

# THE THINGS TO ADD TO FAITH: PERSEVERANCE & GODLINESS

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Many high schools, colleges and universities are going through mid-term exams right now because they are about half-way through their semesters or quarters. So, I think it's only fair that we have our mid-terms this morning since we are about half way through the seven additives to faith that Peter taught us. For the past few Sundays, we've gone through the first three of those special things that we need to add to our faith to make our faith strong and healthy. So . . . for your midterm exam this morning—who can name all three? . . . Yes that's right—***Goodness, knowledge and self-control.***

And this morning, I want you to think about additives #4 & #5. They are two more things that the Apostle Peter tells us we need to add to our faith when he writes: <sup>5</sup> [M]ake every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control [they are the three topics you nailed this morning—and then he goes on to say:]; and to self-control [add], perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness . . .<sup>1</sup> Now why are these last two so important?

Well, do you sometimes feel like your faith is lacking direction?—or that you just can't seem to get your faith in sync with God's plan for your life? Well then, add a heavy dose of ***perseverance*** to your faith and you will be just fine. Or ask yourself this: Does your faith allow you to react to what life throws at you in a Christ-like manner? If not, your faith needs to have a good measure of ***godliness*** added in order that you will instinctively react to things in the way God desires. So, let's see what this ***perseverance*** and this ***godliness*** is all about?

Perseverance, as it applies to faith, means having endurance in your faith—i.e., the will to press forward in your faith in Jesus in both good times and bad—not to just trudge ahead blindly, but rather to press on according to God's plan for your life. Paul helps us to understand this. I think if Paul had been around today he would have been a tremendous sports fan. He would have been an especially avid track and field fan, and a boxing fan, because he liked to use athletic images from these sports to remind Christians what perseverance in the faith means. For example, Paul said: <sup>24</sup> "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!" <sup>25</sup> All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. <sup>26</sup> So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing." 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 (NLT2) Perseverance is what keeps our eye on that prize. Perseverance means to keep on running—finish the race of life with a strong faith, despite all the many things that will try to trip you up along the way. And it means to keep

on running according to what God has planned for you, not according to what you might want to plan for yourself.

Jim Ryun came to understand this. Do you remember Jim Ryun? He was the first high school athlete to ever run a mile under four-minutes and the last American to hold the world record in the mile. He became an Olympic champion by winning a silver medal in the 1968 Olympics in the 1500 meter race. Later in his life, Jim moved on to represent the State of Kansas in Congress from 1996 to 2007. But athletics wasn't something that came easily to him. In an interview not too long ago, Jim told about his difficulty in finding his niche in the sports world. He recalled: "*In junior high, I was into the major sports like baseball and basketball. My first experience was to try out for the baseball team. I went from the outfield, to the infield, to the bench, and then I was cut. And that was the church baseball team! Next I was invited out for the junior high basketball team because I was tall for my age. Halfway through the first practice, the coach told me he wanted to meet me in his office afterwards. He asked me to turn in my jersey because he had seen enough and I was done. I went home that night and prayed, 'Dear God, if you have a plan for my life, I'd really appreciate it if You'd show up and tell me what that is. And by the way, I'd also appreciate it if it was something in sports because that's where I'd like to have my future.' I said that prayer every night for lots and lots of nights.*"<sup>2</sup>

That's perseverance—and it's amazing just how much prayer plays a role in our perseverance in faith, and how often God answers those prayers in unexpected ways. As it turns out, Jim's friends encouraged him to go out for cross-country track. He didn't really like it at first, but something helped him to persevere. And Jim began to recognize that his persistence in prayer allowed him to start seeing that God has a plan for each of our lives. He said: "*If I hadn't failed in those earlier sports efforts, I could have become a mediocre baseball or basketball player, but God had bigger plans. . . When I started racing as a junior in high school against the best in the world, I looked down the line at the start of the races. I knew enough to pray, and I did so before every race.*" And the interviewer asked him, "*What was the prayer you'd say before your races?*" Jim responded that he'd pray: "*Dear God, I'm here and I'm scared. Please help me.*"

That's a pretty good prayer—I know that I have prayed it a couple million times it seems. And the more he persevered in praying for God's help Jim began to understand that the perseverance that Peter was talking about does make our faith mature, strong and healthy. And because of that, he noticed that as he persevered in his Christian walk, his prayer life started to change as well. Rather, than praying, "*God help me,*" his prayers started to go beyond asking God to attend to his own well-being.

And so, he started adding something to those prayers. The prayers became more like: “***God help me in a way to let me serve your plans for my life.***” And his interviewer asked him if he had any advice that would encourage those searching for God to reach that point in their faith. Jim thought a moment and then indicated that we all need to learn something. We need to learn that: “***It's not about you. It's about what God wants to do through you. You'll have different stages of life you'll go through, but if you keep in mind that God has a plan, then life will make sense.***” Perseverance in the faith will give you that kind of perspective—it is through perseverance in following God’s will that you will find ultimate joy in life despite whatever your circumstances may be. And for that reason, Paul could honestly reflect upon his faith-enhancing perseverance when, toward the end of his own life, he said: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV) And when you can say that, and know that it is true, you’ll will come to see, as someone once wrote: “***Perseverance is the rope that ties the soul to the doorpost of heaven.***”<sup>3</sup>

So now, let’s turn to that second additive to faith that we’ll explore this morning—the one called ***godliness***. In a nutshell, “***godliness***” is having respect for God in an active manner that affects the way a person lives out their lives—and especially the way that they ***naturally react to things.***<sup>4</sup> Let me give you an example. Do any of you remember the movie, “***Karate Kid***”? There was this young man named Daniel who asked an older Asian gentleman, named Mister Miagi, to teach him karate. And Mr. Miagi agrees to this, but only on one condition: Daniel has to totally, and without any questions, submit himself to Mr. Miagi’s instructions.

So, on the first day, Daniel shows up all ready to learn the secrets of karate from this martial arts master. But, instead of showing him the latest karate moves, Mister Miagi tells him how to paint a fence. And he does this by giving him a paint brush and showing Daniel a very specific up-and-down motion that he must use over and over again until the entire fence is painted—which ended up taking several days to finish. So, with that out of the way, Daniel assumes that they will finally get down to business with the next lesson being truly about karate. But, Mr. Miagi’s next lesson is just as boring as the first—he shows him how to scrub his deck, again using a very specific motion with his arms and hands. More days go by and Daniel is beginning to wonder if and when he’ll ever be taught any real karate. But, hey—Daniel decided to persevere and remembered that he swore not to question Mr. Miagi’s methods. The third lesson was not any better than the other two because this time Miagi wanted him to wash and wax three of the most weather-beaten old cars you could ever find. And you guessed it—again, Daniel’s washing and waxing technique had to adhere to a very strict circular motion that Mr. Miagi prescribed for him to use with his hands.

And that was the straw that broke the camel's back as far as Daniel was concerned. And so he finally turned to Mr. Miagi and complained: "***I thought you were going to teach me karate, but all you have done is have me do your unwanted chores!***" Well, obviously, this was a breach of his promise because he agreed to never question the old man's practices. Mr. Miagi was a bit aggravated by this and snapped back at him: "***I have been teaching you karate! Defend yourself!***" And he starts punching and swinging and kicking at Daniel. And you know what happened? Without even thinking, Daniel ***instinctively*** would sweep his arms and hands in the same motions that used Mr. Miagi had made him use when doing his chores. And as a result, he blocked each and every kick, punch and jab that Mr. Miagi threw at him. And when he finished his attack, the old man just walked away, leaving Daniel to ponder what the master had known all along: ***Instinctive skills come about from repeating over and over—in a ***persevering*** sort of way—the correct, but seemingly mundane actions, over and over again.***

. . . **The same is true of godliness.**<sup>5</sup>

You see, godliness means living your life ***instinctively*** in a Christ-like way. Whatever punches life throws at you, your Christian reflexes react to those blows quite naturally. When verbally attacked with angry words, you no longer respond in kind with your own ugly words. Rather, you instinctively remember something that King Solomon wrote: "**A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.**" Proverbs 15:1 (NLT2) When physically attacked, you learn to turn the other cheek. When a homeless guy in the cold asks for your shirt, you give him your sweater and coat as well. When someone asks you to walk with them in their shoes—you don't just walk one mile, but two.<sup>6</sup> And as your godliness grows, more and more you will do these things without ever giving it a second thought. These godly traits come about by persistent study of God's Word, by practicing over and over all the little things that God calls you to do with your life, so when big things come along you'll instinctively react to them in a Christ-like way.<sup>7</sup>

And what you once deemed to be a "big" or "important" or "priceless" things in your ***old godless life***—well, you'll see them as having little value at all. What makes you happy and content will change radically. And the things that make people content are remarkable. Earlier this month, the National Interagency Fire Center reported 17 major fires have been burning out of control in this country destroying nearly 257,000 acres of land nationwide.<sup>8</sup> Many times the people who are confronted with such fires have as little as 15 to 30 minutes to evacuate their homes as wind-blown flames come rolling in. Recently, a survey was conducted in California to find out what kind of things people deemed to be the most important to scoop up and carry with them when they are rushing to escape a potentially fatal fiery death—i.e., what were the things that people instinctively valued the

most when pressed in an emergency situation. A musician grabbed his violin and rushed out the door. A golfer grabbed his clubs. A bride-to-be gathered up her wedding dress. Many people started throwing practical things into a plastic bag—toothpaste, a razor, shampoo, toilet paper and the like. Some ran to closets in search of old boxes and photo albums, desperate to save their memories. An 82 year-old woman remembered her walker and a hairbrush, but left her husband's thyroid medication behind. A 57-year-old man stood in his doorway and defiantly shouted at his nephew who'd come to rescue him that he wasn't leaving without his old pickup truck—the one that stood nearby rusting with a dead battery under the hood. But, the wildfire didn't care about him or his pickup truck. It swept right on through killing the man and leaving the burned hull of the rusty old truck. Reflecting on this, a clinical psychologist concluded that in situations like these, when the lives of people are reduced to what they can grab in 30 minutes, people make choices instantly and instinctively. The problem is that later on they are always faced with the consequences of those decisions.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, when people base their contentment in life on worldly things and make their choices accordingly, in the end they can never be satisfied. Jesus said: <sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."<sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV) Worldly things can't be taken with you when you leave this world, nor can they offer true and lasting contentment.

And that is where **godliness** comes into play in the life of a Christian. Paul in his letter to Timothy said: <sup>6</sup> **Godliness with contentment is great gain.**<sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.<sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.<sup>9</sup> People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 1 Timothy 6:6-9 (NIV) And Paul is absolutely correct. Godliness helps us to **instinctively choose the things of God** over the things of the world. And because of that, godliness yields a contentment that produces great and lasting wealth. The bottom line is this: Our eternal destination depends upon us **instinctively desiring the right things—the things of God.**<sup>10</sup>

Now you have to admit that this has been a fairly productive morning. In just this one hour, you've passed your midterm exam with flying colors—naming **goodness, knowledge** and **self-control** as those first three additives to faith. And now you have added two more: **Perseverance** and **godliness**. And if you will supplement your faith with those things, your faith will grow stronger—so healthy, in fact, that your faith will withstand the sickness of sin. And that is a very good thing, because one day you are going to leave this old world behind. You'll break these earthly bonds and stand before the

Throne. And when you do, you won't have to worry the least little bit about the sickness of sin. For then, Jesus will turn to you and say: "Your faith has made you well."<sup>11</sup>

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV) <sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; <sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup> and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.risenmagazine.com/jim-ryun/>

<sup>3</sup> Francis J. Roberts, quoted in Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 470.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Strong, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "GODLINESS," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>5</sup> Duke Winser, El Segundo, California. Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 4. Elesha Hodge, comp., *Volumes 1-4*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "GODLINESS". PreachingToday.com.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 6:29-31 (TLB) <sup>29</sup> "If someone slaps you on one cheek, let him slap the other too! If someone demands your coat, give him your shirt besides. <sup>30</sup> Give what you have to anyone who asks you for it; and when things are taken away from you, don't worry about getting them back. <sup>31</sup> Treat others as you want them to treat you.

Matthew 5:39-42 (NIV) And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 16:10 (NASB) He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/nfn.htm> (October 11, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky; source: Trisha Thadani, "Fire evacuees had minutes, or seconds, to save memories. Here's what they grabbed," SF Gate (10-21-17). PreachToday.com.

<sup>10</sup> Jim L. Wilson, Fresh Illustrations: Stewardship, (Austin, Texas: WORDsearch, 2015), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 148.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 17:19 (NIV) Then [Jesus] said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."