

“The Divine Life” Part 2C

Holiness

2 Peter 2:1-11

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Gracious Lord, as we ponder the entrance into human history on the part of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray, Lord, that our minds would be focused upon Him, that You would remove from us the frustrations and consternations of this week, that we would think upon those things that are lovely, pure and holy. And may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Continuing our deliberation of the divine life as recorded for us in 2 Peter chapter 1, again it's such an important passage of Scripture that I want to keep everything in its right context. I'd like to read the entire passage for you again—2 Peter chapter 1, verses 1-11, studying the divine life.

“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. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and Amen. We are calling this portion of Scripture "The Divine Life." Two things we've talked about so far, as a matter of quick review, and those are the divine implantation and the human utilization.

The divine implantation is found in the very first verses. *"To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing."* God did something when He divinely implanted His holy life in us. A good cross reference, which we've used before, is Ezekiel 36:22-26, where God took the heart of stone, removed it and replaced it with a heart of flesh.

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Transcriber's Note: Ezekiel 36:22-26. *"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.'"*

Bruce: No longer did we have an inactivity toward spiritual things. That is called *regeneration*. That is the divine implantation of the life of God. Peter describes it as having obtained something. That means obtained by lot, by divine allotment. God has chosen to give us something of Himself.

There are two kinds of ministry. There is the ministry that sells and there is the ministry that releases life. Peter is talking about ministry that releases life. And that is because you've been divinely implanted with the very life of God. That's what it means to be in Christ. And so the first aspect that Peter wants us to understand is the sovereignty of God in the divine implantation of the life of God in the life of the believer.

Next we come to the second portion of this balanced approach. And that would be that the sovereignty of God is balanced with the responsibility of man. The responsibility of man is found in the terminology that I would prefer to use—the human utilization. The divine implantation and the human utilization.

Now a lot of times we talk about cooperating with God. Now I understand what that means. I think it's a far better illustration to say that it is not so much cooperating with God, because that would infer that I bring certain resources to the table. We really don't have any resources, do we?

Participant: No, we don't.

Bruce: God is the One who divinely implants the resources within us. So I have no resources to bring to Him to cooperate with Him. I prefer to use the words *human utilization*. We utilize the resources that God gives us.

Now we see that in the human responsibility portion of that when he says this. *"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue."* You and I have a responsibility to utilize the resources that God gives us. That's the human utilization of the resources that God gives us.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in His very first Beatitude, at His very first staff meeting, says this. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Literally, that means you're a spiritual beggar. You're bankrupt. You have no resources. What God does is that He divinely implants His life within you. And that gives you the resources that you need. Peter says that you've been given everything you need for life and Godliness. Peter is talking about all the resources that you and I will ever need and to utilize those resources for the glory of God so that we can participate in the divine life.

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So if you look at your outline, the two major themes would be the divine implantation of the life of God, and then the human utilization of the resources that God gives us.

Now as we talk more in detail about the resources that God gives us through these great promises, Peter talks about adding certain things to our faith. You have this divinely implanted faith by the sovereignty of God. And now he says that you have the divine responsibility to utilize those resources to add to your faith. *"Make every effort to add to your faith."* And he says that there are seven things you need to add.

Now, as a quick review, as we talked last week, these virtues all fit together like the cog of a wheel. This is a divinely inspired order. This is not just random prose and poetry. It's a divinely inspired order.

And when you look at the grammar in the Greek text, it basically looks like this. The first quality leads to the second one and the second one completes the first one. The second one leads to the third one and the third one completes the second one. So they fit together like the cog of a wheel. And the end result is what? The last one is what?

Participant: Love.

Bruce: Love. He is basically saying that when you learn how to love sacrificially, you will never fall because if you work on all of these things, you will learn how to live an excellent life, and that is because you've learned to love sacrificially.

As we started this process last week, we started with adding moral excellence. The first thing that we add to our faith is moral excellence. Moral excellence is really the quality of living an excellent life.

Now what is it that we need after moral excellence? You need to know how to live morally excellent. So the very next thing that we talked about last week was *knowledge*.

This is practical knowledge. This is not just knowledge of the deeper things. It is a practical knowledge. It is basically a knowledge that is the knowledge of what to do in every given situation.

Now if you and I are going to live morally excellent lives, what is it that we need to know? We need to know how to make a decision in every situation we're confronted with. That's why knowledge completes moral excellence. You start with moral excellence. If you say you're in Christ, then act like it. People say that you're holier than thou. Then act like it. The very first thing that shows evidence of our regeneration is our morality.

Jesus says this. *"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* You see, probably one of the greatest indications of your spiritual maturity, men, is what you talk about. Why do you say those phrases? Why do you use that terminology? Why do you use that verbosity? Why do you do that? You see, it's a reflection of something deeper, and that's the divinely implanted life. And one of the first things that is going to control our moral excellence is what comes out of our mouth, because that's an indication of the condition of the heart.

The real battle is the heart. And Jesus says this. *"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* One of the first things we need to clean up, men, is our language. We don't talk about filthy jokes. We don't talk about immoral things. We don't talk about that because we're working on living an excellent life and being morally excellent.

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Now on top of that, you need to know and understand the practical things to make decisions to live a life of moral excellence. That's where the word *knowledge* comes in. It's very, very practical knowledge.

There are two Greek words for *knowledge*. One of them is *sophia*, which means the knowledge of deeper things. The other one is *gnosis*, which means practical knowledge. It's the ability which enables a person to decide rightly and to act honorably and effectively in the day-to-day situations of life. That's what the word *knowledge* means. It's very practical knowledge.

As we look at our list, the next thing that we need to add is moral excellence, and then we add knowledge. Now what happens when knowledge occurs? There can be the tendency to be puffed up with knowledge. All of a sudden, you have all this knowledge of the Scripture, the things to do, and you take pride in the fact that you're consumed with so much knowledge. What is the very next thing that we need to do to add to our knowledge?

Participant: Self-control.

Bruce: Self-control. What is it that a person who has great knowledge needs to do? It is to be under self-control.

The word *self-control* is a very interesting word. It means "having one's passions in hand." It means self mastery.

Look at this. Add moral excellence. Add knowledge. After your knowledge, the thing that you need to do is to gain mastery over your knowledge so that you know how to use it wisely. You don't just go and become a Bible basher and beat people over the head. You know how to use it wisely. And that's why you have to hold your passions in hand. It's the ability to take a grip of oneself.

The Greeks had four stages of life. Stage one was where passion was totally subjected to reason. When the fight is won and reason reigns supreme, it's perfect temperance. That's absolute perfection. That's stage one.

Stage two was exactly the opposite. Passion controls all reason. And the fight is lost and passion reigns supreme. That would be called unbridled lust. One is absolute perfection. The other is unbridled lust. Passion rules reason.

Stage three was in between the two. Reason fights, but passion prevails. The battle is still on. But at the moment it is a losing battle.

And stage four for the Greeks was this, The word that we're talking about now—*self-control*, in which reason fights against passion and prevails. The battle is still on, but it is a winning battle because you learn to take a grip of yourself. You've learned to hold your passions in hand. And you've learned to gain self-mastery over your emotions.

Now what a great quality that is! But notice the sequence. Moral excellence leads to knowledge. Knowledge leads to self-control. The thing that you and I need to do to gain all of this knowledge is to gain mastery of that so that you know how to use the knowledge correctly. The believer is not void of personal passions. But they remain under control and become one's friends, not enemies. Yes?

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Participant: Bruce, in Philippians Paul says, after he says "*rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice!*", he says, "*Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*" Would you say that relates?

Bruce: Absolutely. That's where we need to understand that we have passion in our manhood. We have passion in our desire to minister for Christ. We need to bring those passions under control and let people see that. That's going to be a function of our knowledge. Our knowledge is helping us to understand how we need to bring things into control.

Here is an illustration of that. I've mentioned to you one of my favorite Bible verses. Gaining mastery, self-control, knowledge. Knowledge tells me what to do. Mastery says how to do it. "*I will fight for you while you remain silent.*" Exodus 14:14. (Bruce covers his mouth to make his point.)

Now that's a bit of knowledge. But it's also what? Self-control, because I don't normally want to keep my mouth shut. What I normally want to do is take somebody on. When somebody says something, I want to get in there and fight. But knowledge says this. "*I will fight for you while you remain silent.*"

That means this. I've got to gain mastery over myself and my tongue and my mouth and my emotions, because I might explode when I say something incorrectly, because out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. You see, that's an example of self-control. It comes from the knowledge of understanding what we need to do.

The knowledge is this. "I'm going to fight for you, Bruce, while you remain silent." Sometimes my best response when I'm very passionate and angered about something is this. (*Pause.*) Just keep your mouth shut. Because I know this. God will fight for me while I remain silent. That's an illustration of how we can apply this, gaining self-mastery. It's a critical word that we should understand.

Now notice what happens next—*perseverance* or *steadfastness*, as the English Standard Version translates it.

Perseverance. This is a word that means "to remain under trials and testings in a way that honors God, without demanding a time limit to rescue." Let me give you that again. Perseverance or steadfastness means to remain under trials or testings in a way that honors God and does not demand a time frame to remove the situation. It does not mean to simply sit down and endure. It has a forward look to it of serving and seeing beyond the situation. In other words, perseverance is this. It's the desire to remain in the situation for the glory of God and not demanding a time frame to be removed from it.

Now what is it going to take to do that? Self-control! That's why self-control precedes perseverance. Perseverance is an expression of self-control. It's the outward demonstration of self-control. Self-control is gaining inward mastery of yourself, holding your passions in hand. And the expression of that is perseverance, because nobody can be persevering unless he exercises what?

Participant: Self-control.

Bruce: Self-control! That's why it's a divinely designed order, men. Do you see how it works?

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Vincent, who translates a lot of the Biblical words, describes this word *perseverance* as meaning this: "remaining behind or staying; not merely endurance of the inevitable, for Christ could have relieved Himself of all of His sufferings. But it is the brave, heroic patience, which for the Christian not only bears, but contends." Not only do you bear under it, but you contend with it.

How many times has somebody said, "Well, I'd just like to change my job because I don't like my boss?" So many times I hear young people say that. "I think the Lord wants me to change my job."

"Why is that?"

"Well, I don't like my boss."

What does that have to do with anything? Do you understand moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance? Maybe the Lord wants you to stay there for the glory of God. Did you ever think about that? If you're worried about yourself, you're not going to think that way. You've got to control your passions in hand. Nobody can be persevering unless you exercise self-control.

The word also means this. It means entire command over one's passions. Several years ago, when I was with the ministry of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Washington, D.C.—this was probably thirty-five years ago—there was a convocation, a convention of all the countries around the world that were involved in athletic evangelism. I represented The Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We had people from twelve countries—from Singapore, Hong Kong, Africa, Holland, England, Germany, France, all over the world. It was a convocation and a convention of people involved in athletically oriented evangelism for the kingdom of God.

One of the things that I had the privilege of doing was taking the people from outside the United States on a tour of the monuments of Washington, D.C. I rented a van and drove them all over the city of Washington, D.C. just to let them see the magnificence of our country. Most of these people had never been in the United States before.

There was one young man who had escaped Idi Amin's regime in Africa. Fredrick was his name. Fredrick didn't say a whole lot. He just watched and looked around.

And after it was all over, I took the people back to the hotel. I said to the people, "What did you think of the United States of America? I'm so proud of my country. What did you think about Washington, D.C., our capital? Isn't it a beautiful city? Did you see the wonderful monuments, the history of our culture?"

And the people said, "Oh yes, that's very nice." But Fred came up to me afterwards.

I said, "What did you think of the United States, Fred?"

And he said this. "I perceive that the United States of America is not a very persevering nation."

"Did you get that out of the Lincoln Memorial?" (*Laughter.*) I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "I look at your TV. I look at your advertisements. I look at your newspaper. I look at your magazines. I look at your movies. And what I see is a culture that does not know how to control themselves. I see that you're not a persevering nation because you do not exercise the character quality of self-control."

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What a great illustration! He's absolutely right. You see, the only way that we as a nation are going to persevere is when we learn how to control our passions, to control ourselves. Self-control. We need to get a grip on ourselves individually, as well as getting a grip of ourselves nationally.

No one can persevere who is not exercising the characteristic of self-control. Self-control leads to perseverance. Self-control is the inward attitude of holding my passions in hand. And perseverance is the outward expression of self-control. It's remaining in a situation for the glory of God and not demanding a time frame to be removed. Men, you can't do that unless you're under self-control.

Peter says, "Add that to your faith." To your moral excellence add knowledge, and to knowledge add self-control, and to self-control add perseverance.

And next, add *Godliness*. This is the word *Godliness*, which literally means "worship rightly directed." Now notice. It means a Godward attitude that puts a person in the position of doing that which is pleasing to Him. It means Godwardness. In other words, it puts you in a position of always wanting to glorify God.

Now go back and take a look at the definition of perseverance. The definition of perseverance is this—the desire to remain in a situation for the glory of God.

What is Godliness? Godliness is the outward expression of desiring things that are honoring to Him. It is the idea of worship rightly directed. One of the greatest ways that you and I can worship God is by persevering. Do you see how the correlation happens? Perseverance leads to Godliness.

Godliness is worship rightly directed. You cannot be worshiping rightly if you're not persevering. You cannot be persevering unless you are self-controlled. You cannot be self-controlled unless you understand knowledge. And you cannot understand knowledge unless you're working on your moral excellence. It all fits together. Godliness means this—always correctly worshiping God and giving God His due. Do you realize that you might be worshiping God by remaining in a situation with a boss you don't like? That could be an expression of Godliness because it's an expression of perseverance, because it's an expression of self-control.

It also correctly serves fellow man and gives men their due. Godliness really has a right relationship both with God and with man. You cannot do that, men, unless you're persevering. You cannot do that unless you're exercising self-control. You cannot do that unless you know how to do that. And you cannot do that without working on your moral excellence. Godliness is worship rightly directed.

Let me give you some insights on how we might develop what I would call *Godwardness*, a desire to please God. I think that a way of cultivating this would be this. Work at acquiring an accurate vision of God. Work at acquiring an accurate vision of who God is.

Jesus says in John 17, "*This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God.*" Which God do you know? Is it the God of your human imagination? Or is it the God of Biblical revelation?

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Cultivate the true knowledge of God. That's why we spent three years studying the twenty-eight attributes of God. Cultivate that. Make sure that you have a correct Biblical view of who God is.

I think it's very important to reflect and meditate upon the character of God, to see the beauties of Christ. Reflect and meditate upon the character of God—not just what God does for you, but who God is with you. Meditate on His character.

Consider that God is always present with us. I think that's important to understand to develop a Godward thought, that God is always with us. One of His attributes is this—omnipresence. That's why we really technically shouldn't say, "God, we are anxious to come into Your presence." Where do you think you've been? (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You've been there all the time. We need to recognize that. And when you recognize the fact that you are never out of God's awareness, that you're never out of God's presence, that's going to begin to change the way that you think about your conduct and what you do. To develop a Godwardness, Godliness, one of the things we can do is to recognize this: that God is omnipresent. He is always with us and we're never away from Him.

Participant: That's true.

And fourthly, I would offer this for your consideration. Give yourself to the church, the body of Christ, where you will receive instruction in the Person of God and the work of Jesus Christ. Give yourself to the church.

There are two things, men, that will last for eternity. It's not the stock market. It's not football. There are two things that last for eternity, and those are the word of God and the church. If you want to hitch your wagon up to something that is going to be eternal, it's going to be the Scripture and the church. Give yourself to the church. And get involved in instruction where you can learn about the Person and work of Christ.

Godliness—worship rightly directed. You cannot be Godly and have that Godward thought unless you are persevering. And persevering is one of the expressions of worshiping God correctly.

Now we've talked about Peter. Let's go to 1 Peter. Look at 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 19. Here is an expression, a manifestation of Godliness, worship rightly directed.

Verse 19 of 1 Peter 4. The context of this is suffering as a Christian. Verse 19 is a summary statement. "*Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will.*" Do you realize, men, that suffering may be part of God's will? When you hear preachers saying that it is not God's will for you to suffer, that is certainly anti-Scriptural.

The Christian life is a fight. Three words describe the church, God's people, historically. *Remnant*—it's not everybody. *Persecution*—"*all those who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" And thirdly, *spiritual warfare*.

Those people who teach that there is no such thing as spiritual warfare have no idea of what they are talking about from Scripture, because the Scripture says this. Peter says that you've got to learn to suffer as a Christian. It's a fight, men. It's a battle. It's warfare.

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And you and I need to learn to suffer like that. And one of the ways in which we do that is to learn to persevere and to remain under a situation so that we can worship God correctly. It may be that in your suffering God is demonstrating His glory in your worshiping Him correctly.

Do you realize that your suffering may be an act of worship? Look again at what Peter says. *“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”*

The key word there is the word *entrust*. Nowhere does it say that we are to entrust ourselves to authority. It says that we submit to authority, but that we entrust ourselves to God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: There is a difference. You take that act of submission to authority, even though it's not comfortable. You take that act of submission and you entrust that to a faithful Savior. We entrust that act of submission to Him. There's a difference between entrusting and submitting.

Jesus nowhere entrusted Himself to the authorities. He submitted Himself to the authorities. But He entrusted Himself to God. That's exactly what we do in the midst of our desire to be Godly in worshiping Him correctly.

Godliness is practical religion, making sure that we have a right relationship both with God and with man. And that leads us to what? An expression of that would be what? *Brotherly kindness*. One of the expressions of Godliness is brotherly kindness, because we have a right relationship with God and a right relationship with man.

Brotherly kindness means to have an affection for the brethren, to have an affection for the brothers. It means love of the brethren. It means the willingness to take on the demands of Christian friendship.

There is something wrong with us in the church, men, when the demands of personal relationships become a nuisance rather than an expression of our love for God. Are relationships inside the church a nuisance? We need to back up, men, and understand what it means to worship God correctly. Cultivating relationships of Godliness will manifest itself with brotherly kindness.

In this sense, there are three kinds of people in the world—by race, by place and by grace. By race—that would be by birth. Place would be by nationality. And grace is by the divine implantation of regeneration. There are three kinds of people when you look at it creatively—by race, place and grace.

Brotherly kindness is having an affection for those in grace, those who have been divinely implanted. And you and I must learn how to treat one another inside the context of the church. And we practice that and we take it outside into the world.

That's why it was so important several years ago when we studied the fifty-eight *one another* commands. Those fifty-eight *one another* commands are instructions on how people are to get along with each other inside the church. You practice that inside the church. And when relationships in the church become a nuisance, there is something wrong with us because we're not practicing Godliness, because Godliness manifests itself in brotherly kindness and affection for the brethren.

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Those fifty-eight *one another* commands may be broken down into four major headings—*our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another* and *our restoration of one another*.

Where does it all begin, men? It all begins with this. My relationship to you as a brother in Christ is an expression of my Godliness, of my practical Christianity, in the way that I treat you. And the reason that it starts with that is this. It's because I know that you and I have the same heavenly Father. It has nothing to do with race. It has nothing to do with place. It has everything to do with—

Men: Grace.

Bruce: Grace. Do you understand that?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: The basis of our relationship in the body of Christ is the fact that I know that you and I have the same heavenly Father by grace by the divine implantation of God's holy life in us. And you utilize the resources that He gives you by working on these graces that God gives us so that you can live a morally excellent life.

You see, the world is trying to see healthy relationships. And where are they going to see that? They're not going to see that in Congress. (*Laughter.*) They're not going to see that in corporate America. The only place where they are going to see that, men, potentially, is in the church.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because there is an affection that you and I have for those born of grace, an affection for the brothers. And when you and I regard relations in the church as a nuisance, there is something wrong with us. We need to back up and say, "How do I become more practically oriented in my Godliness and show brotherly affection?" Yes, Bob?

Bob: Bruce, when we think of this progression that you've been talking about for the last few weeks, when we think of Godliness, when we think of the attributes of God, it reminds me of a great expression. True vision occasions right conduct. And when we have a true vision of what God is about, and His attributes and all, then I think that it occasions us to have right conduct in our lives.

Bruce: Absolutely. Well said. A true vision of God produces right conduct. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, the question about how these attributes manifest themselves in our lives, ascending and sequential, are more than one of these developing at the same time?

Bruce: Yes. One of the best ways to look at this—and the last one will be love—if you're lacking one of those things, you need to go back and work on it. You may be exposed in one of those six things in a certain period of your life, and you go back and work on that one. Ideally, when you're working on one, you're working on them all.

But it starts essentially with looking at the man in the mirror. Sometimes you go back and say, "Look. If I'm not very persevering, what do I need to do to become more persevering?" Back up and study what? Self-control.

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It can be very, very edifying and very, very stimulating when you take a look at these things and say, "Which one of these things am I lacking?" The Holy Spirit will reveal that to you and you can begin to work on that one, and then you begin to work on them all together. So yes, they are all developing. And when you work on one, you're working on them all because they are all so intertwined. These are not separate things; they are all intertwined. For me to work on perseverance means that I've got to work on self-control. To work on self-control, I've got to figure out what I need to do about self-control. That becomes knowledge. That means moral excellence in the choices that I make. So they all do fit together. And they all work together.

But I would say that one of the best things to do if you're lacking in one of these things is to go back and work on it. That is what the Scripture says. "*Make every effort to add to your faith.*" Yes, please?

Participant: We've been discussing this mainly in general in the Christian life. And I'm thinking of my marriage. I've been married for forty-nine years and it will be fifty in June.

Bruce: Congratulations.

Participant: And I'm thinking that these attributes can be applied to developing a Christian marriage.

Bruce: Oh, absolutely! Now notice! That's a great lead into the last one. The last one is what? Love.

Participant: Isn't that what you said? Suffering in faith? (*Laughter.*)

Participant: That's the gospel according to Rob. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: That's right. Now notice that the last one is this. These all fit together. They fit together like the cog of a wheel. And the end result is this. When you're working on the first six ones, the end result is love. The process of developing these first six ones leads up to the whole consequence of love.

Love is sacrificial love. And let's describe what that means for a moment, because that has applications everywhere. Peter is basically saying this. When you learn how to love sacrificially, you're never going to fail. That means in your marriage, in your work, with your kids, wherever it may be. When you learn how to love sacrificially, love can be taught, this process of how he is walking us through this. Love can be learned. It's something far more than just emotional feelings. It's something that can be a choice because God gives you all the resources with the divine implantation as you utilize these things. You utilize these graces, and the end result is that you'll learn how to love sacrificially.

So let's take a look at what this means. The chain ends by having believers show to others what God has shown to them. That's why ministry releases itself.

There are two types of ministry, men—one that sells by marketing, or one that releases life. This is how you release life. You release life by giving away to somebody else what God has given you. And that's how you understand God's love. Love can be learned. It can be taught. It can be developed. It's the well-being of another. That's what love means—the well-being of another.

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The excellent person is the person who knows how to love with the love with which God has loved him. The excellent person is the person who knows how to love with the love that God has shown him. That's why love is the consequence of the first six. It's the result.

That's ministry—giving away what God has given you. An excellent person is a ministering person, because you are giving away the sacrificial love that you know God has given you. And you are giving that away to somebody else. The divine life does not sell. It releases life, because you're giving away what God has given you—His love for us. And that applies anywhere.

Look at verses 8 and 9 of 2 Peter chapter 1. *“For if these qualities are yours.”* What qualities? The ones we just talked about. *“If these qualities are yours and are increasing.”* What does that mean? By inference it means what?

Participant: I'm learning.

Bruce: I'm learning. I'm working on them. I'm making every effort. I'm increasing in these seven things.

“They keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful.” It's just a double negative way of saying that you are to be fruitful and effective. Look at verse 9—effective and productive. If you don't understand this, you shut your eyes to the truth.

“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. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he has been cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.”

What is he basically saying? Men, when you learn how to love, with a love in which God loved you, you're never going to fall. Peter is basically saying this, what we've learned before, that love never fails. That's excellent living. That's 1 Corinthians 13.

One of my Puritan friends summarizes this passage this way. “Love is the spring of true excellence. It supplies the constant and sufficient motive to do what is right. Love is the sign of true excellence—not only the spring of true excellence, but the sign of true excellence. As a bird watches and locates the nightingale by its song, people discover the followers of Christ by their deeds and their acts of love.

“Not only is love the spring of true excellence and the sign of true excellence. It is also the crown of true excellence, because we conquer everything by giving away the love of God that He has given to us.”

Men, that's ministry. Ministry is giving away to somebody else what God has given us. And I would encourage us, brothers, to use these seven things as a checklist. If one is wrong, work on it, because you'll be improving all the others.

Excellence is not your performance. It's your person. Excellence is not your position. It is your person. Excellence is not your possessions. It is your person. Excellent living, Peter tells us, is learning to give away what God has given you.

And that is this. God loves you. Do you understand that? Have you experienced that? Just ponder that as you look at the Christmas season—the immensity of God's love for us. And when you understand that, men, you and I are on the verge of living a

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morally excellent life, because character precedes our conduct, because who we are determines what we do.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: May it be so for Jesus' sake. Let's pray. Father, I pray that You would forgive us of our ineptitude in trying to grasp the magnificence of this passage. In our human frailties, we are not omniscient. Father, we just pray that Your Holy Spirit would remove anything that has been inconsistent with the revelation of Your holy word, and only those things that would guide us into all truth would be done by the Holy Spirit this day. Protect us from ourselves, Father. Give us a clear vision of who You are, that we might worship the God of Biblical revelation and not the god of our human imagination. And all the Brave Men said, "Amen." (*Applause.*)