

The Starting Point: Faith



Progress to Perfection (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue to study our challenging but also inspiring theme for this week, "Progress to Perfection." Our starting point for this theme was the command given by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 5:48.

> "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We saw that that's a very clear, practical command. It cannot be misunderstood. Jesus wants us to be perfect and the standard of perfection is God the Father. And I used the example of the word "round." A thing is either round or it's not round. All circles are round but circles differ in size. God the Father is like the great circle that embraces the whole universe. You and I can be just tiny little circles but perfectly round, perfect, each in your own appointed place.

Yesterday we looked at the example of the apostle Paul as he himself states the purpose and motivation of his life in Philippians 3:12–14.

> "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

So, there's Paul's life purpose and motivation stated. He's pressing on to become perfect, to lay hold of that for which he was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. You see, the initiative was with Jesus but the response has to be with us. And I pointed out that the real essence of Paul's ability to achieve this was his whole hearted commitment to God.

Today we're going to turn to the words of another of the outstanding characters of the New Testament, the apostle Peter. In his own characteristic language Peter sets our for us

very clearly the goal of our Christian life but he also states seven successive steps that we must take to attain this goal. I am going to read to you from 2 Peter 1:4–7. Peter is speaking about all that God has provided for us through our relationship to him in Jesus Christ. And he says:

> "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very 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; and to brotherly kindness, love."

Let's look at the goal that Peter states there. It has two aspects. The positive and the negative. The positive aspect of the goal is to participate in God's nature, to become partaker of God's own divine nature. Isn't that an astonishing goal? And yet, it's stated there so clearly and it's exactly in line with the goal that Jesus stated. "Be perfect as your Father is perfect."

Then the negative aspect of the goal which follows necessarily and logically is this, to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. So, the more we become partakers of the very nature of God the further we escape from the corruption that is in this world through evil desires. They're necessary consequences, the one or the other. They're like the two opposite sides of a coin. The positive, become partaker of God's nature; the negative, escape the world's corruption.

But Peter also states seven successive steps that we must take to achieve this goal. And I want to read them to you again, emphasizing them. He says, "For this reason make every effort…" In other words, it's going to require real application on our part. "Add to your faith goodness…" We start with faith, the first step is goodness. "To goodness, knowledge; to knowledge, self control; to self control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; to brotherly kindness, love." So, there are the successive, practical steps toward the achievement of our goal of perfection. The starting point is faith. The seven successive steps that follow from faith are one, goodness. Two, knowledge. Three, self control. Four, perseverance. Five, godliness. Six, brotherly kindness. And seven, love.

Now it's my intention this week and also continuing on to next week to analyze in a very practical way for you what is involved in taking each of those seven steps. I'm going to try to break it down in such a way that this seemingly unattainable goal of perfection becomes something real which we can attain if we take the steps that God has prescribed. Let's just look at those steps once more. We start with faith, we add to it goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. The ultimate, you see, is love but it takes certain steps to get there.

Love isn't something that just happens, it's not a wishy-washy emotion. It's not primarily emotional. It's primarily in the will and it takes self discipline to achieve that kind of love.

In the remainder of my talk today I'm going to deal specifically with the starting point for this progress to perfection. The starting point is faith. It's very important to see that. And there is no alternative. There is no other point from which you can start and get in line with the process that will take you on to God's goal for you. You have to begin with faith.

This is stated emphatically in many passages of the New Testament. For instance, in Hebrews 11:6.

> "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

That's very clear, isn't it? "Without faith it is impossible to please God." No matter what else that we may have that we consider good, without faith it isn't pleasing to God. And if we come to God we must believe. There's no alternative for believing. We must believe two things. First, that God exists but that's not half in itself. Secondly, that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. In other words, we must believe that if we meet God's conditions and faithfully obey what he showed us in his word then he will bring us to the place that he's promised. It's faith in God's faithfulness and wisdom. Without that we can't even begin this process to perfection.

Then in Galatians 5:6 Paul says this:

> "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

I understand Paul to say there, in essence, in our Christian life no outward ceremony or ordinance is of ultimate value. It's the thing that's in us that matters. And the great basic requirement in us is faith. Not just nominal or theoretical or doctrinal faith, but faith that's active and practical. Faith that expresses itself through love. It's important to see that this

kind of faith is not primarily doctrinal or intellectual but rather it's a personal relationship to God. It's illustrated by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12.

> "That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and an convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."

Paul was near the end of his life, he was in a very difficult situation in prison, alone, awaiting execution. Some of his best friends had forsaken him and yet he still had firm, unshakable faith. I think one of the keys is that his faith was not in a doctrine but in a person, in God. He said, "I know whom I have believed…" Lots of people would say, "I know what I have believed." But that won't see you through. A WHAT will not help you in that evil day that's coming. "I know whom I have believed…" Our faith must be directly and personally in God, his faithfulness, his ability, his wisdom.

Secondly, I think the key to that relationship with God is stated there where Paul says, "I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." Another version says, "…what I have committed…" The key to that kind of relationship to God is commitment to God. Total, unreserved, personal commitment to God. To put your life totally in God's hands and say, "God, I'm yours, do with me what you will." And, I believe, out of that kind of commitment there comes that kind of faith which Paul demonstrates there. So can you say that? I know whom I have believed. That's where it all begins.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing further with you on this weeks challenging theme, Progress to Perfection.

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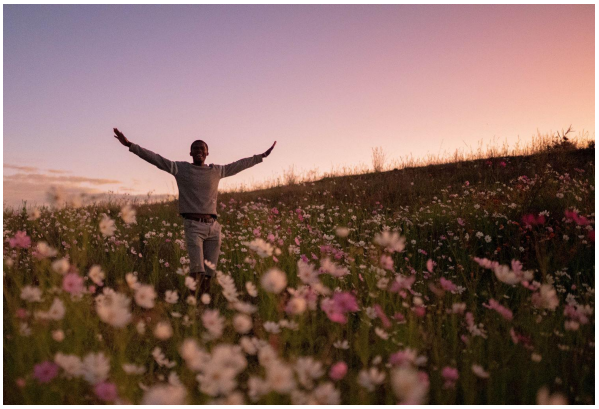

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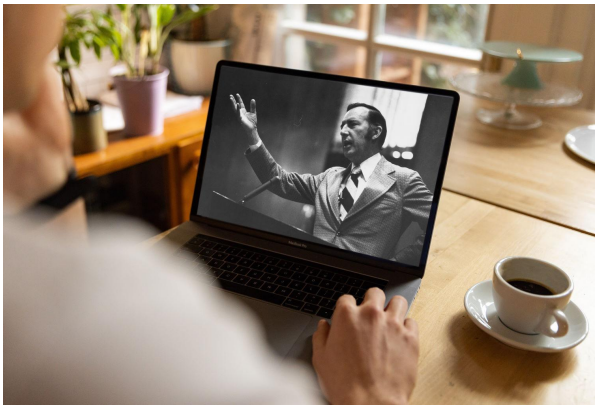

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