellence, they expected us to be at the bottom, but we felt that would be a reproach to the Lord.

What About You?

The first building block on our foundation should be excellence. Think about that for a moment in terms of your own occupation. What do you do for a living? Are you a teacher? Then you ought to be an excellent teacher. My students would accept the Lord and get saved, but soon their attitude became, "Well, now you won't expect so much of us because we're Christians." I would to say to them, "You are totally wrong. Now that you're saved, I expect a whole lot more of you." If you can be a teacher without being a Christian, then as a Christian, you ought to be a much better teacher when you can pray and seek God's help and wisdom. Are you a nurse? You ought to be an excellent nurse. Are you a bus driver? You ought to be an excellent bus driver. Are you a shop assistant? You ought to be an excellent shop assistant.

That is the first step in your upward process, but I think it has dropped out of a lot of people's thinking. Let's read again what Peter says in verse 5:

> *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue* [or excellence] . . .

Without faith you would not be able to achieve excellence in many cases. Faith opens the way for excellence. There is a statement in the epistle of James that appeals to me. James is pointing out to believers that it is not much use just saying you are a believer—you have to demonstrate it by the way you live. James says:

> *Someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*
>
> *James 2:18*

In other words, James is saying, "I'll show you what I believe by what I do." Is that challenging to you? Shouldn't we be able to say that? "I'll show you what I believe by the way I live. Watch my life and you will see what faith can do."

It's quite a challenge, and you may not feel that you would be able to say that right now. Why don't we take this opportunity to ask for God's help in the

matter?

Please pray the following prayer as we close this chapter:

> *Dear Lord, You know exactly where I stand at this moment on this issue of excellence. Lord, I need Your help! By Your grace and strength, please enable me to establish the building block of excellence in my work, my family interactions, and all aspects of my life. I'm not as far along as I ought to be in this matter, and I ask You to help me to get there. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

CHAPTER 4

THE SECOND BUILDING BLOCK: KNOWLEDGE

After excellence, what is the next building block we add to the process toward perfection? For that answer let's look at the next words in 2 Peter 1:5, reading the verse in its entirety:

> *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue* [excellence], *to virtue* [excellence] *knowledge . . .*

The second step up is knowledge. What kind of knowledge? The Scripture is not referring here, in essence, to scientific knowledge but to the knowledge of God's Word and God's will.

A Priority for Every Believer

There are two issues to which you need to give immediate attention when you become a believer. The first is the issue of excellence—straightening out your life, being efficient, being punctual. If you are being paid for working eight hours a day and you work seven hours and fifty-five minutes, realize that you are stealing five minutes. That is theft. Most employees today, I imagine, are thieves. As a Christian, you have a testimony, which means you cannot afford to be a thief.

Following your focus on excellence, gaining knowledge is your next priority —the knowledge of God's Word and God's will. It is God's Word that reveals God's will. One of the greatest challenges the apostles faced was to continually confront ignorance. They had a running battle with it.

I don't think I fully appreciated this battle with ignorance until I was ministering in Pakistan years ago. At that time, about eighty percent of the women were illiterate, and of the men, probably over fifty percent. When one of the preachers who was traveling with me informed me in advance that he was going to preach about the exodus of Israel out of Egypt, I said, "Before you do, you'll have to explain to them that Israel was ever *in* Egypt, because they have no knowledge of that." Throughout that time of ministry, each time I stood there

before these people and brought my messages, I sensed a big thick wall of darkness, which was ignorance. I had never seen the negative power of ignorance as I saw it there.

A Devious Strategy

This may shock you, but I have observed that ignorance is increasing at an alarming rate in all cultures. Speaking of our own culture, for example, people in the United States don't know the main dates of American history. They don't know the dates of the Civil War. Intelligence has very little place in our contemporary culture. There are the super-intelligent, the "whiz kids" and the people who design computers. But basically there is just a flat level of incompetence. It is much harder to get a building properly built today than it was fifty years ago, or to find workmen who can be relied upon.

After being in Pakistan, I came to realize that this is a satanic strategy. Satan is deliberately blanketing people with ignorance so that they will be ready for the antichrist. Global ignorance will prepare the way for the antichrist.

Ignorance in the Church Today

Let's look quickly at some of the areas of ignorance the apostles contended with in the early church. I think you will see that most of them are still true today.

In Romans 11:25–26, we find the first area of ignorance:

> *I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness* [or hardening] *in part has happened to Israel until the fullness* [full number] *of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . .*

A vast section of the church today is ignorant of the fact that God has allowed blindness, or hardness, to come to Israel ***only until*** the full number of the Gentiles has come in. Then all Israel will be saved. There is tremendous confusion in the church today because of ignorance of this mystery.

Then in 1 Corinthians 10:1–11, Paul talks to the believers in Corinth about another area of ignorance, urging them to remember that everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament was a pattern or sign or example to us as a warning. In verses 1–4, he says:

> *. . . all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all*

> *were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.*

In this passage, Paul lists five supernatural spiritual experiences that happened to Israel's forefathers. Then he says, "But with most of them God was not well pleased" (verse 5). This is something we need to know! We can be baptized in the Spirit and be baptized in water and speak in tongues, and yet God may not be well pleased with us.

A Sober Warning

In the next five verses, verses 6–10, Paul gives a list of Israel's problems, and every one of them is found in the church today. They should not lust after evil things. They should not commit sexual immorality. They should not tempt Christ. They should not murmur. (*Murmur* is an old-fashioned word for "complain.")

How many Christians know that complaining is a sin? For the Israelites, the consequences of complaining and "tempting Christ" were serious. Their complaints brought serpents that bit them, and by complaining they brought destruction upon themselves.

What is the alternative to complaining? Praising. If you are praising all the time, you can't be complaining. And if you are complaining, you can't be praising. You have to make up your mind which one will be your main activity.

We then read in verse 11:

> *Now all these things happened to them as examples* [or patterns], *and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*
>
> *1 Corinthians 10:11*

All the experiences of Israel in the Old Covenant were written for our admonition to warn us not to make the same mistakes. If we don't know what happened to them, how can we be warned?

Yet More Ignorance

In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul brings our attention to a third area of ignorance in the church:

> *Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant . . .*

There is a certain amount of light coming into some parts of the church in regard to spiritual gifts, but there is still a great deal missing. When I think of the ignorance in our lives when I came into the ministry, I am embarrassed. You could have presented a demon to us on a plate and we would not have known what it was, or how to deal with it!

Paul speaks in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 about another area of ignorance:

> *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep* [died in the faith], *lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

We need to know what happens to believers after death. What is the ultimate destiny of those who die in Christ? It is very important that we know that.

For the fifth and final example of what we must understand, let's look at 2 Peter 3:8. Please note that Peter is speaking to all of the apostles, not to just one of them.

> *But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

We must understand God's measurement of time. A thousand years is like one day for God. So what does that mean for the two thousand years that have elapsed by our standards since Jesus died and rose from the dead? With God, that is two days.

There are so many areas where God's people today are ignorant, where they are lacking in the knowledge of the Word of God. I would like to say to you, especially if you feel called to the ministry, make it your aim to get people instructed in the great central truths of the Bible which every Christian needs to know. Lay a solid foundation in the lives of the people to whom you minister and with whom you have contact.

CHAPTER 5

THE THIRD BUILDING BLOCK: SELF-CONTROL

In this chapter we are going to continue with our examination of the words of Jesus found in Matthew 5:48: “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Before we proceed, however, it may be helpful to pause for a moment and review what we have already learned.

Recapping What We’ve Learned

We saw in the previous chapters that God has a program or a process by which we can move from our initial faith in Jesus into what the Bible represents as perfection. The actual passage where we find this “perfection process” is found is 2 Peter 1:1–7, where Peter says that it all begins with God’s grace (verse 2). If we begin from any other point of view, we will fail hopelessly. If we rely on our own cleverness or ability or righteousness, we will come far short of God’s standard of perfection. So it is important that this teaching begins with that key word: *grace*.

Peter then speaks about a life of multiplication. He points out to us that God’s power has given us all that we will ever need for life and godliness. The provision of God is in the promises. This is so important that I want to once again ask you to say it out loud: *The provision is in the promises.*

As we avail ourselves of these promises, believing and obeying them, we progressively become partakers of the divine nature, simultaneously escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Then in verse 5, Peter begins to talk about a process of adding “building blocks” in successive levels to our foundation of faith. Please bear in mind that the only starting point where we can begin in the Christian life is faith. Faith is the broader foundation stone upon which we are going to build all successive levels or stories. Adding building blocks to this underlying slab of faith is the process that will produce in us a life that will “be perfect.”

So far, we have discussed the first two levels in our building. Let’s briefly recapitulate our discussion of the first two levels, or “building blocks,” given to us in 2 Peter 1:5: “Add to your faith virtue.” You will recall that I chose the word

excellence instead of ***virtue*** because I deliberately want to get away from a religious or moral-sounding context. I personally believe that God expects that every true believer should bring forth excellence, regardless of how humble his vocation may be.

I am reminded of something that happened in Germany some years back through the ministry of a pastor friend of mine. He led a young man to the Lord who had been very heavily into drugs. This young man's mind was more or less gone—it was just not functioning. But he had genuine faith in Jesus. My pastor friend took him into his home and began to show him the elements of Christian living and discipline. After awhile he was able to find a job with a firm that employed him in the most humble capacity, emptying wastepaper baskets and performing other menial tasks. The pastor said to the young man, "I just want to tell you two things. First of all, trust in Jesus and ask His help. And second, be faithful." And so he faithfully performed his tasks. After awhile they gave him a slightly more advanced position. All this he did faithfully, always praying, and this continued until he held a moderately responsible position.

In that country most people felt they needed some form of educational certification, so he decided that he needed to enroll in school. He went to see his boss to explain that he was leaving and to thank him for all the help he had received. But when he told his boss that he was planning to leave, the boss said to him, "You can't go. You are the only man in this firm I can trust. Stay, and I will train you to take over my job."

This is a true story. You see, the key was faithfulness. Solomon said, "A faithful man, who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6). Solomon was the ruler of a large empire. He had all the choice men of Israel at his disposal, but even he had trouble finding someone whom he could trust. If you are unskilled, above all be trustworthy and be faithful. Jesus said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

I have met many people with an attitude of "entitlement" who say, "This job is too trifling. It's just not worth my attention. Give me a more important job, and I will really show you what I can do!"

For my part, I will never give that person such a job because it is contrary to the principles of Scripture. Jesus said, "Try him out in the smallest things. The one who is faithful in the small things you can trust for the bigger things." So we see that excellence is something that is within the reach of anybody who believes and is sincere—and who is willing to be humble.

Looking again at our text in 2 Peter 1:5 we read: "[Add] to virtue [excellence] knowledge." The next building block after excellence is knowledge. I pointed

out that it is not scientific knowledge we need, although that can be very useful and helpful. It is primarily through the knowledge of God—of His Word and of His will—that you can become an effective and successful Christian.

Then we looked at some of the examples of ignorance the apostles were continually striving against, and which still exist in the church today. I gave five examples of these areas of ignorance.

First of all, every Christian needs to understand the mystery of God's program for Israel. Every Christian needs to know that we are not completely independent of Israel. God's purposes cannot come to their full consummation "until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25–26).

Second, we are not to be ignorant of the various warnings to the church derived from the experiences of Israel on their way from Egypt to the land of Canaan. Remember, one whole generation perished in the wilderness because of unbelief. Paul makes it clear this is a warning to us.

Then Paul points to two more areas of ignorance in the church: that of spiritual gifts and God's plan for believers who die. What is the ultimate destiny of those believers? Many Christians think that heaven is the goal—but it is not. Heaven is a blessed, wonderful stage. But the goal is resurrection. Paul said, "If, by any means, I may attain [not "heaven" but] to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:11). Again, this is an area in which many Christians are lacking in understanding.

Finally, we discussed one last area of ignorance—regarding God's measurement of time: "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Time is different for God than it is for us, and it is important for us to know that truth.

Exercising Our Will

We are now ready to move on with the successive stages of this process. Let's examine the third building block, which we find in 2 Peter 1:6:

> *. . . add . . . to knowledge self-control . . .*

I find that some people who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit have the attitude that the Holy Spirit is going to take over and do it all for us. But self-control is one of the ninefold fruits of the Holy Spirit and it must be cultivated. So the Holy Spirit is not going to do it all. He imparts self-control to us, and then we have to control ourselves. If we will exercise our will and make the necessary

decision, the Holy Spirit will empower us and enable us. But—He will ***not*** make the decision for us.

The New Testament generally uses various pictures to illustrate the need for self-control. One reason why we need self-control is because it is closely followed by endurance. These two building blocks, self-control and endurance, can develop into a bottleneck. If you can't get through this bottleneck, you can find yourself unable to make any further progress. And you cannot switch them around—you need to follow according to the biblical order.

After knowledge comes self-control. When you know all you ought to do, that is good—but it is not the same as being able to do it. Being able to do it and doing it effectively depend on being able to control yourself.

One of the most vivid pictures Paul uses to illustrate self-control is that of an athlete. I am always humbled when I teach on this theme because I am continually asking myself, "How far have I myself come?"

Let's look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24: "Do you not know . . .?" Notice again that here is another challenge regarding ignorance:

> *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.*

Please notice that we are not competing with our fellow Christians. We are competing with the forces that would oppose us and keep us from obtaining the prize. Paul then continues:

> *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things.*
>
> *verse 25*

Temperate is another word for "self-control." Paul is thinking about the Olympic Games of the ancient world which established the pattern for the Olympic Games of today. What was true about the Olympic Games then is no less true about the Olympic Games now. Paul is giving us one of the most vivid examples of the need for self-control.

Let's continue reading and then we will see how this applies to our lives:

> *Now they* [that is, these athletes] *do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*
>
> *verse 25*

The "gold medal" in the ancient Olympic Games was a laurel wreath, which was placed on the brow of the winner. Of course, it withered after awhile, but it still was a mark of tremendous honor. Paul went on to verify that what these Olympic athletes were striving for was only going to wither away. But then Paul

adds that we are striving “for an imperishable crown.” Before us there is the possibility of a crown, a gold medal—one that is eternal.

In verse 26 Paul applies this truth to his own life: “Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty.” In other words, Paul is saying, “I know the mark to which I’m running, and I do not swerve to the right or the left. I go on straight toward the mark.”

I have often said that if you aim at nothing you are sure to hit it. One of the great tragedies in Christian living is aimlessness. Every believer should have an aim. Every believer should have a goal. Do not just become someone who follows a religious routine—goes to church every Sunday and Bible study on Wednesday evenings and maybe the home group some other night. That is all well and good, but in the long run, you will wither spiritually unless you have a goal in your sights.

Beating the Air

Paul continues to apply the athletic metaphor to himself in verse 26:

> *Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air . . .*

The picture Paul describes is of a boxer who just recklessly and frantically lashes out without knowing what he is trying to hit. A lot of us are like that in our prayer life. We know we are fighting something, but we don’t know what it is. I have learned over the years that our prayers only become fully effective when we know what we are dealing with. That is why we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives. Gifts like the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits will enable us to know what we are really up against.

When I was pastoring in London in the Bayswater area in the early 1950s, most of our congregation was made up of people who were saved in street meetings. They were not always the most respectable people. We had lots of people who were struggling, tormented with demons, but I had no idea of how to deal with demons. Sometimes we followed the old method of just shouting loud and long and hoping that something would happen, but demons are not deaf! It is not necessary to shout at them. However, you do need to know what you are dealing with.

I remember one situation where we were successful—not by our cleverness, but by the grace of God. My first wife Lydia and I had helped two Russian Jewesses come to Britain from the Soviet Union by way of Israel. They had

become Christians through a dramatic personal encounter with Jesus one night when they were planning to commit suicide. (The story is too lengthy to go into here.) At any rate, they would regularly meet with us and we would pray together in our home. One afternoon while we were meeting, they said to us, "We're Baptists, but in Russia the Baptists are much noisier than the Pentecostals are in this country." When they prayed, they were not embarrassed about what the neighbors might think—they just took off.

We were in the middle of one of these prayer times when there was a ring at the downstairs entrance. I went down to answer and it was one of my lady parishioners with her husband in tow. She said, "This is my husband. He's just come out of prison, and he has a demon." (Frankly, I hadn't even known she had a husband!)

Well, her declaration was not good news for me at all. I thought, *What am I going to do with this man?* But I let them come up and we just went on praying, because we didn't know what else to do.

So after these Russian ladies had been praying rather loudly for about twenty minutes, this man sidled up to me and said, "I'm going. There's too much noise!" God gave me a marvelous answer, and I give all the glory to Him for supplying it. I said, "Listen, it's the devil that doesn't like the noise because we're praising Jesus. You have two options. If you go now, the devil will go with you. If you stay, the devil will go without you." So we went on praying. About ten minutes later, he came up to me and said, "It just left; I felt it leave my throat."

Generally speaking, however, in so many other situations, we wasted many hours "beating the air" because we didn't know what we were fighting or how to fight it. Every now and then we had success, but our successes were not nearly as numerous as our failures. Paul said when we fight we have to know what we are fighting. Be specific, identify it and know how to deal with it.

All of what we have been examining in this section has to do with self-control. Paul ends 1 Corinthians 9 with these words about that subject:

> *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
>
> *verse 27*

Vision Is Vital

Paul has given us the picture of an athlete who wants to win the gold medal. That is his ambition and his vision. In order to win that medal, he puts himself

under the most rigorous discipline. Why does he submit to the discipline? Because he has a goal. He has a vision. He sees himself running faster, jumping higher or throwing the javelin farther than anybody else ever has. His vision motivates him.

In Proverbs 29:18 the writer says:

> *Where there is no vision, the people perish [cast off restraint, NKJ]. KJV*

Vision enables us to discipline ourselves. Have you ever tried to slim down? Have you succeeded? If not, your problem may be that you don't have a sufficiently clear vision of yourself the way you want to be. If you can envision yourself weighing less, with your muscles toned and your skin glowing with health, that vision may be clear enough for you to make the sacrifices that are necessary. But if you have a blurred vision of what you want to be, it will not motivate you to make the necessary sacrifices.

For years, I was friends with a woman whom I considered to be the most successful ballerina of the twentieth century. I knew her when she was only sixteen years old, and followed her career for some years. I was not surprised at her success because I knew her motivation. Everything in her life was subordinate to dancing. The books she read, the food she ate, the exercise routine she followed—all were directed toward excelling in dancing. And she did.

In the early days of our friendship, I was a rather aimless student. But after I became a Christian I often reflected on that lady's discipline. My thought was, *If only Christians were sufficiently motivated like she was—if only they had a vision of what they could attain like she did—they wouldn't drift. They wouldn't be carried along by the tide of society's influence upon them.*

If you will look into the Word of God—truly gaze into it—you will get a vision. The Bible says that when we look into the Word of God and see the glory of God, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory. But in today's world we spend too much time in front of the television and far too little time in front of an open Bible. So much of what we see in the images that surround us doesn't motivate us in the right way. That needs to change.

It is impossible to be a Christian without making some sacrifices. We may have to sacrifice some of our accepted practices and unedifying ways of spending time that militate against our vision and goal to be more like Jesus.

Resisting the "Door-Openers"

When we talk about self-control, everybody thinks about fleshly desires. I

would have to say that most of us certainly have some problems in that area. It is rather tragic that in the Western world many people are trying to lose weight, or at least avoid putting on weight, while in other parts of the world people do not have enough to eat. It is a tragedy.

But there are many other areas we need to control apart from our appetites. Consider our moods. We are not free to indulge in anger, resentment, bitterness, self-pity or depression. We must not yield to them. They are more deadly than the fleshly appetites. Don't give in to moodiness. I believe there is something amiss with a moody person. I think they are spiritually off-center.

After the incident in Bayswater (where the husband received deliverance during our "noisy" prayer meeting), God plunged me into regular times of ministry where I was dealing with people who needed deliverance from demons. One of the interesting truths I learned was that certain demons are "door-openers"—they get in and open the door for others. Two of the main door-openers are resentment and self-pity. Do not yield to them. You can make your mind up. Exercise your will and start praising God instead of feeling sorry for yourself. Start quoting the promises of God.

Just like everyone else, I have developed a set of mental habits. By that I mean, I have certain patterns of thinking that go back long before I was saved, and they still return to my mind. But I have discovered a discipline that I will share with you because it might be of some help to you. It is based on 2 Corinthians 5:17–18:

> *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God.*

Every time these aimless, negative or unedifying thought patterns reassert themselves, I stop and say, "I am in Christ. Therefore, I am a new creation. The old things have passed away. All things have become new, and all things are of God." I have come to the point where it doesn't pay the devil to tempt me that way, because every time he tempts me I go deeper into the Word of God. But if I just let him play with my mind, he would go on doing it.

The whole area of self-control is a discipline to which we all need to give careful attention. In my own situation, the accepted Pentecostal doctrine was, "I'm saved, baptized in water, baptized in the Spirit, speak in tongues—I have no more problems!" But it isn't true. I know that for a fact, because it was not true for me, nor for the Pentecostals I pastored. Believe me; their problems did not end the first time they spoke in tongues.

Not only Pentecostals, but all of us need to bring ourselves under self-discipline, not giving way to moods and attitudes and desires. If you have a

vision, you will be able to do it. But without a vision, you will cast off restraint and ignore your need for self-discipline and self-control.

This building block will involve struggle. Ruth and I readily testify that both of us struggle ourselves in this area of self-control. We're not perfect by any means. You can expect there to be times of struggle for you in this perfection process. But the goal is to keep going upward, not downward.

Let's voice that in a declaration to the Lord as we close this chapter.

> *Lord, I recognize that self-control is an area I need to take seriously in my life. By the inspiration of Your Word, I set it before me as a vision and a goal. By Your grace and with Your help, I will take steps toward You in the area of self-control.*

CHAPTER 6

THE FOURTH BUILDING BLOCK: ENDURANCE

The next building block in Peter's list is closely related to self-control.

> . . . *add . . . to self-control perseverance* [patience or endurance] . . .
>
> *verse 6*

As I pointed out earlier, without self-control you will never be able to persevere or endure. Every time a test comes, you will yield. That is why I call these two building blocks together—self-control and endurance—"the bottleneck." Until you can get through that bottleneck, you are not able to move forward in the progression to the next three levels.

At one period in our lives, Ruth and I went through a very difficult stretch of well over two years. I told Ruth, "This is not a battle—it's a war." During that time, we sat down and asked ourselves, "What is God aiming at in our lives?" We came to the conclusion that in Ruth's life, God was aiming at endurance. And in my life, He was aiming at patience.

As an active, strong-willed person, it has not been easy for me to make allowances for those who are weak. All my life I have pressed ahead, which I don't regret. I am glad I did. But you cannot just ignore the weak.

Ruth had been weak physically, but in many other ways she had been extremely strong. But God was working in us by what we were passing through. We came to one conclusion: There is only one way to learn endurance—that is to endure.

Please don't imagine you can learn it any other way. If you ask, "Why do I have to go through this, Lord?" He will say, "Because I am teaching you endurance." You will be tempted to ask, "Isn't there any other way, God?" But you will hear Him respond, "No, there is no other way. This is the only way."

So if you are going through some kind of struggle like that right now, don't be discouraged. God is still on the throne. He is working something out in you. Remember, God has eternity in view. I have come to this conclusion: God will not sacrifice one of the tiniest fragments of eternity for all of time. He is always working for the eternal.

Endurance Takes Time

I once knew a very successful young leader of a growing work in the United States. Shortly after his son was born, I happened to be in their home, and I prayed over this little boy and dedicated him to the Lord. As he grew up, it became apparent that he had crossed eyes. The eye specialist said there was no remedy for it. There was nothing they could do. He would have to wear corrective glasses all his life.

But the Lord gave them a Scripture, Psalm 84:7: "We go from strength to strength in Zion." Not from weakness to weakness, but from strength to strength. Continually for seven years, they claimed this promise of God, *from strength to strength.* The result is that this boy is now perfectly healed. The doctor says he no longer needs glasses. But it took seven years.

Staying Plugged In

If you go to a healing meeting and you are prayed for but you don't see any results, you could say, "I didn't get healed." But maybe you started to get healed. Maybe in order to receive your healing you are going to have to endure. How long? Only God knows. Not all healings are instantaneous; many healings are progressive. But if you don't endure, you might lose it or not come into the healing that awaits.

I personally believe that, according to Scripture, everybody upon whom elders lay hands in faith and anointing begins to get healed. That is what the Word of God says. But many don't receive a final or permanent healing because they did not endure.

When I pray for people and I see that God has touched them physically, I say, "Now God's power is at work in your body. Just keep the plug in the 'power outlet' and you'll be healed." When they ask me how to keep the plug in, I say, "By thanking God. Just go on thanking Him, thanking Him, thanking Him."

When I first met Ruth in 1977, she was an invalid with a ruptured disc in her spine. As a work of mercy, I went and prayed for her—little knowing what else I was getting into! I prayed for her in June of that year and I knew God had touched her. So I said, "God has touched you—now keep the plug in." And she is one of my examples. She kept the plug in until November, every day just thanking God that His healing power was at work in her body! Months later, in a meeting in November, she was instantly and permanently healed. But she had to keep the plug in for about five months. A lot of people would have pulled the plug out and said, "Well, I didn't get healed." When you say, "I didn't get

healed," you have pulled the plug out. You have cut off the power.

Pushing Ahead in Hope

Self-control and perseverance (or endurance) are the bottleneck. Until you can get through them, you cannot advance any further. Perhaps we should briefly look at a few Scriptures to encourage us, beginning in Hebrews 6:11 and following:

> *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish* [my Bible's margin says "lazy"]*, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*
>
> *verses 11–12*

Notice that word ***diligent***. And also the phrase "until the end." In other words, don't stop short. Again, it is not enough just to have faith. You need faith and patience.

> *For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "SURELY BLESSING I WILL BLESS YOU, AND MULTIPLYING I WILL MULTIPLY YOU." And so, after he* [Abraham] *had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*
>
> verses 13–15

How long did it take? Twenty-five years! Think of the countless times he must have been tempted to doubt or to say, "This is not going to work." God let him get to be ninety-nine years old before he had the promised son. That is patience. And remember, Abraham is the father of all who believe. We are the children of Abraham if we walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. What were his steps? Faith and patience.

There is a lot about these principles in Hebrews, so let's look at Hebrews 10:36:

> *For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise : . .*

There is a gap between doing the will of God and receiving the promise. In that gap you can do two things. You can keep the plug in or pull the plug out. If you pull the plug out, you get nothing. If you keep the plug in, you get everything. What is God testing? Your perseverance.

Then we read in Hebrews 12:1:

> *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*

The Christian life is not a sprint. It is not a dash. I think you could say it is a marathon. Many people start off very fast, but never pass the finishing tape. The great requirement is the building block of endurance.

Let's end this chapter with the following simple proclamation:

> *Lord, I'm not going to give up. With Your help, I will leave the plug in Your power outlet, and I will keep on keeping on. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

CHAPTER 7

THE FIFTH BUILDING BLOCK: GODLINESS

We return now to 2 Peter 1:6 as we look at the next building block to be added in our progress toward perfection:

> *. . . add . . . to perseverance godliness . . .*

Godliness Has a "Presence"

How many of us ever hear the word ***godliness*** used today? It has almost dropped out of our vocabulary. One reason for this is because there is very little of it to be found in the world today. When you are with a person who exhibits the characteristic of godliness, he or she makes you think of God. That is my personal definition of godliness. The presence of God is with such a person.

I will relate a brief incident that happened when I was still in the British Army. I'm not trying to hold myself up as an example of godliness, but I'm simply using this as an illustration. After I was saved, I spent the next four and a half years in the army. The army is not the hardest place to be a Christian, by any means, but it certainly is not the easiest place either. However, during that time I never abandoned my testimony and I never compromised my position of faith in Jesus Christ.

Shortly before I was discharged in Jerusalem, I was in charge of the hospital reception office on the Mount of Olives. If you have ever been in Jerusalem, what is now a Lutheran hospital was at that time Number 16 British General Hospital. I was a corporal and there was a young soldier, a lance corporal, serving under me. During our time of service together, I had never said anything to him about the Lord or about the gospel.

Then one day, three or four people were in the reception office and in the course of the conversation taking place, he swore, using a particularly dirty term. Immediately he looked at me, blushed, and said, "I'm sorry, Corporal Prince, I didn't know you were here." I had never said a thing to him about God, you see, neither before or after that time. But my presence made him aware that there is a God who has certain standards. I think that, in a sense, is what God means by godliness.

In 1 Timothy 4:7–8 Paul gives these instructions to Timothy:

> *But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little* [as long as we are in this body], *but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

Strengthened in Godliness

I want to point out in the verse above Paul indicated to Timothy that godliness required exercise. He said, "***Exercise*** yourself toward godliness." I think we all have a concept of what exercise is. You get up in the morning and you go through an exercise routine. (Some of you don't do anything. Let me just add here that in due course it will catch up with you! My years have taught me that if you neglect your body, sooner or later it serves notice on you.)

What I am saying here is that godliness is something you achieve by exercise. There are muscles of godliness that can be strengthened by exercise. There are postures of godliness that you cannot achieve without exercise.

What are some of the exercises that will bring forth godliness? I have just made a short list.

1. **Prayer**. Prayer is an exercise that can yield godliness.
2. **Bible study**.
3. **Scripture memorization**. Let me recommend that practice to you. It is one of the greatest sources of strength you can ever acquire.

We once read a book on the Cultural Revolution in China called *The Church in China* by Carl Lawrence. It was a very revealing book. The author made this point: Under the most intense persecution during the Cultural Revolution, everybody's Bibles were taken, Christians were thrown into prison, tortured, and put to death. Of those who were imprisoned and tortured, the only Christians who survived were those who had memorized Scripture. Others either denied the faith, betrayed their fellow believers, went mad or committed suicide. The only ones who had the stamina to stand were those who had memorized Scripture.

Suppose you were imprisoned tomorrow for twenty years, and you didn't have a Bible with you. How much would you have at the end of the first year? Who knows when you and I might be exposed to the same kind of pressures? Don't imagine it could never happen to you, because it can.

4. **Meditation.** After memorization I usually refer to meditation. Search out this topic in the Scriptures sometime and read all the promises made to those who meditate in the Word of God. Clearly, you can't meditate on something you have not memorized. The Word must first be in your mind in order to meditate

upon it.

5. **Fasting.** Another form of discipline, which I believe is scriptural, is fasting. Let me point out that Jesus didn't say to His disciples, "*If* you fast." He said, "*When* you fast." (See Matthew 6:16–18.) He assumed they would do it. Here is my personal conclusion from Scripture and experience: there are certain goals in the Christian life that are in the will of God that you will never attain without fasting. (I could include a lot more material on fasting, but for the purposes of this booklet, this will have to suffice.)

Let me just review that list of exercises to godliness:

Prayer
Bible study
Scripture memorization
Meditation
Self-denial in the form of fasting

When it comes to the period in which we are living, the Scriptures warn us of a special extra need for godliness in 2 Peter 3:11:

> *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved* [that is, the world as we know it], *what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness . . .?*

On the other side of the ledger, in the epistle of Jude, we get a picture of people engrossed in this world in the last days.

> *Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*
>
> *verses 14–15*

What is the word that occurs four times? ***Ungodly***. Therefore, what is the distinctive feature of the close of this age? Ungodliness. Have you lived long enough in your culture to see a tremendous increase of ungodliness in your lifetime? I think you would probably have to answer that question in the affirmative. In the midst of ungodliness we must cultivate godliness. We must be determined to be different. And that takes exercise.

Let's tell the Lord now that we are willing to take that step:

Father, I want to see godliness come into my life in a much stronger way. I want to represent Your character and presence to those around me.
Lord, I decide now to put in the "exercise" necessary to see that happen. Please help me and strengthen me as I take this step. In Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

THE SIXTH BUILDING BLOCK: BROTHERLY KINDNESS

We have now come to the sixth building block: brotherly kindness. Who are our brothers? Our fellow believers. In other words, what we are focusing on in this chapter is our love for our fellow Christians.

At first glance, this may seem easier than some of the other building blocks we have studied. However, I believe that the further we progress in this "perfection process," the harder it gets. I hope you will be encouraged when I say that for me, it was such a relief to realize that it is not always easy to show brotherly kindness. We assume we all love our fellow Christians, but the truth of the matter is, it is not always that way.

If you are a fairly new believer, probably one of the most severe tests you will ever have in your Christian walk is the way you may be treated by some of your fellow Christians. You think they are all going to love you, treat you kindly, be fair to you and never speak against you behind your back. Unfortunately, it just isn't so, and it may be very different than what you expect.

Surprisingly, despite whatever ill-treatment we may experience, we *still* have to love *them.* Let's be realistic—it is not always easy to have a loving attitude. In fact, let me read these words of David in Psalm 55. I want to impress this upon you, especially if you are a younger believer who is struggling with the way you have been treated by older Christians. You still have to love them, and that is the test. Listen to the experience of David in Psalm 55:

> *For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God in the throng.*
>
> *Psalm 55:11–14*

David is saying to someone who is close to him, "You are the one who betrayed me. You are the one who spoke against me behind my back. You are the one who let me down."

If you have ever felt betrayed by someone you trusted, you know how painful this is. Don't tell me it doesn't hurt—it does.

But I say again: We *still* have to love them. And God has made this possible through the new birth. Let's read this in 1 Peter:

> *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*
>
> *1 Peter 1:22–23*

Please notice that love for our brothers comes through obedience. It is the new birth which makes it possible for us to love our fellow believers. If we hadn't been born again, it would not be possible. That does not mean it is always easy. But it is possible.

A New Commandment

If we are interested in evangelization, let's bear in mind that the greatest method of evangelizing the world is for Christians to treat one another with love and brotherly kindness. There is no way of evangelizing that exceeds that. In John 13:34–35, Jesus says:

> *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

Notice that this is not a recommendation—it is a commandment. If we don't do it, we are being disobedient. Next, Jesus says:

> *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

What will speak to the watching world is the spectacle of Christians loving one another. It is the one testimony that will reach the whole world.

Let's not talk about evangelization and reaching the lost if we are not prepared to demonstrate lovingkindness to our fellow believers. I think you would agree that when you speak to the unconverted about becoming Christians, one of the first arguments they will make against Christianity is the divisions and quarrelling they see in the church.

I remember talking to a Jewish person once about the claims of Jesus. He said, "If I join the church, which church will I join?" At that time, Jerusalem was

probably at the center of division. For years every Christian group in Jerusalem was at war with every other one. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Israeli army had to keep the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholics from fighting each other for the right to control it. In that environment, how would the Israelis be able to believe in the brotherly kindness of Christians? That is why we have been given “a new commandment.”

Do you feel challenged beyond your ability to handle this building block? Why don’t we just take it to the Lord as we end this chapter?

> *Dear Lord, this building block seems out of my reach. I’m still dealing with the injuries I have received from fellow believers, and I bring those to You again for healing and restoration.*
> *Please help me, Lord, to love my brothers and sisters in Christ. For His sake. Amen.*

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Derek Prince (1915–2003) was born in India of British parents. Educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King's College. He also studied several modern languages, including Hebrew and Aramaic, at Cambridge University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

While serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Out of this encounter he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life, which he then devoted to studying and teaching the Bible.

Derek's main gift of explaining the Bible and its teaching in a clear and simple way has helped build a foundation of faith in millions of lives. His non-denominational, non-sectarian approach has made his teaching equally relevant and helpful to people from all racial and religious backgrounds.

He is the author of over 50 books, 600 audio and 100 video teachings, many of which have been translated and published in more than 100 languages. His daily radio broadcast is translated into Arabic, Chinese (Amoy, Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghaiese, Swatow), Croatian, German, Malagasy, Mongolian, Russian, Samoan, Spanish and Tongan. The radio program continues to touch lives around the world.

Derek Prince Ministries persists in reaching out to believers in over 140 countries with Derek's teachings, fulfilling the mandate to keep on "until Jesus returns." This is effected through the outreaches of more than 45 Derek Prince offices around the world, including primary work in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. For current information about these and other worldwide locations, visit www.derekprince.com.

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