

## *For Those Who Want More • 2 Peter 1:1-2*

While still in his twenties he became a millionaire several times over. He was the kind of person many of us would envy, one of those “got-it-made” kind of guys. A wonderful person! Really nice! But he told me that his Christian life was not what he wanted it to be. He wanted the “fire” back that he had as a college student. He wasn’t satisfied with his relationship with God. He even doubted the reality of his Christian faith. I told him that his deep desire for a better relationship with God was itself an evidence of his personal faith in Jesus Christ. And I told him that what he was feeling was not at all unusual.

Some people are Christians of convenience. They insist that they are believers but their faith makes little difference in everyday life. They don’t think much about God while at work and they can’t be bothered with God in their finances and family relationships. Jesus Christ is a part of their lives but he is not Lord of their lives.

On the other hand, some of us want more. We are not satisfied with a mediocre religion. We want to be closer to God this year than we were last year. We want to move forward in our walk with Jesus Christ. We want to experience more of him. We are ready for the next level of Christianity.

If that’s you, I invite you to explore the New Testament book called II Peter. Let’s study together what was written to Christians in the first century about moving forward in their faith. I hope you will study from your own Bible and that you’ll write notes in the margins or underline words that will help you grow. Personalize it. Make it your own. Memorize some lines that you find there that God uses to speak to you.

Second Peter almost didn’t make it into the Bible. In the early centuries of the church this book was often neglected, ignored or excluded. Some Christians didn’t think Peter actually wrote it and others insisted that it did not measure up to the rest of the New Testament. But this little letter just wouldn’t go away. Churches kept reading it. Christians studied it and

reported back that their lives were transformed by it. Eventually Christians decided that this book is very much a part of the New Testament and certainly belongs with the other books in our Bible.

We may share their experience. At first reading you may not find all you are looking for. Few Christians would name this as their favorite book of the Bible. In fact, many Christians are relatively unfamiliar with what it has to say. But the longer and deeper we look into it the more we discover in II Peter a path to the next higher level of our Christian faith and walk.

Second Peter is a letter, written by a man who wanted more, to readers whom he hoped also wanted more. Today when we write a letter we typically sign our name at the end of the letter. In the first century the writer put his name at the beginning of the letter.

Simon was a common Jewish name. Jesus gave him the Greek nickname Peter. In Aramaic the name was “Cephas”; in Greek it was “Petros”; in English it was “Rock” or “Rocky”. Like many in the Roman world he went by two names and called himself Simon Peter. Actually, he spelled his name unusually when he started this letter. It shows up in the original language although not in our translation. He called himself “Symeon” using the old Hebrew spelling. Only one other time in the Bible is his name spelled Symeon and that is in Acts 15. Actually, Simeon Peter was the name his parents gave to him when he was born.

Simeon Peter, or Simon Peter, was born in a little village called Bethsaida on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was there that he grew up and learned to read and write and fish. As an adult he moved to Capernaum, a fishing center on the north shore of that same lake, and became a professional fisherman. Although not

trained as a rabbi, he knew his Bible well. He was a seeker after God. He wanted more from his spiritual life. He was first attracted to the fiery prophet

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John the Baptist and later to the charismatic teacher Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus called him from fishing on the sea to following after Jesus he responded with an instant “yes!”

No matter how much he got of Jesus, Peter always wanted more. He was committed, zealous and impulsive. When Jesus walked on water Peter jumped out of the boat and went right to him. When Jesus was transformed into a radiant supernatural presence on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was there. When Jesus fed the thousands with a boy’s lunch, healed the sick and raised the dead Peter was always close by. When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Peter was the only one with the courage to shout back, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And, when Jesus was arrested and tried for treason, Peter sneaked into the courtyard to be as close to Jesus in his most desperate hour as he could get.

Not that Peter always got it right. Sometimes his impulsiveness got him into serious trouble. Once Jesus was so disgusted with Peter that he called him “Satan”. When Jesus was arrested Peter pulled out a knife and attacked one of the arresting police officers (he was better at fishing than fighting and cut off the cop’s ear by mistake). And when Jesus needed him most Peter denied that he even knew Jesus three times in one night and deeply saddened Jesus’ heart.

But when he blew it he was always deeply sorry. He was the kind of man who learned from his mistakes and did not repeat them. Whatever it took he always wanted to be part of the action. He wanted to be closer to God. He wanted more of Jesus.

By the time Peter wrote this letter nearly forty years had passed since Jesus had returned to heaven. Peter had learned a lot. He was older and wiser and more experienced. He had grown a lot. He wanted to share what he knew with any of us who would do whatever it takes, always want to be part of the action, want to be closer to God and want more of Jesus.

Peter identifies himself in three ways—as Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. If you had three blanks to fill in about yourself, what would you write? No doubt you would write your name first, but then what would you put for numbers two and three?

Peter calls himself a servant. Actually, if we don’t read another word from the rest of this book

we have already learned something powerful and significant. Peter didn’t use the word for a household servant; he used the word for a slave: “doulos”. In the Roman Empire a master owned a slave as a piece of property. He could do absolutely whatever he wanted with a slave. Slaves were taught that their only law was the master’s command. Slaves owned no property, had no holidays, didn’t get days off or have any other independence. All of life was centered on the master. Most people didn’t want to identify themselves as slaves.

But Peter had discovered in those four decades that being the slave of Jesus set him free. He completely belonged to Jesus. His only law was Jesus’ command. He owned nothing of his own; everything belonged to Jesus. He had no days off, no holidays and no other independence. All of life was centered on Jesus. He was proud to be the slave of Jesus Christ!

Here’s the challenge for us. We want to move on to the next level of Christianity. We want to experience God. We are tired of the same-old-same-old. Yet we want to keep title to our lives. We want to choose when to obey Jesus. We want to have some days off from God. We want to be the center of our own lives. But we can’t have it both ways!

If Peter were here he would call for a choice right now. Are we willing to be the *doulos*, the slave, of Jesus? Do we agree in advance to do whatever he commands, even if we prefer not to do it? What do you say? What do you choose? To those of us who are reluctant to sign over title for the rest of our lives out of fear that we might have to move, break off a relationship or give away something we want to keep Peter would ask, “What’s the problem? Don’t you trust Jesus? Do you think you can do a better job with your life than Jesus will?” Peter trusted Jesus enough to be his slave. That’s how he got more. That’s how he moved on to Next Level Christianity.

I want to ask you to try something. Take a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Sign your name and write after it “a slave of Jesus Christ.”

Peter had three ways of self-identification: Name; Servant; Apostle. The broad definition of “apostle” is anyone who has been sent on a mission. So all Christians are apostles. But here Peter uses the word in a technical sense to refer to that small band of leaders upon whom Jesus founded the church. St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20, speak-

ing of the church as “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*” In other words, he speaks with the authority from Jesus Christ as well as his personal spiritual experience. We can truly count on what he writes to move us ahead in our Christian faith.

Letters are not only from someone they are to someone. Peter’s letter is addressed “*To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.*” In other words, Peter is writing to Christians. Christians then and Christians now. And not just those who say they are Christians but those whom God says are Christians.

A large majority of Americans say they are Christians when many are not. A Christian is not someone born into a Christian family. A Christian is not someone who was baptized as a baby. A Christian is not a church member. A Christian is not someone who once prayed a prayer. A Christian is someone who, through the righteousness of God, has received faith.

Let’s be sure we get this right. “Righteousness” refers to a right relationship with God. The only way to have a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus means that I received Jesus as my Savior from sin and that I believe everything the Bible teaches about him. This is the starting line of Christianity. If we do not personally have faith in Jesus Christ we are not Christians and if we are not Christians there is no way we can move on to the Next Level of Christianity.

Airline frequent flier programs are widely popular in the United States. On Northwest Airlines you are given Silver Elite status if you fly 25,000 miles in a year, Gold Elite status if you fly 50,000 miles in a year and Platinum Elite status if you fly 75,000 miles or more in a year. With each higher level there are increased benefits and rewards.

Imagine someone signing up to fly from Los Angeles to London and Peoria to Paris in order to move up to the next level but never signing up for the World Perks program in the first place. If you don’t sign up you will not get the benefits! You can’t move up until you enroll.

My Northwest frequent flyer card says, “Member since 1986.” That is when I signed up. And it’s similar with Christianity. Unless a person signs up as a Christian there is no way to move up to the Silver, Gold or Platinum levels of Christianity. Faith comes first.

When did you sign up? When did you register your personal faith in our God and Savior Jesus Christ? If unsure, sign up today. Tell God you believe. Tell someone else you told God. Write down the date in the front of your Bible. Seal the deal

with believer’s baptism just the way they did in the Bible. This could not be more important. Be absolutely sure!

When we put our faith for life and eternity in Jesus Christ it works because he is

“*our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” Peter wants us to know that Jesus is our Savior because he died on the cross for our sins. Peter also wants us to understand and believe that Jesus is God. The Bible here clearly teaches that Jesus is God.

Peter was a Jew writing primarily to Gentiles. He was a veteran writing to novices. He was an apostle who spent three and a half years of face time with Jesus writing to those of us who have never actually seen Jesus face-to-face. Yet his letter declares, “*To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.*” Our faith and future is just as sure as St. Peter’s—even if we are not Jews, even if we are new at this, even if we have never had face time with Jesus. We’ve got it! We are just as Christian as St. Peter himself!

In II Peter 1:1-2 we read:

*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:*

*Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

This next line in II Peter 1:2 is very important to me because I need grace and I need peace. Grace refers to the generosity of God. It is the gifts God

***The only way to have a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus.***

gives us to make it through life. Peace is the inner calm of heart that God gives us in the storms of life.

We need grace to deal with people. Grace is what God gives us to get a job, cope with illness, survive deep regrets, fulfill our dreams and make it in life. Grace is what God gives us to pray, to pay bills and to proclaim the truth of Jesus.

What grace has God given to you? He has given me the grace to deal with my failures and inadequacies. He has given me grace to go on when others have deeply disappointed me. He has given me grace to believe when I am riddled with doubt. He has given me grace when those I love have died. He has given me loads of grace but I need trainloads more. I can't tell you how many thousands of times I have desperately prayed, "Oh, God, please help me." And he has given his grace.

And we need peace. Peace in our world. Peace in our families. Peace in our jobs. Peace in our hearts.

There are times when my heart is pounding, when I am scared and worried and churning inside and God has given me peace. He settles my soul. He lowers my blood pressure. He assures my heart. He supernaturally calms me down. But, yesterday's peace seldom has a hangover the next morning. I need new peace every day.

So, how do we move on in our Christian lives to get grace and peace? The answer is the theme of II Peter—"the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Once again, we need to get this right. It is more than head knowledge but head knowledge is part of it.

The Barna Research Group conducted a survey of Americans and found that 82% of regular Bible readers described themselves as being "at peace" compared to 58% of those who never read the Bible; 78% of regular Bible readers said they feel "happy" most of the time compared to 67% of nonreaders; 68% of regular Bible readers said they are "full of joy" compared to 44% who said they never read the Bible.

Bible reading is important and valuable for information, for grace and for peace, but there's more to it than that. In the Bible the word "knowledge" often refers to an intimate relationship. In the Old Testament it was used to describe sexual relations between a husband and wife. "*Knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*" is getting to know him bet-

ter and better through all the experiences of life.

The path to Next Level living is to know Jesus. Know him at school, in sports, in good times and bad. Talk to him in prayer. Ask him to share your heartbreak. Invite him into your friendships. Look for him in your problems and pain. Get to know Jesus so well that you can anticipate and predict his power and presence in situations you have not yet faced. Share all of life with him just as you would with your very best friend.

Super Bowl television ads are often more memorable than the football game itself. During Super Bowl XXXVII Fed Ex ran a commercial parody on the movie *Castaway* where Tom Hanks' character is stranded on a desert island after a plane crash. He had a Fed Ex package that he never opened during all the years he was on the island. When he was finally rescued and returned to the United States, he delivered the package, unopened. In the movie we never find out what was in it. But in the Super Bowl ad, the bedraggled survivor delivers the package and says, "If I may ask, what was in that package after all?" The woman opens the package, shows him the contents and tells him, "Oh, nothing really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier and some seeds." He had everything he needed to survive and thrive but he never opened the box.

When we crash, when we're stranded, when we're stuck, we need to remember that in Jesus Christ we have everything we need. We are servants of Jesus Christ, those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as St. Peter's. Grace and peace are "*yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*"

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