

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 30 August 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Steps to Fruitfulness (Part 2)

2 Peter 1:5-6

There is a story that has been told to me many times by a family that I know. The story has been told and retold so many times, that it has become a sort of family legend! The story goes like this. It was late in the afternoon, and dinner time was approaching. The mom had roasted a chicken (which was more than big enough to feed their family of four); and she had placed it out on the kitchen counter. However, dinner was suspended a little longer than normal that evening, because Dad and Mom were busy helping their daughter to gather transcripts for college. Now, the other member of this family was a teenaged young man; and at the time, he was going through a major growing spurt. He kept saying, “Mom, I’m hungry! Can’t we eat?”; and Mom kept saying, “No, just wait a little longer. We’re almost done.” This continued for a while; and after many more reminders from her son that he was hungry, the mom finally said, “O.K., you may eat a *little bit* of the chicken.” Well, things in the kitchen were quiet for a little while, as Mom and Dad continued to help their daughter with her transcripts. Finally, they were finished; and all three of them went to the kitchen to sit down to a delicious supper. However, they were in for a shock. When they walked into the kitchen, the first thing that caught their eye was the chicken. The meat was gone, and only the bones were left! Their son hadn’t eaten just a “little” chicken: he had eaten the whole bird! Needless to say, Mom was *not* happy! Their son was addressed by his first, middle, *and* last name, and was given a stern rebuke!

Now, what is the moral of this story? The moral is that the son *knew* his mother’s will about the chicken. He also knew that supper was coming soon. However, his stomach told him that he couldn’t wait. And so, he indulged (or rather, *overindulged*) his appetite. He had knowledge; but it was an insufficient knowledge, because it didn’t include the right heart response. This inadequate knowledge then led him to become “intemperate,” as he overindulged on the chicken.

Knowledge and temperance are spiritual qualities that all believers should be adding to their Christian lives. First and foremost, we should be growing in **faith**; and then to faith, we should be adding **virtue**. Then, we should be adding to virtue **knowledge**, and to knowledge **temperance**. **Knowledge** and **temperance** are the spiritual qualities that we will be examining this morning. The title of this message is *Steps to Fruitfulness (Part 2)*.

Read 2 Peter 1:5-6.

I. The third step to fruitfulness: knowledge (v. 5)

As you continue to grow in faith, and as you continue to add virtue to your faith, you should also be adding the spiritual quality of **knowledge**.

Now, please don’t misunderstand: “knowledge” is not some totally new quality that you don’t begin to acquire until after you’ve put on “faith” and “virtue.” Knowledge has been there from the very beginning of your Christian life! Before you can even begin to exercise **faith**,

you must *know* some vital truths, so that you can place your faith in them. **First, you must have the knowledge of who God is.** You must know that He is the all-powerful, all-knowing God, and the Creator of all things; that He is everywhere present, yet is above and separate from His creation; that He is a personal God, and not an impersonal “force”; that He is a perfectly loving and merciful God; but that He is also a perfectly holy and just God. **You must know, and believe, in who Jesus is.** You must know that He is the Son of God, and that He is one with His Father and the Holy Spirit. In order to be saved, you *must* know and believe this truth of the Trinity! You must know that the Son of God came down to this earth; that He was miraculously conceived in a virgin’s womb, and took on human flesh; and that He is fully God, and fully Man. **You must know what sin is.** You must know that sin is not a “mistake,” but a wilful transgression of God’s law. You must know, and confess, that *you* are a sinner, worthy of eternal separation from God, in hell. **You must also know how to be saved from your sin.** You must know, and believe, that Jesus died on the cross to take your judgment for sin, and rose again bodily from the grave, so that in exchange, you might receive His gift of imputed righteousness, and (one day) a resurrected, sinless body, just like Christ’s. You must know, and believe, that by repenting of your sin and placing your complete trust in what Christ did for us on the cross, you are saved *and kept eternally* by the power of God. You must *know* all these things, and *believe* them with your whole heart, in order to be saved.

After you are saved, there are some things you must know in order to start living the Christian life. For instance, there are many things that you must know in order to exercise **virtue** (the quality of “standing for what is right”). How can you stand for what is right if you don’t know what the right thing is? You must have the *knowledge* of what is right in order to believe in it, and stand for it; and the only way to know what is right is to **read God’s Word.**

As you can see, knowledge is necessary from the very start of the Christian life. However, a Christian *must not remain stagnant* in His knowledge of God’s Word!

Read Hebrews 5:11- 6:2.

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is rebuking his readers, because many of them were still having to be taught **“the first principles of the oracles of God”** (in other words, the “ABC’s” of Christian doctrine). He told them that for the length of time they had been saved, they should have been able to *teach others* by now. He said that it was time to move from spiritual milk to spiritual meat. And what did Paul consider spiritual “milk”? According to Paul, the doctrines of salvation, baptism, and the resurrection are spiritual “milk.” According to Paul, the teaching of the **“laying on of hands”** (the things that are involved in approving and delegating church officers) is spiritual milk. According to Paul, **“eternal judgment”** (the Bible’s teaching about the eternal punishment of the lost) is also spiritual milk. Every believer should know these teachings well. We need to master these doctrines, and then launch out “into the deep” of God’s Word. In order to keep growing spiritually, you *must* grow more and more in your knowledge of Scripture. Let’s see what David had to say about God’s Word.

Read Psalm 119:105.

When we think of the word “lamp,” we tend to picture a modern torch--something that has at least a 100W output, and that can project at least 20 or 50 feet ahead of us. Thus, when we read this verse, we usually don’t stop to think of what a “lamp” meant to the people of David’s

day. A Hebrew "lamp" was a single dish with a candle in it. At night time, this kind of lamp was bright enough to illumine only the next couple steps in a person's path. A person had to take one careful step at a time, and trust that his candle would illuminate his next step.

So it often is in our lives. God's Word is a "lamp." Most of the time, God's Word gives you the illumination that you need for the *next step* on your life's pathway. It instructs you in how you should live day by day; but it doesn't reveal your personal future. If the Lord were to let you know what is going to happen in your life a few years, a few months, or even a few days down the road, you would probably be so discouraged or fearful about the trials that are coming your way, that you wouldn't even want to take the next step of faith and obedience. If you don't trust and obey God's Word *day by day*, you will never experience the spiritual blessings and victories that God has in store for you. **Proverbs 3:5-6** says, "***Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.***"

The book of Proverbs has much to say about "knowledge." However, God makes it clear, from the beginning of the book of **Proverbs**, that "***the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge***" (**Proverbs 1:7**). You cannot have the knowledge that you need to live your life without fearing the Lord. You may have a lot of *head* knowledge of the teachings and doctrine of Scripture; but if you aren't afraid to disobey God's precepts, then you don't really possess knowledge. If you truly have godly knowledge, then you will live your life *according* to that knowledge. If you fear the LORD, then you will fear to trust in your own wisdom. Solomon said, "***Lean not unto thine own understanding.***" Let's go to the very beginning of **Proverbs**, and see what the Lord says about knowledge.

Read Proverbs 1:1-4.

Please look closely at **verse 4**. What is that word that follows right after "***knowledge***"? It is the word "***discretion***." God links discretion with knowledge. If you truly have knowledge, then you will have discretion. And what *is* discretion? Well, as we saw a few weeks ago, the Hebrew word for "***discretion***" (*m'zimmah*) means "a plan." It can mean either an evil plan, or a good plan. Now, obviously, in **Proverbs 1:4**, the word *m'zimmah* refers to a *good* plan. Solomon is talking about having a *godly* plan—one that is based upon godly *knowledge*.

Discretion is godly knowledge that is put to practice.

Now, there was a man in the Bible who was full of plans. You might call him "the man with a plan." However, many of his plans were not godly. Oftentimes, his plans were not acts of godly discretion at all; instead, they were "mischievous inventions." Now, there is no doubt that this man was diligent, hard-working, talented, and intelligent. He had all kinds of plans. In fact, his parents gave him a name that literally means "heel-grabber," or "schemer"; and that is the kind of person he turned out to be. He always had a self-made "plan" to get ahead. Such was the way he lived the better part of his life—until one day when the Lord began to transform him into a different man. The person to whom I am referring is *Jacob*.

Now, in a few moments, we will take a close look at the "turning-point" event in Jacob's life, when God began to change him into a different man. However, before we do, let us first "rewind the tape" of Jacob's life, and take a survey of his character. First, let's talk about his relationship with the Lord. *Did* Jacob have a relationship with God? Yes. It is evident that at

some point in his early life, Jacob personally placed his faith in Jehovah. He did have a genuine desire to serve God. As a believer, he did love God, and the things of God; and he did exercise faith--*to an extent*. However, far too often, he acted without asking God what to do. Too often, he relied on his own plans; and it got him into big trouble. His “big troubles” really began when he failed to wait on God to work out the matter of the birth right and the blessing.

You see, God had revealed to Jacob’s mother Rebekah, before he was born, that he, and not his older brother Esau, was to receive the birth right and the blessing one day. However, circumstances didn’t seem to be leading in that direction. His father Isaac was dead-set on giving the birth right and the blessing to his older brother Esau, because he favoured him. However, instead of letting God work out this situation in His own time and way, Jacob craftily manipulated Esau into forfeiting his birth right to him in exchange for a bowl of pottage. (This now made Jacob the future spiritual leader of the family.) Then, a while later, Jacob told a big, fat lie in order to get the blessing, as well. (The “blessing” was the double portion of his father’s inheritance.) Jacob put on his brother’s rough hunting clothes, and imitated his brother’s voice; and he told his old, blind father that he was Esau, so that he would unwittingly give the blessing to him. Jacob *did* get the blessing, and his father could not take it back; but this terrible lie caused a horrific division in their family. Esau was so angry at Jacob, that he was determined to kill him; and Jacob had to run for his life.

Jacob had plans; and with his plans, he *did* get what he wanted. However, God was not pleased with his plans. Jacob had to learn to rely on *God’s* knowledge and wisdom, and not on his own. So, God began to deal with Jacob. (You might say that He put him through “spiritual boot camp”!) First, He sent him away to the land of Syria, to live with someone even craftier than himself. That person was his Uncle Laban. For the next twenty years, as Jacob hid from Esau, his Uncle Laban cheated Jacob far worse than Jacob had cheated his brother and his father. First, he cheated him by giving him his daughter Leah to wife, instead of Rachel, as they had agreed; and he got seven more years of service out of Jacob in order to pay the dowry to marry Rachel, too. Then, as the years rolled on, Laban changed Jacob’s wages ten times, in order to get the most out of him. Jacob had finally “met his match.”

However, even this ill treatment from his Uncle Laban wasn’t enough to break Jacob. Yes, Jacob’s faith was growing, in certain ways; but Jacob still had a strong sense of self-sufficiency in him. He still had that old tendency to fall back on his own wisdom and plans. So, God began to move things in another direction. First, God allowed the bad relationship between Laban and Jacob to become so intolerable, that Jacob had to leave his uncle hastily, and go back to the land of Canaan. However, there was a huge problem. As Jacob was approaching Canaan, he received news that his brother Esau had been informed of his approach, and that he was coming straight toward him with 400 armed men! Needless to say, Esau *was* not happy! He still remembered how Jacob had cheated him twenty years earlier; and he was bent on revenge. Let’s go now to the book of **Genesis**, and see what Jacob did.

Read Genesis 32:3-12.

Jacob was now extremely frightened—more so than he had ever been in his life. His little scheme to get the blessing twenty years earlier hadn’t worked out so well. He had acted without godly knowledge and discretion; and now it was time to face his hate-filled brother the next morning. What was Jacob going to do?

Well, once again, Jacob had a plan. He divided his camp into two parts, so that if Esau attacked one camp, at least the other camp could escape. Then, *after* he had laid out all these schemes, he finally did what he *should* have done first: he prayed! (**Read verses 7-9 again.**) Was God impressed with Jacob's "two camps" idea? No, He wasn't. It wasn't God's will for only a small part of Jacob's family to survive. God had a far better plan; and now that Jacob had enough faith to *ask* God what he should do, God began to set *His* plan in motion.

Jacob was now at the "turning point" of his life. God had lined up another "match" for Jacob; but this time, Jacob's "match" was none other than Christ, the second Member of the Trinity! God arranged for Jacob to wrestle (literally and physically) with God Himself, in human form!

Read Genesis 32:22-32.

Who was this mysterious "man" with whom Jacob wrestled all night? Obviously, he was not an ordinary man, because he seems to have appeared from out of nowhere. It was none other than Christ the Son of God, the second Person of the Godhead! How do I know? Because after this encounter Jacob said, "***I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved!***"

Now, why did the LORD appear in a bodily form, and allow Jacob to wrestle with him? It's simple. God was bringing Jacob to the point of surrender! Have you ever seen a children's wrestling match, in which the child who knows he's beaten has to yell "uncle," so that his opponent will let him go? "Uncle" means, "I give up! I surrender!" Well, that's what was happening here. In this wrestling match (which lasted all night long), God was bringing Jacob to the point of surrender. Jacob *did* finally surrender; but the thing it took for him to surrender was for God to touch Jacob's hip, and to put it permanently out of joint. Now, Jacob didn't actually say the words "I surrender"; but we know that he *did* inwardly surrender because of what he requested of the Lord. Jacob said, "***I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.***"

Now, please don't misunderstand. Jacob was *not* being presumptuous. He was making a sincere, urgent plea! Jacob had a lot of wit; but he was finally at his wit's end. He was finally admitting that he needed *God's blessing* in his life. He was finally admitting that his own plans were insufficient. He was now pleading for *God's blessing* in his life.

This was the turning point in Jacob's life. In fact, this turning point was so significant, that God showed his favour upon Jacob by giving him a new name—the name Israel ("prince with God"). Now, when Jacob looked outside his tent the next morning, nothing about his situation *appeared* to be any different; but something *had* changed in Jacob's heart. As for Jacob's big dilemma, God had been silently working on that, as well. As it turns out, the Lord dealt with this situation in a totally unexpected way. God actually changed *Esau's heart*.

Read Genesis 33:1-11.

There is no other way to explain Esau's sudden change in attitude than that God supernaturally turned his heart. Now, make no mistake about it: the Scriptures make it clear that Esau never stopped hating Jacob. Esau was a profane man, who never personally knew the God of his father Isaac; and to his dying day, he was eaten up with bitterness toward his brother. Yet, on

this particular occasion, Esau's wrath was turned away. Why? God simply turned his heart at that point in time, so that he would not try to kill his brother!

Now, what was *Jacob's* part in all this? His part was simply to "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." Instead of running away, Jacob boldly went right up to his brother, with his family close behind him: and as he did so, he exercised that old-fashioned trait of *humility*. The Bible says, "***Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up***"; and that is exactly what Jacob did. Jacob bowed to his brother seven times, and thereby showed the respect that a younger brother in those days would have shown to the *ruler of the family*. (This was probably his way of acknowledging that he had illegitimately taken that position from Esau.) Also, he offered his brother valuable gifts. And what was the result? Clearly, Esau's heart was turned (at least, for the moment)! No longer was he out to kill Jacob. Jacob needed knowledge and discretion, and God gave it to him. From this point onward, Jacob began to rely on God's knowledge in a way he had never done before.

By the way, did you notice what the LORD told Jacob at the end of their wrestling match? He said, "***As a prince hast thou power with God and men, and hast prevailed.***" Now, in what sense did *Jacob* "prevail" in this match? If *Jacob* "prevailed," then who really won this wrestling match—the Lord, or Jacob? Clearly, the *Lord* won! However, by surrendering himself to the Lord, Jacob won, too. In order to "win," he had to surrender!

You see, the Lord is going to win, whether you choose to surrender to Him or not. He always wins! However, when you choose to surrender your heart to Him, and let Him have His way, you win, too. It's a "win-win" situation! Jesus said, "***If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it***" (Matthew 16:24-25).

II. The fourth step to fruitfulness: temperance (v. 6)

(Read verse 6 again.) Here in verse 6, we find the next step to spiritual fruitfulness: **temperance**. What is temperance? Temperance is being moderate in your use of things of this life. Temperance is keeping things like food, drink, sleep, relaxation, recreation, hobbies, clothing, houses, money, physical fitness, health, or any other things of this life, in their right places, and not giving them too much importance. To have "***temperance***" is to love God, instead of loving things of this world. To have temperance is to have self-control.

Now, what is the link between knowledge and temperance? As you know, each of these spiritual qualities is built upon the previous quality. Knowledge comes before temperance: how, then, does knowledge lead to temperance? Well, let's look at a couple Scriptures.

Read Ephesians 1:7-9.

In these verses, Paul lists several "riches of God's grace." First, he says that God has abounded toward us with all "***wisdom and prudence.***" Then, he goes on to say that God has made known to us the "***mystery of his will.***" A mere head knowledge of Scriptural facts and doctrines isn't enough. God also wants us to know His *will* for our lives. As you grow in knowledge of God's Word, you are able to know God's *will* for you; and as you surrender to His *will*, your whole life becomes a living *sacrifice*.

Read Romans 12:1-2.

This is how godly knowledge and temperance are linked. As you grow in the knowledge of God's Word, you come to know what is ***“that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”***; and as you understand God's will, and *surrender* to His will, your outlook on life begins to change radically. You begin to see things from God's perspective. You begin to regard the things of this world as mere “tools”, which you can use to serve the Lord. In fact, things of this world begin to look a bit unreal—like a dream, which has no substance.

Now, maybe you're thinking, “Pastor, this is a nice thought: but my material needs are very real.” Yes, material needs are real; but they are also temporal. Material things have lasting value *only* when we use them as tools to accomplish God's will. For example, God may want you to give a material possession, which you *thought* you needed for yourself, to someone else who is in need. Should that person be unsaved, your act of kindness might prompt him to consider Christ--and, in time, to receive Christ as Saviour. By exercising *temperance*—by not regarding that earthly thing as too important to give up—you gain an *eternal* reward.

Read Luke 16:1-9.

Temperance is a vital Christian character trait; and it is linked to many other godly qualities. Take contentment, for example. You can't separate temperance from contentment. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”*** Temperance is also inseparable from “self-control.” In order to be temperate, you must have *inward* control of your desires--and your emotions. If you have temperance, you won't get frustrated and angry when you aren't getting what you want. Unfortunately, many Christians are like children in grown-up bodies. They want what they want, and they want it *now*; and if they don't get it, they have a “grown-up” temper tantrum. Christians who haven't learned the godly quality of temperance will have no control over their spirit; and they will be very vulnerable to the enemy's attacks. **Proverbs 25:28** says, ***“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”***

Temperance also has an eye to the future, and to things that we cannot see now. That is why temperance is also linked to *patience*. You may not have much in this world *now*; but if you have temperance, then you will also have *patience* as you strive toward the heavenly prize. Like the Apostle Paul, you will regard this life as a “race”; and as you press forward in that race, you will be ***“temperate in all things.”*** You won't be “pigging out” on things of this world. You won't be “eating the whole chicken.” Instead, you will trust God to give you the little that you need *now*, to run the race--so that later, you may receive a heavenly crown.

Of course, our ultimate model of temperance is the Lord Jesus Christ. He ran the race perfectly. As Jesus did His Father's will here on earth, He had nowhere to lay His head. He was willing to be materially poor, so that we might be made spiritually *rich*. He was temperate in all things. The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian believers, ***“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”*** (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Conclusion: Christian, are you growing in the knowledge of God's Word? Are you *submitting* to God's knowledge--or are you leaning on your own understanding? How about temperance? Are you being moderate in the things of this life? Do you look at the things of this life as only temporary? Are you setting your eyes on that which is eternal?

I would also ask: "**Are you saved?**" You cannot have true, godly virtue, or knowledge, or temperance, until you first place your **faith** in the Son of God! Won't you repent and trust in Him today?