

## INTRODUCTION

I heard about a husband who wanted his wife’s 40th birthday to be special, so he asked her, “Honey if you could have anything in the world for your birthday what would it be?” She thought for a moment and said, “I’d like to be six again.”

So on her birthday, he got her up early and served her a bowl of Lucky Charms, and then they headed for Six Flags. He put her on every ride in the park including the Free Fall, Death Slide, and the Monster Roller Coaster. Six hours later, she staggered out of the park with a headache and her stomach in her throat. Then her husband drove her to McDonald’s where he bought her a Happy Meal with extra fries and a large chocolate shake.

Finally, she wobbled back into her house, and her proud husband said, “Well, honey, what was it like being six again?” She looked at him and said, “You idiot, when I said ‘six’ I was talking about my DRESS SIZE!” If there’s a moral to that story it is that even when a husband is listening, he’s still going to get it wrong!

When it comes to your past, you can look back and remember, but you can’t go back and have a second chance. Wouldn’t it be great if you could look into the future and see what would happen, as clearly as you can look back into your past? You don’t need a crystal ball, or a fortune teller to do that, you only need to understand the Bible.

The theme for our study of II Peter is “Living in Fast Forward.” As followers of Jesus Christ, we have the amazing ability to look forward into the future with eyes of faith. We must live in the present, of course, but when we push the fast forward button on the Bible, we can preview the wonderful outcome of our lives. That glimpse into the future allows us to look forward to the future with confidence.

In John 3, Jesus taught that becoming a Christian is like being born again. When you first place your faith in Jesus, you’re like a spiritual infant. But like all babies, then you should begin to grow toward spiritual maturity. The problem is some people never grow out of spiritual infancy; they remain spiritually immature.

Are you growing? Are you a healthy Christian? Here’s a test to help you diagnose your level of spiritual maturity: On a scale of 1-10 (1 being “not at all” and 10 being “completely”) how much do these statements describe your Christian life?

1. I believe there are absolute moral standards for right and wrong.
2. I find it easy to choose to do the right thing.
3. I have a gnawing hunger to read the Bible every day.
4. I have no trouble keeping my temper under control.
5. The people who know me best would say that I’m a patient person.
6. When I start a task, I find it easy to stick with it until I complete it.
7. When faced with a moral choice I always ask myself, “What would Jesus do?”
8. I’m always looking for ways to show kindness to strangers.
9. I’m not holding a grudge toward someone who hurt me.

10. I think more about meeting the needs of others than having my needs met.

Now add up your numbers to see how you did. What score do you think is required to go to heaven? If you said, “70” you’d be wrong. If you said, “90” you’d be wrong again. The score required to go to heaven is: ZERO.

In other words, these aren’t issues that deal with whether you’re going to heaven or not. The Bible says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” (Titus 3:5 NKJV) The only way you’ll get into heaven is by the mercy of God—not by your goodness.

The point of this little test is to see how healthy you are as a Christian. If you scored under 70, you can safely assume you are not a healthy, growing Christian at this time. In this passage, Peter provides seven steps to spiritual health.

II Peter 1:5-8: For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

These seven qualities are sequential. That is, they build upon each other. When the ancient Egyptians built the great pyramids, they had to start with a perfect foundation in order to build up toward the pinnacle. The same is true about spiritual growth. So let’s briefly examine these seven layers of spiritual health.

## **1. FAITH + EFFORT = GOODNESS**

Faith in Jesus Christ is what provides the foundation for spiritual health. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). But it takes more than faith to be a healthy Christian. Peter says we must make every effort to add some qualities to our faith.

In James 2:17 the Bible says, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” Some people assume that when you trust Christ, then all you have to do is sit back and coast. You can’t work to earn your salvation, but the Bible says in Philippians 2 you must work out your own salvation. There is effort involved in growth. But this effort isn’t in our own energy. It is in the energy of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “We proclaim him, admonishing, and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” (Colossians 1:28-29)

The King James translates this word “virtue.” It literally means “moral courage.” The word was used in Greek mythology to describe the power given by the gods to give a person the ability to act heroically.

Goodness is knowing what is right and having the courage to do it. We live in a time when we desperately need moral heroes in America. We’ve seen our culture move from a position where we observed and followed the Ten Commandments through a time when the Supreme Court ruled in 1980 they must be removed from public school classrooms. And this month they accepted a case where someone has sued to have the Ten Commandments removed from the Texas State Capitol. In this time of moral relativity, we need moral heroes who stand up and say there is right and there is wrong, according to the Creator of the Universe. These moral heroes are the ones who will choose to do what is right, even if they are the only ones. Have you added that conviction to your faith? It’s foundational for spiritual health.

## 2. KNOWLEDGE

Upon the foundation of faith and goodness, you should add knowledge. Knowledge must be added to goodness, because it doesn’t matter how much you know if there is no goodness in your life.

The religious researcher, George Barna, has written a great deal about how there is an appalling lack of Biblical knowledge by people who claim to be born-again Christians. The majority of those questioned didn’t know who came first, Moses or Abraham. (Abraham did) 70 percent of those questioned said the statement, “God helps those who help themselves” was in the Bible. And only 9 percent could correctly identify what the “Great Commission” is.

God says, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” (Hosea 4:6) Whenever you purchase a new product, you should read the owner’s manual. The Bible is the Creator’s owner’s manual for how to live. That’s why we say that the letters in “BIBLE” could stand for ‘Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.’”

Biblical knowledge is not just head knowledge. A good definition for knowledge is: absorbing truth into your heart. In the Bible the word “to know” means “to experience.” That’s why it says in Genesis 4:1 (NKJV) “Adam KNEW his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son, Cain.” This concept of knowledge goes beyond embracing Biblical truth, it means to have an intimate relationship with the truth. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” (John 8:32)

## 3. SELF-CONTROL

Upon goodness and knowledge, you must add self-control. Cindy and I have a dog named Betsy. She’s a Schnauzer and she is hyper-active. We’ve taught her some tricks that she loves to perform. Usually the last trick in the routine is when we take a Milk Bone treat and say, “Stay” and then we walk across the room and wait. She wants that milk bone, but she has learned to stay perfectly still until we say, “Come on.” Then she runs like a flash to get the treat. That time in which she “stays” is what self-control is all about.

The word for self-control comes from two words meaning to “hold oneself still.” (*egkrateian*). It was a word used to describe a runner crouched at the start of a race. A runner has to hold himself

perfectly still in order not to “jump the gun.” That ability to stay still and motionless is the control you need when you face temptation.

Are you able to control your temper? How about your tongue? Are there any addictions or habits in your life that you can’t seem to control? The Bible says, “Better a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city...Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28)

You can define self control (“holding still”) is the ability to say “no” to wrong choices. We all face temptation, and it takes willpower to say “no” when you want to lose your temper, or to engage in that bad habit. As Christians, our sins have been forgiven, but we still have to suffer the painful consequences to sin.

Years ago I memorized a statement about sin I’ve never forgotten. It said: Sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go; it will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay and it will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay. So once you have a foundational to goodness, and you have a knowledge of the miserable consequences of sin, it will empower you to have the self-control to say, No!”

#### **4. PERSEVERANCE**

This word perseverance is sometimes translated patience. But patience carries the idea of standing around passively, like when you’re waiting in line. This word means to actively stay on course. It was a word employed for sailors that “stay under” the North Star when a ship was sailing at night. The temptation is that when the waves are fierce and the wind is high to alter our direction, but perseverance keeps us on course.

There is no shortcut to develop perseverance. The only thing that produces it is when we endure trials and tribulations. The Bible says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3)

In the 1950s there were television commercials demonstrating the durability of Timex watches. In one, John Cameron Swayze attached a Timex watch to a boat propeller, and after running the boat for several hours, he stopped the boat, pulled out the watch and said, “Timex, it takes a licking and keeps on ticking.” It was effective marketing because by the end of the 1950s two out of three watches sold in America were Timexes.

The definition of perseverance is the determination to keep on without quitting. There are plenty of painful experiences in life that give us a licking, but perseverance is that ability to keep on being faithful to God even when we feel like we’ve been strapped to a boat propeller and driven around the bay for hours!

I heard a blonde joke about a woman in Florida who really wanted to buy a pair of alligator shoes. The first pair she tried on cost \$500. She tried to haggle with the salesman, but he refused. In frustration, she said, “Well, since you won’t come down on your price, I may just go out and

catch my own alligator so I can get a pair of shoes at a reasonable price." The salesman laughed and said, "Go ahead, there's a lake down the road just full of alligators." She stomped out with determination and headed for the lake. A couple of hours later, the salesman was driving home and was shocked to see the blonde standing waist deep in the lake with a shotgun in her hands. He stopped to look just as a 9-foot gator swam by. Blam! She shot the gator and dragged it by the tail to the bank. The salesman was amazed to see three other dead gators already there. As she pulled the alligator out, the blonde turned it over and said, "Oh for crying out loud, this one isn't wearing shoes either!"

She might not have had much knowledge, but she had plenty of perseverance! You may be going through a difficult trial at this moment. You may feel like you are neck deep in a swamp full of emotional alligators. Perseverance is refusing to quit, even when the circumstances look bad!

## 5. GODLINESS

The next step in building a pyramid of spiritual health is godliness. You may think that godliness is unattainable because you can never be God. That's true. But the word (*eusebeian*) meant to "act like royalty." When an ambassador of the emperor officially represented the Roman Empire, he behaved in a way that would reflect well on his boss.

The Bible says we are "ambassadors for Christ." (II Corinthians 5:20) In other words, we represent the King of Kings, so our behavior should reflect that. Another word for godliness would be "Christlike." The reason God saved you is so you could become more and more like Jesus. The Bible says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." (Romans 8:29)

Salvation is a process in which God is continually shaping your personality to become more and more like His Son. Here's a good definition to under this process: Godliness is reflecting the personality of Jesus. When you examine these qualities you'll see that they all describe His personality. Jesus is goodness, knowledge, self-control...and all the rest.

A group of first graders were given an assignment in their Sunday School class to draw a picture of what they thought God looked like. One child drew a beautiful rainbow, and another drew a picture of a shining light. One little guy drew a picture that looked a lot like Superman. But one little girl explained to her teacher, "I don't know what God looks like, so I just drew a picture of my daddy—he reminds me of God." If someone examined your life, would they say you reminded them of God? That's what Godliness is about.

## 6. KINDNESS

The next step to spiritual health is "brotherly kindness." It's the word *philadelphos* - just like the city. It means we should treat others as if they were a part of our family. The Bible says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Here's a definition for kindness: Kindness is treating someone better than they deserve. That's

exactly the way God treated me. I didn't deserve His mercy and forgiveness, but His loving kindness was extended to me through His grace.

Kindness to strangers is the best proof for the gospel. Kindness has converted more people to Christ than all the sermons, debates, and books combined. As followers of Jesus, we don't perform random acts of kindness; we perform *intentional* acts of kindness.

I recently read about a man who was in a restaurant with his family. As was their custom, they prayed before their meal. A stranger across the restaurant who saw them praying paid for their meal. When the dad went to thank the man, he told him to do the same thing the next time he saw someone praying in a restaurant. So he has made it a regular practice.

After I read that, I thought I'd try it, too. I was having lunch last week at Mercados with a friend, as I saw two men across the room who bowed their heads and prayed over their meal. I couldn't see who they were from the angle I was sitting, but I asked our server to bring me their bill. Afterwards, they came over to thank me, and I recognized them as two pastors I know—they weren't really strangers, but they were blessed! Why don't you try that? Who knows, it could start a whole new culture of kindness among Christians!

## 7. LOVE

The pinnacle of the pyramid of spiritual growth is Love. Love is the first of the fruit of the Spirit because it really motivates all the other fruit. Here, Peter lists it as the culmination of Spiritual Health. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you: ‘Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciple if you love one another.’” (John 13:34) The mark of a Christian is not a cross around the neck, or a fish on your car. It's not a big black Bible or a bumper sticker that says, “Honk if you love Jesus.” The mark of a Christian is love for one another.

The Apostle Paul wrote that Love was at the pinnacle of all spiritual graces: “Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...the greatest of these is love.” (I Corinthians 13:7,13)

In the Bible, the opposite of love is not “hate” it is “selfishness.” The word *agape* means to think of the other person instead of thinking of yourself. When we are commanded to love God, we are to think of what God desires rather than what we desire. When we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are to think about what is best for them, not what is best for us. A good definition of love is: Love is seeking to please rather than to be pleased.

Love means you cannot carry a grudge against another Believer. Sometimes Christians aren't very loving to each other. The Christian army has been described as the only army that shoots its wounded. There's a distinct possibility that another Believer has hurt or offended you. The Bible says we must not carry a grudge against them. Jesus said, “If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.” (Matthew 5:23 *The Message*). You cannot say

you love God if you don't love another brother or sister in Christ.

In the Bible, the word agape basically means "the kind of love that gives away." Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

## CONCLUSION

Just as a musical octave has seven notes, and then repeats itself, so spiritual health begins with faith and finds its climax in love. How much effort are you putting into adding to your faith?

I recently read an article by John Piper in which he related the story of Glenda and Robert Lennon. They anchored their boat four miles off the Florida coast to do some fishing. Glenda decided to take a swim to cool off. When she jumped in, she was alarmed to see there was a powerful current moving her away from their boat. When Robert heard her cries, he jumped into the water without thinking and both of them were being tugged away by the tide. Robert was a stronger swimmer, but Glenda wasn't. They made a plan. Glenda didn't have the strength to fight the current, so she would float. Meanwhile Robert would swim against the tide to keep the boat in view until the tide changed, and then he would swim to the boat and come and retrieve her.

He fought against the current for six hours, and just as the boat was about to disappear on the horizon, the tide turned and he was able to swim toward it. He finally climbed back on the boat totally exhausted. But as the sun set, he searched in vain to find Glenda. After hours of futile searching, he headed for shore before he ran out of fuel.

The next day the Coast Guard organized search party, and a search plane found Glenda floating fifteen miles from where their boat had been anchored. She was exhausted but alive and was reunited with Robert a few hours later. What an amazing story.

The point is this: Robert swam against the tide, and eventually made it back to the boat. Glenda floated and drifted for miles. The same is true for Christians. You must diligently swim against the current of our godless culture or you will drift away from God's truth. The tide of human emotions and human frailty will carry you away from goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love. As Peter says, you must make every effort to add these seven qualities to your faith. Like John you have to diligently swim against the current to maintain spiritual health.

In other words, if you do nothing, you won't grow. You'll just drift until you become as Peter writes in verse 8, "ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of the Lord." So I challenge you to take your faith and add to it these seven steps to spiritual health. God will be glorified and you'll be blessed!

## OUTLINE

1. Faith + Effort = Goodness
2. Knowledge
3. Self-control
4. Perseverance
5. Godliness
6. Kindness
7. Love

## THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH

How much do the following statements describe my life?

On a scale of 1-10 (1= Not at all; 5=Somewhat; 10=Completely)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I believe there are absolute moral standards for right and wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I find it easy to choose to do the right thing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I have a gnawing hunger to read the Bible every day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I have no trouble keeping my temper under control.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The people who know me best would say that I’m a patient person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When I start a task, I find it easy to stick with it until I complete it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. When faced with a moral choice I always ask myself, “What would Jesus do?”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I’m always looking for ways to show kindness to strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I’m not holding a grudge toward someone who hurt me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I think more about meeting the needs of others than having my needs met.



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes