



THE MASTER'S VOICE • Calling

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

2 Peter 1:1-11

Peter is writing to a broad audience of Christians facing false teaching, including skepticism about Christ's return. He exhorts them to grow in knowledge and practice of the Christian faith, with the certainty of Christ's imminent return and judgment.

There are two broad areas of "calling" for a follower of Christ. Above all, we are called to Christ Himself. This primary, or general, sense of calling is the emphasis of this passage. Our secondary, or particular, callings relate to the circumstances of our lives. Our work, family, gifting, passions and so forth are the multidimensional callings to which God assigns us. (1 Cor. 7:17-24) The lessons to follow will examine these contexts for our primary calling.

To succeed in life, we need to know two things: what "success" is and how to get there.

For the Christian, success – our goal, our purpose, the end of our existence – is to know and love God.

How do we get there? The good news is that He has already given us everything we need to get there! In Christ, we have the promises necessary to live the Christian life, including the power to acquire the Christian characteristics that show what it means to know God.

These qualities, or virtue, are not divisible into separate categories. You need faith in Christ for all of them. Love for God and for others is the commandment behind the others. Self-control, and perseverance, and brotherly affection are all related.

These qualities are not sequential. You do not forget about knowledge until you have moral excellence, and so forth.

Lists of virtues like this were common among the pagan philosophers. But there are huge differences between pagan virtues and these. The objective was completely different. The pagans frequently sought glory for themselves, for example. We seek the glory that comes from knowing Christ and having His divine life and nature implanted in us. The virtues themselves were often quite different. And the pagans saw the virtues purely as a question of self-discipline.

Christians make every effort to attain them, as Peter says, but with the strength that comes from knowing Christ and having His divine life and nature implanted in us. We attain them through the promises God has given to us. That's why the first quality in the list is faith.

What's the Big Idea?

We are called to know and love God. It's in the development of Christian character that we confirm and fulfill this calling, both as students and throughout our lives.



Faith. Faith has as its object – God’s promises. Trust that they are true and act as if what God says is true...because it is.

Virtue/moral excellence/goodness. Goodness, virtue, or excellence is defined in view of a goal, an end, a function. A good knife is a knife that cuts well. An excellent apple tree is one that bears big, sweet, delicious, nutritious apples. What is an excellent man? An excellent man, a good man, is a man who does what a man is supposed to do in any particular instance. We have to learn what that is. That’s why the apostle says here that we have to add knowledge of that commitment to goodness.

Knowledge. Knowledge comes through God’s word and the experience that comes from learning to follow His commands. It comes from hanging around people who have learned how to act like Jesus. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him and commended the Thessalonians because they had imitated him as well as other churches. The writer of Hebrews told his readers to imitate people who inherited the promises through faithfulness and perseverance. So this knowledge is partly the kinds of things you can explain verbally and partly the kinds of things that you can only pick up through experience and being around people who know how to do it.

Self-control. The word used here often refers to sexual self-control in ancient literature, but it means, generally, the ability to control yourself in all areas of life, including the sexual area. The best athletes in the world are disciplined. Top athletes are careful about what they eat, about getting rest, about rigorous training. We have a much more important goal in mind. How much more, then, should we train ourselves morally?

We have to have faith, moral excellence, knowledge, and self-control, but we have to have them day-in and day-out, today, tomorrow, the next day and the day after that. We have to have perseverance.

Steadfastness/perseverance. This is not something we do for a while. Those who persevere to the end will be saved. If you have truly been born into God’s new people, you will stay with it. Later, Peter will say, “Make sure that you do make your calling and election sure.”

Godliness: Godliness is a humble reverence and conscious awareness of God in every area of life. It is the practice of putting our loyalty to God first.

Brotherly affection. A certain clergyman once said, “I love the ministry. It’s the people I don’t like.” If you don’t like your brothers and sisters in Christ – or genuinely grow to like them – you will not go far in the Christian life.

Love. Love caps it off. Love says it all. Love summarizes all the rest, just as the rest explain what love looks like. Love God. Love others.

These virtues are virtues because they move us toward our goal – “Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They all point us to Him. These qualities are a confirmation that we have, indeed, been called.

What’s Our Response?

Jesus Christ is the beginning, the means, and the end of life’s journey. However, our role in our transformation into His image is not passive. We must engage the will and work at it, while trusting Him to transform our character, as only He can.

What Are the Questions?

2 Peter 1:1-11

LAUNCH

When you are 70 years old and look back on your life, what will it take for you to be able to say your life was a success?

EXPLORE

Read 2 Peter 1:1-11.

1. What is our primary calling in life?
2. What is the source of our success in life?
3. What is the role of God's promises in this?
4. Which "promises" does this passage refer to? Where do we find them?
5. Some people might read this passage and think it means that we earn our salvation by living a good life. How would you respond to them?
6. What are these qualities? Let's start with "goodness" and then "knowledge" and so forth. What does each of these virtues mean?
7. How do we develop these qualities? What does this mean in practice?
8. What is the relationship between these qualities and the "power" and "promises" discussed in verses 3 and 4?
9. How do these characteristics make our calling and election "sure"?
10. Verse 11 says, "...and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." What images does that bring to mind?

APPLY

11. Looking at these qualities, how are you doing? Where do you fall short? Where do you see God at work in your life?
12. Thinking about graduation and beyond, what do you think you need in order to survive and thrive in that world? What concerns do you have in thinking about it?

What Are the Answers?

1. To know, love, and thereby glorify, God. Christian thinkers have long emphasized our singular “calling” to God in Christ, and the multiple “callings” He has for each of us, where our consecration to Christ is put into practice.
2. God’s divine power is the source of our success. He has already given us what we need. Paul says we have every spiritual blessing. (Eph. 1:3)
3. His promises are the specific resources we need for very particular circumstances. Think of them as “blank checks” to cash as needed.
4. The promises are all the commitments God has made to us in His Word.
5. Our faith is a gift (v. 1), His power “has given us everything we need” (v. 3), and specifically the promises necessary to salvation (v. 4). From elsewhere in Scripture (Gal. 5:22-23), we know that these qualities are the “fruit of the Spirit,” in contrast with the “works of the flesh.” Other Scriptures teach that salvation is by grace through faith. It is because of His salvation that we develop character (“For this very reason...”). As the Reformers said, and this passage illustrates, “We are saved through faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”
6. Discuss each briefly in order, drawing on the rest of Scripture. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
7. These virtues come by faith lived out and they inevitably imply the spiritual disciplines – a pattern of time in the Word, prayer, biblical fellowship and corporate worship, ministry and so forth. Emphasize the necessity of developing habits now that can become second nature for the period of change and instability they will experience after graduation.
8. The power and the promises, are the spiritual resources we need to develop the Christian virtues.
9. They are the confirmation and concrete manifestation of genuine faith; they are evidence of God’s work in our lives.
10. Allow the group to discuss. By articulating our thoughts, we may gain motivation or see errors. I Corinthians 2:9 says that the Lord’s welcome into the new heavens and new earth will be better than anything we can imagine!
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Allow the group to discuss. The students’ comments here can be a resource to the leader for the rest of this series and for preparing them for life after college.

Memorize

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

2 Peter 1:3