
Faith – The Character of God

2 Peter 1:3-4 | Sunday, May 13, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

FAITH THE CHARACTER OF GOD 2 Peter 1:3-4

We want to focus of verses 3 and 4 of 2 Peter 1 – “Faith and the Character of God.” I’d like to read verses 1 through 8, so let’s look at the whole section surrounded verses 3 and 4, beginning in verse 1.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I’d like to begin today by asking you five questions. I want to look at five questions and invite you to ask yourself:

- 1) Do you have power?**
- 2) Do you know God?**
- 3) Do you live an excellent life?**
- 4) Are you free?**
- 5) Are you effective and productive?**

Five questions. First: **Do you have power?** Moms, I know you probably need power, depending on where you are in motherhood. If you are a mom with a houseful of very young children, you need

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energy. You need that kind of power. You need the power to have longer nights, to have more sleep, to get more done.

But then, if your kids are a little bit older, you might need power in a different form, all the way up to where if you are a mom here and you have adult children, you might need power to touch your children's hearts, to protect your heart from fear, to help you heal from perhaps some things in your past. There is a whole variety of ways that God's power might be expressed in your life.

But here's the interesting thing about this passage. **If you take the entire eight verses that we just read, Peter tells you that these things are yours by faith: power, relationship with God, a glorious and excellent life, a life that is reflecting the glory of God, freedom, and fruitfulness, effectiveness, productivity. His assumption is that if you place your faith, if you trust in Jesus Christ, these things will increasingly characterize your life.**

He starts in verses 1 and 2. It may seem like this is some kind of formality that Peter is going through, but he actually tells us something very important as he jumps into this letter. He begins by saying, "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ..." Listen to this statement. "...to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

This is an amazing statement. This is the Apostle Peter talking, and he says, "Your faith is equal to mine." That is just contrary for us. We think, "Well, the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle John – these great men of faith – Elijah, Elisha, Moses, Abraham... And Peter is saying, "If you are trusting in Jesus Christ, your faith is equal to mine." In fact, the righteousness of God, your right relationship with God, the power of that to live a right life – it's yours, just like it was and continues to be for all who trust in Jesus. **That's because faith is not about you; it's about the one you trust in. Faith is not in yourself, is not in your own faith. It's in God.** Faith connects you to God.

Peter begins by saying, "Your faith is equal to ours, to mine." That's a very important statement because he now wants to take you through what it looks like to live by faith. In fact, we've been talking about the subject of faith for a few weeks now. We've kind of walked through a progression. We started with: **One of the ways that we increase our faith is we reason with God.**

We come and present an argument to God, if you will. I don't mean that we argue with God so much as a reasoned out, logical progression of thought, saying, "God, this is why I believe you should answer my prayer. This is why I believe that my prayer is your will, and it's right. We do that, not

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because we are persuading God, not because we are informing God of anything he doesn't know. But as we do that, our faith actually increases. **Our faith rises as we consider why this might be the will of God.**

And when we reason with God, promises are very helpful. Promises are key in general, but they're very helpful when we come to present our case before God. "God, you've promised to cleanse me from sin. You've promised to transform me. You've promised that your grace is going to characterize my life. You've promised that you're going to give me your Spirit, your power, your wisdom – for every role in life. For being a dad, for being a husband, for being a pastor, for everything you've called me to be, for being a man – all of the above.

And Lord, you know all the inadequacies that I deal with and all that confronts me. I'm coming and I'm saying, "Lord, I need your help. Jesus, I'm believing your promises. Lord, your name is on me. I'm not making you look very good right now." **You make your case, and as you make your case and as you focus on the Lord and his promises, faith rises.**

Today we come to the topic of the character of God. One of the reasons promises are so powerful is not just that God said it and therefore it is and that God's word is powerful, but God's promises connect us. They make us think about who God is and why his word is sure and true.

So, moms, today we are giving you a book called, [None Like Him](#), which is on the character of God. It's on certain attributes, certain traits of who God is. I won't explain the whole book, but we divide God's traits into two categories: those that God is totally unique in – we'll never share that trait; we'll never share God's infinity or the fact that God never changes. Those attributes are totally unique to God.

Then some of the traits of God, like patience and love and kindness, we are able to share in. Though we'll never be entirely like God in those categories, we can grow in those areas. This book is on the first categories – attributes of God that are unique to him, and how they impact your life.

I'll come back to that in a minute, but I just want to say by way of commercial... Some of the moms here – you're going to get that book and you are a reader. You'll sit down and you'll be through in a few days with that book. Others of you are sitting there saying, "Does he have any idea that I'm a mom and I don't have any time? When am I going to read this?" Maybe you're thinking, "I'm not a reader anyway," and that's fine.

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I will often read a book devotionally just one page at a time. Get up in the morning, read one or two pages, open my bible, pray – it doesn't have to be read start to finish. In fact, sometimes a book like this on the character of God is read wonderfully if you just read it devotionally. So, it's a gift. We want to honor you moms. We are grateful for you. And it connects to this message because we want you to be thinking more deeply about who God is.

So, here's where we want to go. **We want to look at these verses and see how faith helps us to experience the power of God through the promises of God and connects us to who God is.** So let's look at verses 3 and 4. Let's start with verse 3: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." There are three thoughts here on how God provides everything you need.

1. **He has given you everything you need for life and godliness**
2. **Through relationship with God,**
3. **So that you can live an excellent life.**

Do you see those three thoughts right there in the verse? God's power gives you everything you need for life and godliness. It's comprehensive. It's what you need inside of you and it's what you need to deal with your environment. It's also what you need to deal with your children, moms and dads. Marriage – it's inclusive, it's exhaustive. And it not only provides what you need, but it brings you into a relationship with God – a deep, intimate, personal relationship with God.

Think of it this way. God comes to Abraham. "Abraham, I'm going to make you a great nation. This is my vision for your life. Your descendants are going to be like the sand on the seashore." So Abraham believes God. He believes God's promises and he launches out. He and Sarah are unable to have children. They immediately experience their lack of power. And as Abraham comes to God and complains to God, "God, where are you? Here are your promises, God," God just keeps repeating his promises until one day he gives him Isaac.

As you follow the progression of Abraham's life, by the time he's 120 he has his son, Isaac. He takes him and puts him on the altar. He's ready to sacrifice him to God, because now he believes that God raises the dead. Here's the point. **He has not only received God's provision, he has not only experienced God's power, but now he knows God in a whole new way -- through relationship, so that he can live an excellent life, a life to the glory of God.**

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Let's go to verse 4. You'll see it's parallel to verse 3. God gives you promises, "...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

God gives you promises. God's power provides everything you need. These promises are an extension of his character. Look at the unique way that Peter expresses this. Through the promises of God, you become a partaker of the divine nature. He is taking you deeper on each one of these three ideas.

God's power comes to you through the promises of God. God's power brings you into relationship with him. God's promises bring you into actually participating in the nature of God. Here he expresses the result in the positive, so that you can live this life -- this glorious, excellent life. Then he puts it in the negative: to free you from the corruption that's in the world because of sinful desire.

That's a mouthful. **Let me try to reduce it down to power, intimacy, and identity. When you trust in Jesus you experience God's power. You experience a new intimacy and a new identity, where your whole life and how you live begins to change.** You could spend weeks, months on each one of these topics.

For example, take the most intimate relationship that you can know. Even in the best of marriages, even in the best of families, as you grow in intimacy, there is always this question of: "Am I completely known? Am I completely safe? How well am I known?" If you've been married for any length of time, you've probably had your spouse say to you, "If you knew me at all, you wouldn't say that!" I've never experienced that, but some of you have experienced that. Or you may have thought, "He doesn't know me at all."

What we're expressing in that moment is that we have a desire to be known and accepted in love. And we have a need to give that. Here's what's amazing. **In our relationship with God, we not only experience that, but God comes into us and we begin to experience the very nature of God as the Spirit of God lives within us.**

So you're here...you're single, you're not married, you're married, you're happily married, you're unhappily married – we all have intimacy issues. We all have desires that are not perfectly fulfilled. You can get to the end of your life and if you've put all of your hope in a human relationship and the intimacy you'll get from that, you might be setting yourself up for some disappointment.

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You say, “I have invested so much, but did it really pay off?” Well, it does, but that’s not the point. The point is that God takes us to a place of intimacy that’s beyond what we can know just in human relationship. **The power of God brings us into deeper relationship, brings about a transformation, a new identity.** It’s expressed in the positive and the negative.

So don’t run from the negative. The negative is actually very helpful. God, by his power, his promises, frees us from the corruption that’s in the world because of lust or sinful desire. It’s not just talking here about sexual lust or sinful desire. It’s literally desires that have taken control of our hearts -- maybe of good things. It may be the desire for something really good, but it has become an over-desire that now rules our life in a corrupting way. That, Peter says, characterizes the world, but instead of bringing life it brings corruption.

Let me see if I can illustrate this in a couple ways, first of all just personally. I placed my faith in Christ as a young boy and understood that I had sinned and I needed a savior. I didn’t understand that as a boy trusting in Jesus there was a massive journey in front of me, where the battle against sinful desire was still very much on.

In my case, there was this massive sin problem of pride. It expressed itself in anger. Please forgive me for using the past tense as if it never happens now, but I’m going to use the past tense anyway. Pride expressed in anger. If you’d met me you’d have thought, “He’s jovial, he’s affable, he’s very likable,” right? In fact, my nickname as a child was Happy. The anger wasn’t like, “Oh, he’s an angry person,” but it was a competitive anger. It came out in a desire to exalt myself over other people. It came out in sports and competition and academics, in every way imaginable.

Even when Beth and I were first married, she would say things to me like, “You know, I love you, but you always have to have the last word.” And I had a response. Imagine the irony of that. “No, no, not really.” I was very much characterized by defensiveness, because I had believed a lie. I had believed the lie that if I win, if I’m the best, if I’m good at this, if I’m good at that, then I’m significant, then I’m to be reckoned with, then I’m going to be okay. I had made that god in my life. Are you with me?

This is what happens. God’s power comes in and meets you and breaks the power of those lifelong sins – the sins that you battle with your entire life. And you learn to come before God and say, “God, you’ve promised that I’m to walk in freedom. You’ve promised, Lord, that I’m not to be characterized by this life-controlling problem that keeps me from living a virtuous life, an excellent life to your glory.

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Lord, it is bringing corruption into my relationships, into everything in my life. Lord, you've said the penalty of that sin is paid for, that I don't have to pay for it. I receive forgiveness by trusting in you, Jesus. This is affecting my marriage. This is affecting my children. This is impacting everything in my life. It is a corrupting corrosion that goes everywhere into my life. God, will you help me?"

That, actually, is not fictional because the sense of powerlessness in my life completely characterized my experience. I remember while at seminary, crying out to God, "God, I feel like I have no power to change." When I began in youth ministry, I remember very early on a young man, late teens, still in high school, coming to me and saying, "My girlfriend and I are really having trouble walking in purity and I feel like I have no power to stop this or to have any self-control."

Here's what's interesting. You can hear that and you can say, "Hmmm. Well, that just must be your identity. That must be who we are as humanity, and you should go with it." The problem with that thinking is that if you just go with your appetites, they are not easily satisfied. They are never satisfied. They will want more and more and they will get darker and darker and stronger. You will be enslaved to a rapacious, destructive spirit. We need freedom that only comes by the grace of God.

This is what happens. I'm taking the time to kind of lay this out even personally to illustrate it, because I find as a pastor that when people really open their hearts to me, they feel like change is coming way too slowly. They feel that they lack power. We are often trapped in a thinking that expects life issues that have characterized our lives for decades, in some cases, to be gone in a breath. We really think once Jesus forgives us we should inherently just possess the power to walk away from whatever.

There are miracles of deliverance that God does. I don't know why he says, "Okay, these you never have to deal with again, but these are here for you to learn to trust in me and learn sanctification and learn to grow."

Okay, let me take you through the rest of the verses just to see. Here's what comes in verse 5. Peter says, "Add to your faith..." then he gives a list. When you read the list, you may think that this is a progression. You add to your faith virtue, then it stacks. But don't think of a stack. Think of a bicycle wheel or a wheel with a hub, and faith is the hub. Faith is how you add virtue.

This Greek word for virtue is the same word that he used earlier for excellence. He is talking about moral virtue. There's a whole sermon obviously right here, but basically he started with faith. Your

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faith is equal to his. This is how it works in your life. The power of God comes in. You receive the promises. You experience a relationship with God. God is in you. You are learning to walk an excellent life, a glorious life. You are learning to put off the corruption that's in you and in the world because of over-desires. **Then he tells you to use your faith to grow in these areas: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love. And faith in God and in the promises of God and in the character of God is the key to that growth.**

I was talking to one of our young men who basically started a construction business. He is a part of the church. He was saying to me, "Wow, I really have a vision for just doing this with excellence, to bless people, to honor God. He and I were talking about how in the construction industry that is a real light, because at certain times, in certain industries we will see a lot of corrupting influences. He was sharing how he had seen some things working with various vendors that could potentially be disheartening. But instead he saw it as an opportunity for the light of God to shine.

I said to him, "I know what you mean. I have a similar profession. Not all pastors have a great reputation. I can bemoan that fact or I can say, 'This is an opportunity for the glory of God to shine.'" Let me just say this: When God describes excellence, he describes it in a way and with qualities that we don't often focus on. He talks about love. He talks about brotherly affection. He is talking there about the way I greet you. The physical, the emotional expression of: "I love you." He is talking here about a comradery that we build together. He is describing here a life and a lifelong pursuit that comes by faith.

We are not against outcomes and tips and techniques and methods. Those things are helpful. But if we can't get the slides right, we'll eventually get there, right? When you walk in and you see tattered carpet in the foyer, I'm going to say to you biblically, "We'd like new carpet, and if you'll make a donation we'll get it, however God is a lot more interested in this list than our list, just frankly." It's the truth!

I can tell you that these things are a lot more difficult to come by. This is the excellent life God has for you. **Identity of who you are comes from an intimate knowledge and relationship with God that is transformed by the power of God just because of God's sheer mercy and grace at work in your life because of what Jesus has done for you.**

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He ends this in verse 8 by saying, “If you’ll just do this, if you’ll follow this progression and then just work on these things, I promise you that you will not be unfruitful. You will not be ineffective. **You will have a fruitful life. That’s a good promise, right?**

So, let’s go back to our list of questions. **Do you have power? He is promising you in this passage that by faith in Christ you’ll have power. He is saying that it happens through a personal, intimate, deep knowledge of God where you partake in the very nature of God. God’s desire for you is for you to live a life that gloriously reflects who he is, that is characterized by excellence, by virtue. You are to be free from lust and evil desire that is life-controlling.**

He phrases this in verse 8, that you are increasing in these qualities. It’s not a one and done. There is a progression of learning to walk in our freedom so that we are in faith for those corrupting influences to be conquered, so that we will have an effective and fruitful life.

This week I had the joy of going to watch my 24-year-old son graduate from Texas A&M, so we celebrated. This son came into our family 12 years ago from Africa. He was 12 years old and didn’t speak English. In 12 years he went through 12 or 13 years of school. He started at FAU, wanted to get into A&M, didn’t get there, so he went to FAU so he could transfer. Got there, went through the military corps, and graduated with an accounting degree. Can you tell I’m so proud of this son? You know what? This is fruit of my crazy life, and I’m so dysfunctional it’s a miracle!

I was sitting there at dinner, celebrating with my family. This son has some challenges with getting idioms correct because he didn’t learn English until he was 12. He’ll say thing like, “I’m going to kill two stones with one bird.” “It’s not over till the fat lady starts baking the cookies.” He has all his own idioms, right? They’ve become part of the lore of our family. I don’t know if I were 24, struggling with language and other people were picking up on that, that I would react in a godly way. Knowing what you know of what I’ve already told you about myself, you’re saying, “No, I don’t think you would.” What I’m trying to say is that he is teaching me about life and courage and perseverance and faith in God. And somehow, in a backward way, God let us participate in it!

You may be sitting here and have regret about the way you’ve lived your life. You may look at how you feel your sin has affected your children, or maybe how you chased success and in the end it cost you in other vital categories. **Whatever it is, no matter how late or early it is, God’s power, God’s grace is ready to do so much more in you and through you than you can imagine!**

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That's the message. Moms, that's the gift to you: power, intimacy, identity. It's yours in Christ. You don't earn it. You receive it as a gift, and your children will be blessed beyond anything that you can imagine. It's never too late. Let's pray.