

Human Potential

2 Peter 1
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I would like you to turn to Peter's second epistle. We are going to take what I hope for you will be a new look at this very old book. It is a very small letter of only three chapters which could very easily be lost in the New Testament were it not for the fact that it comes right after 1 Peter.

When I was in high school I had a coach who summed up one large segment of my life one day when he took me aside, put his arm around me and said, "Spider," (they called me Spider because I had such skinny legs) "you have great potential."

What bothered me was the ominous silence that followed. Looking at my life I could say that was true. There was great potential there for something. And yet I felt something was lacking. I knew that inside this skinny 165-pound body there really was a 245-pound middle linebacker and a 9.3 sprinter. I knew there was tremendous potential there, but I never could realize my potential. I think there are many of us who feel that way about our lives. We know that we were destined for greatness; certainly we were destined for a level of performance much higher than what we are achieving. We have greater potential as a father, or as a husband or mother, or wife, or leader, and yet the difficult thing is to be what we know we were destined to be to realize our potential. We are not alone in this. I think this is the feeling of the world in general. This is why there are so many movements today directed toward helping people to actualize or realize their human potential. Many movements and conferences and various other things are going on now directed to that particular end. I believe this is the issue that 2 Peter deals with, and I would like to have us look at that book for the next three weeks to see how we can be what God intends us to be, how we can live out our potential.

The thing that makes this book so helpful to me is the realization that the longings that I have for my life are the longings that God has. We are not working at cross purposes. The destiny which the Lord has purposed for me, the intention of his heart is the same thing for which I long. I believe the purpose of 2 Peter is to show us, step by step, how we can be what we were destined to be. I want you to look at chapter 1 with me. Obviously, in the time that we have, I am not going to be able to do a detailed exegesis of this passage, but we will look at some aspects of it in detail; others we will have to look at in summary fashion. The first two verses are an introduction. Verses 3 and 4 establish the ground of our potential, the foundation for the potential that God has determined for us. Verses 5 through 11 describe our growth toward that potential. And verses 12 through 19 contain Peter's application. Unfortunately, this is one of those chapters where the division is in the wrong place. Chapter 2 ought to begin after verse 19, because verses 20 and 21 belong with chapter 2. So we will stop at verse 19. Let's begin with the introduction, verses 1 and 2:

**Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**

We are told four things in this introduction. First, we are told the author is Simon Peter. Simon was his Aramaic name; Peter was his Greek name. Both words mean essentially the same thing: *rock*. If Peter were living today we would probably call him Rocky. He has the same endearing qualities as the hero in the movie "Rocky" - a sort of rough exterior, and yet, I think, inside, a sensitive heart. He was a man who, outwardly, acted indifferently - he seemed to be very calloused at times, not too sensitive to people's needs - yet inside he had a very soft heart toward the Lord's things, and a desire to be what God intended him to be. By the time he wrote this book he was an old man, probably in his seventies. He was one of the

apostles, one of the twelve the Lord called into a relationship with him. After the Lord's resurrection Peter was in Jerusalem for a time preaching, and, as a result of the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen, he traveled to the north and settled in what today is Turkey - There he planted churches and ministered to the body of Christ. Shortly after Paul's death, he went to Rome. It was there that he lost his life, probably within a year of writing this letter. In fact, he may have been in prison at the time he wrote it, and he certainly was facing death, as he indicates in this book. As far as we know from tradition, Peter was crucified upside down outside the city of Rome, on the Ostian Way.

Second, we are told what Peter was, or how he viewed his place in the body of Christ. He is described both as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and as an apostle. The conjunction of these two ideas is always interesting to me. He was an apostle. That indicates his high and exalted position within the body of Christ. He was one of a unique group, one of twelve men who were called into a very special relationship with the Lord and given a very special commission. The apostles were sent out to plant churches, but, what is more important, to write Scripture, which means that these men, viewed in terms of their place in the body of Christ, were on a par with the prophets of the Old Testament, men like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel. These men had a very high and holy calling. And yet Peter sees himself as not only an apostle, but as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, a mere slave or servant. This viewpoint gives perspective to any office that God gives us within the body of Christ. It does not make any difference how exalted our position may be; ultimately we are all servants. That is how we function in whatever capacity the Lord puts us in. As Jesus said, "I came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give my life a ransom for many." That, likewise, ought to be our perspective. It certainly was the position from which Peter viewed his ministry.

The third thing we are told in this introduction is that the letter is addressed to those who have received a faith "of the same kind as ours." By "ours" he means the apostles. Peter is writing to those who share in common a belief that the apostles had. He is using the word "faith" here in the sense that we use it when we ask someone, "Of what faith are you?" That is, what is your system of belief? Peter says that he is addressing these words to people who have a system of belief like the apostles-who believe what the apostles believe. There has been much debate about who these people are. Some say they are the people Peter addressed in his first letter, i.e., the Jews, scattered throughout the Roman Empire. But I think not. It is my conviction that Peter is writing a sort of encyclical letter to the church at large, and designating it to anyone who shares a faith in common with the apostles, i.e., all Christians. Because that is what a Christian is. A Christian is someone who believes what the apostles believed. There are many people today who call themselves Christians, and they are very gracious and lovely people, but they do not believe what the apostles believed. Their faith is not grounded on apostolic teaching. and therefore they are not Christians. Certainly we should love them, make friends with them, we should care for them, minister to their needs, and never reject them as people. But they are not Christians. A Christian is someone who believes what the apostles believed, no matter where he is, or what he is, or whatkind of culture or background or education or national heritage he has. He may be three feet tall, black, and wear a bone in his nose and sleep on a jungle floor. But if he believes what the apostles believed, he is my brother in Christ. Peter wants us to know that a Christian is someone who believes what the apostles believed.

The fourth thing we are told in this introduction is something of Peter's desire for the people to whom this letter was written. This wish is expressed in verse 2: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." Peter is not talking merely about knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is talking about a relationship with him. The term that he uses indicates that beyond question. He uses this term a number of times in this book to describe the kind of special relationship that Christians have with Jesus Christ. They know him in a very special way. Grace and peace that is favor with God and peace with him, comes through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I believe that the next paragraph of this book tells us how that knowledge is taken from a first century setting and passed on to us. How do we lay hold of God's grace and experience his peace? It comes through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. How does that knowledge come to us? That, essentially, is the question at the back of Peter's mind, and he answers it in verses 3 and 4. This, then, is the ground of our relationship, and also the ground of our potential (verses 3 and 4):

. . . seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence. [If you have an American Standard Bible notice that the margin note changes the preposition "by" ("by His own glory") to "to." I think in the context that makes more sense]. **For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in**

the world by lust.

I think Peter's argument is very simple. You can follow it through by looking at the pronouns. I want to go back and read it again. and underscore the pronouns in each case. This is what he is saying:

. . . seeing that His divine power [i.e., Jesus Christ] has granted to US [apostles] everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called US [apostles] to His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to US [apostles] His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them YOU [those who receive this letter, which includes us] might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Peter is describing the process by which a relationship with Jesus Christ is communicated to the world at large. He says four things. First of all, he says it is His divine power that has accomplished all this. Everyone in the world wants to tap into divine power, to find within himself, in some sense, the divine life, and to tap into that. Or he wants to find it somewhere else, so that he may share in that life. That is the great concern because every man knows that somehow he has the potential to be godlike. That is his desire, if only he had the power to do it. Somehow he senses, think intuitively, that only God can be godlike, and therefore he has to find that godlike spark or life or however it is described either within himself or somewhere else. By so doing, he can then fulfill his destiny.

The second thing Paul tells us is that this divine power has to do with life and godliness. That is, it relates to every area of life. Not only life in the sense of the observable, the visible, the mundane-but also piety (the word Peter uses), godliness, the realm of the Spirit. This divine power, he says, has relevance not only for the here and now, but it has to do with spiritual things as well. That is, it touches all of life. It concerns the use of our resources now. It concerns the problems that you face right now, problems that you young couples have in purchasing a home. It used to be thought that every young couple had a basic right to purchase a home. That is no longer true. You are being priced right out of the market. So this power has relevance for that sort of problem. It has relevance for your job, and for your front lawn during the drought, and for every aspect of your life, even your car. A few days ago someone took a nail and scratched their way right down through the hood of my fine little Honda car. Well, God's power has something to say about that. I had something to say about it, too! This power has to do with issues just like that, not merely things that happen when you are gathered together as a body of believers here, or when you are doing something that is obviously spiritual. Paul is saying that this power has to do with all of life.

The third thing Peter tells us is that this power comes "through the knowledge of Him who called us." Here is this term again-real knowledge, true knowledge, "true truth," as Dr. Francis Schaeffer would say-in terms of a relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the way truth is communicated to us. It comes through a living relationship with him.

The fourth thing he says is that it has something to do with our destiny. Peter says, "He called us apostles to His own glory and excellence." "Glory" means worth or value. In both the Old and New Testaments the term "glory" basically means "to be heavy." We have almost the same idiom today when we talk of someone who is a "heavy dude," someone who has weight, value. Recently I saw an ancient tablet that listed all of a man's household possessions. At the bottom it said, "This is his glory." That is what Peter is talking about-worth, value. Peter says the One who called us called us to the same worth, the same value. that he himself has. That ought to say something to people like you and me, who sometimes doubt our value and worth. We are also called to his eminence, or excellence, as it is translated here. We use this term in the sense that we describe a skilled surgeon as an eminent surgeon; he is well-known because of his skill and his craft. That is the term Peter uses. "Eminence" means, basically, mastery of life. The One who called us not only has worth and value, but also is the master of life. After all, he is the Creator. He is the controller of all things. He knows how to cope with life, and Peter is saying that we learn from him how to cope with life. That is our destiny that is what he is moving us toward.

This is what I think Peter is saying. He is describing his call to come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Peter's brother Andrew went down to the Jordan River where John the Baptist preached, and John pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Andrew went home and said, "Peter, we have found the Messiah!" The Lord then called Peter into a relationship with Him, and for three and a half years they traveled throughout Palestine. Peter saw, in a very personal way, the power of God

displayed before his very eyes. The Lord took him out on a boat on the Sea of Galilee and taught him how to handle storms. Jesus is the master of stormy situations in our lives. He fed them when they were hungry, and he broke bread when there was no bread to be had. He taught them that he is the One who knows intimately about their need. And throughout these three and a half years, these men who had been called into a relationship with Jesus Christ learned that it was their destiny to be able to cope with life. That was what God had in mind for them. That was their potential.

But Peter says this ability to cope with life didn't stop there. The gospel isn't looking back to the apostles and saying, "My, didn't they do it well!" The process continued on through the apostles, because in verse 4 it says, "Through [see the margin note these things He has granted to us [apostles His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." That is, "You can have the same relationship with Jesus Christ that we had." The Lord commissioned these men not only to know him, but also to write these great and magnificent promises in Scripture. And these Scriptures are then passed On to us, and on the basis of these promises we can know Jesus Christ on the same basis that the apostles knew him. Do you see that? Have you ever envied the apostles because they had what seemed to be a unique relationship with Jesus Christ? They could live with him and walk with him and see him in action. Peter is saying, "We don't have an edge on you. We don't have anything that you can't have. The same relationship, the same contact with divine power, the same capacity to cope with life and to live out your potential in the world is yours, if you come to know Jesus Christ through this book." These are the great and magnificent promises, passed on the apostles, and then to us. And if we learn from these promises of God's divine power we will begin to cope with every situation in life. Peter says that, basically, what this means is that we thus escape the destruction that is in the world by lust.

Unfortunately that term "lust" almost always means sexual lust to us. But the term refers to the preoccupation with sensual things. Now, sensual things, in themselves, are not wrong, but to be preoccupied with them is wrong. That is, if our lives consist of things that we see, things that look good, things that smell good, and if we are preoccupied with these things, Peter says the result will be destruction. That is what is causing the disintegration of our society today. Peter says that by having become a partaker of the divine nature, you have escaped the destruction that is in the world through the preoccupation with sensual things.

I like beautiful things, and I am sure you do, too. I like to hear beautiful sounds, and to see beautiful sights. There is no premium, particularly, on feeling bad; I like to feel good. But to be preoccupied with these things. Peter says, will lead to our destruction. The great tragedy is that today the majority of books that are coming off the presses are instructing us to do things that ultimately are going to be destructive. They are teaching us to gratify our senses in various ways. Peter says the result is corruption and destruction. But by having come into a relationship with Jesus Christ through the Word of God, we are delivered from that destruction. This, then, is the apostolic word, the word that delivers. This is the word that was experienced by the apostles and was passed through their hands and minds into our hands. And so what we have today is a revelation from God through the apostles that enables us to know Jesus Christ on the same basis that they knew him, and thus to escape the destruction that is in the world by lust.

But it is not enough merely to possess this word. Peter goes on to say that this word must possess you. This is not a magic book. It is not merely the word of this page that delivers. The other day I saw an advertisement on TV for a microfilm Bible. You can now carry a microfilm around in your wallet and thus have the whole Bible. That is not what Peter is talking about. It is not the Bible sitting on your coffee table, and it is not the Bible tucked in your wallet. That is not what it means to possess the Bible. The Bible has to possess us. It has to master us. That is what he describes in verses 5 through II:

Now for this very reason also [i.e., because we have the life of God within, because we have the apostolic word], **applying all diligence, In your faith supply moral excellence.**

In other words, start acting on the truth that you have! Let this word master you. Start believing it. Start counting on God in very practical ways to work out the truth of this revelation in your life. This word "supply" actually means "lavishly supply." In Peter's day, this term was used of the patrons of the arts who lavished time and money and effort to build the culture of their day. They would compete with one another to see who could out fit the chorus, or the symphony orchestra, or whatever, in the most lavish way. No expense was spared. The Greek word literally means "to outfit a chorus." Peter says that ought to be our

approach toward the faith, i.e., the body of belief that we have. Don't hold back; pull out all the stops. Lavishly supply to your faith all these other characteristics. In other words, begin to act upon the truth, and do so in an energetic and enthusiastic way. Peter is not saying here that we ought to try harder. If you read this passage, it appears on the surface to be an exhortation to the will merely to try again, or try harder. That is not what Peter is saying. He is assuming that the life of God is already there. Now act on the basis of that truth. Let the life of God express itself. Don't frustrate it, don't inhibit it. Let God be God in you.

Have you been yelling at the kids this week? Well, don't do it. That is what Peter is saying. You don't have to do it. Oh, you will fail. So will I. I fail many times. I can yell louder than any of you. But Peter's point is that we don't have to. Stop doing it. If you fail, lay hold of God's forgiveness and go on. Don't be depressed. don't get discouraged. don't quit. But neither should we excuse failure in any area. If we have the life of God within us, let's start acting that way. Are you defrauding your employer in some way, cheating him of time or money? Stop doing it. We have that sort of power.

What are we lavishly to supply? First, we are lavishly to supply in our faith moral excellence. This is the same term Peter used in verse 3. "Excellence" means mastery. Start using these truths to master life. Start coping with life. You can.

Second, supply "in your moral excellence, knowledge." This means merely a knowledge of Scripture. Begin to read the Word so that it will possess you. Give yourself to studying it, to prayer fully trying to understand what it is saying. There is always that order in Scripture-obedience precedes knowledge. If you begin to obey the Word, you have a hunger for more of it. More of it comes alive for you. and more of it makes sense. Obey it and God will open up more of it to you. If the Bible is dry and dull and dusty, it may be that you are not obedient to the truth that you have. I have found that true in my own experience.

. . . and in your knowledge, supply self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance [or patience], and in your patience, godliness [or piety, a spirit of worship, a spirit of submission to God]; and in your piety, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love.

In other words, it is not enough to let the Bible have a place in your home'. it has got to have a place in your life. It is not enough to master the texts of Scripture: Scripture has to master you. The apostolic word has to lay hold of our lives and begin to possess us. That is what Peter is saying. And if you do these things, he says in verse 8:

For if these qualities are yours and increasing [because this is the sort of thing that is never static; we always have to be moving-either we are going into decline or we are moving ahead and making progress in these qualities] they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, For he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Peter is saying this: No matter what this condition is. no matter how frustrating your circumstances may be, if these qualities are yours, if they are an inherent part of your life, and you are growing. you are not idle, and you are not unproductive, you are fruitful. I have lost track of the number of times that verse has come home to me in helpful ways. There are many times when, for one reason or another, we get set aside and we are not doing anything that appears to be productive. In those times, Peter says, if we will be God's men and women, if we will allow the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to make us more loving. more kind, more patient people, we are productive and fruitful in God's sight.

Some of you young mothers were very active, working in Young Life clubs or teaching women in Bible studies, or perhaps working out here in our children's Sunday School, or some other aspect of the ministry, and then a little child comes into your life. and that changes everything. Now the only time you get out of the house is when you have to take a bag of used Pampers out to the garbage can! That can be very frustrating. Your husband is running around doing all kinds of what appear to be vital, exciting things. But Peter says that if you are practicing these qualities in your home, you are fruitful, you are productive. The other side of the coin is that if you are not. Peter says. you have forgotten the very purpose for which you were saved. God brought you into a relationship with him to cleanse you from sin and you have forgotten that, and no matter how busy you are, you are unproductive. You can be teaching, evangelizing. doing all sorts of good and proper things. but if these qualities are not yours and increasing,

then you have forgotten the very purpose for which God has called you. Because the potential that we have in this life is godlikeness. And there is no ceiling on that quality. We are all in the process of growing toward that end. What is important is that we pursue that end. If that is our goal, Peter says, we are not idle, not unproductive. no matter what the circumstances may be. He goes on in verses 10 and 11 to say,

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

That sounds like a threat. It sounds like he is saying if you don't practice these things. God won't call you. But that is not what he is saying at all. It is not a threat; it is a test. He is saying that if the life of God is in you, you will practice these things. That is the whole point. It is the most natural thing in the world to be godlike if the life of God is in you. If there is no hunger for godlikeness, then he may not be there. But when divine power comes to reside in your life. it is going to express itself in very tangible ways. and there will be a deep hunger to have these qualities in your life, and there will be progress in this direction. Oh, we will be failing a lot, but that doesn't bother God. He is very comfortable with failure. All he looks for is progress. The point is, God's life has to express itself. If it isn't expressing itself, then that life is not there. Or, we might seriously ask ourselves the question, "Is it there?"

When I was about nine years old, my mother sent me out to the pumphouse to see what was wrong with the pump. My dad was gone: he usually handled things like that. There were 220 volts of power going into the big motor that ran the pump. I tried the switches, and it wouldn't run. So I decided to test it. I had seen my father, working on our automobile, take wires and spark them together to see if they were hot. So I thought I would test this out. I got a screwdriver-and by God's grace it was a screwdriver and not a crowbar, or I wouldn't be here today. I put that screwdriver right across those wires. There was an explosion, and I went flying backwards out of the pumphouse, landing on my neck about ten feet outside the door. I remember looking at the screwdriver, and it was bent just like a hay hook. I learned a very valuable lesson from that: you don't fool around with 220 volts. That is a lot of power. The point is obvious: if you have that kind of power flowing through the wires, something is going to happen. The same is true of us. We have God's power. It isn't always obvious. As I look at you, and you look at me, we don't look very powerful. But the power is there. And if we are not putting it to use, then we need seriously to ask ourselves the question. "Is it there?"

I am not going to elaborate on verses 12 through 19, but I do want to read them, because this is the application to this entire section. Next week we will fit this section into chapter 2, because the two sections are related.

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling [an interesting way to look at your body - as just a skin tent!] to stir you up by way of reminder [that is, as long as I am around I am going to keep preaching this message: take heed to the apostolic word], knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling [knowing that getting rid of my tent] is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me [the Lord told Peter how he would die.]. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,"-and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with HIM on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

We will take more time with this passage next week. I just want to say this in summary: Peter is saying, "We not only had the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures, but we now have those Scriptures attested in the coming of Jesus Christ, and the message which we write is now on par with the writings of the Old Testament prophets. This is the way that the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the power that is a necessary

concomitant of that relationship, comes to you. It comes through the witness of the prophets, and the witness of the apostles. Therefore, pay heed to it. This word is translated much too softly. It actually means "be addicted to it." The term is translated in I Timothy 3, where it talks about deacons not being "addicted" to much wine. "Be preoccupied with it" is the idea. This is the Word, the apostolic witness that revealed the power of Jesus Christ, and how to come into a relationship with that power. Therefore we need to give ourselves to it. We need to know it. We need to read it and to study it. We need to be mastered by it. It is not enough merely to possess a Bible; we need to be subject to it. Peter says. having subjected ourselves to it, it is going radically to alter our lives. It will give us the power for coping with life right now, and it will give us the ability to live out progressively the destiny that God has for us. That is how we live out our potential. That is the message of the book of 2 Peter.

Father, we are thankful that you have given us a word about yourself. We are not limited by what has been passed down by tradition and other things that could be so easily distorted, the picture so badly marred. We thank you that there is a true witness to who you are, and what you came to do, and what you have in mind for us. It is our desire this morning to know this word and be subject to it, to allow it to sit in judgment on our lives and to control us, so that we begin to live out, by means of the Holy Spirit, divine power, divine life. We thank you, Father, for the strength that comes from knowing you. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

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