

The First Step: Goodness (Excellence)



Progress to Perfection (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be back with you again as I continue to share with you in a positive and systematic way our theme for this week, "Progress To Perfection." In previous talks this week we looked first at the command of Jesus an then at the example of Paul.

And then we looked at the example of the apostle Paul and we saw that Paul was a man who took that standard and that objective very seriously. He stated the object and the motivation and the purpose of his life, it was to be perfect, to achieve perfection. He was realistic about himself. He said, in a certain sense, "I'm already perfect in the sense that there's nothing in my life that isn't yielded to God. There's nothing that's contrary to God. In no way am I resisting or opposing God." And then he said, "In another sense, I'm not already perfect. I haven't arrived, I'm not mature, I'm not complete. But that's where I'm headed." And he said, "the things that are behind I'm willing to forget. But I'm looking forward, I'm pressing on toward that goal." A tremendous example of personal dedication. That's the kind of person that succeeds in any walk of life. The dedicated, motivated person.

It's true also in the Christian life. But we have to be careful that our motivation is God's motivation, that it's based on the requirement of Jesus himself. "Be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

And then yesterday we looked at the seven successive steps outlined by the apostle Peter that can take us from our starting point to our goal of perfection. You see Peter doesn't just make the statement of what's required, but he very clearly sets before us seven successive steps by which we can attain to this goal. It's good he breaks it down. He doesn't face us with one vast leap by which we have to attain or one tremendously high step that we have to take. But he breaks it down to a number of successive steps and so makes the goal attainable for us.

This is what Peter says in 2 Peter 1:5–7.

> "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."

So, there are the seven successive practical steps. We start from faith. To faith we add goodness; to goodness, knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; to brotherly kindness, love. You see, the goal, the ultimate is love.

Yesterday I emphasized in particular that the starting point must be faith and that for this there is no alternative. There is no other point from which we can begin except the point of faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us without faith it is impossible to please God. When we come to God we must believe two things: that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek him. In other words, we have to believe in God to the extent that if we do what God tells us, we believe he'll achieve for us what he has promised. That's the initial starting point. We have to have faith in God's goodness, his faithfulness, his wisdom and his power. This faith is not primarily doctrinal or theoretical but it's a personal commitment to God which allows him to do whatever he wants in our lives. So, that's the basis, the starting point—faith.

Today we're going to look at the first upward step which is goodness. Looking again for a moment at verse 5 of 2 Peter 1:

> "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness."

Notice Peter says, "Make every effort…" It's something that's going to take our attention. It's going to have to be priority number 1 in our personal development that we take these steps.

So then, the first upward step is goodness. Now, some of the other translations use the word "excellence." It's important to get the right picture of what is means here by goodness. In the Greek of the New Testament the word used is ?arete?, which is a word with a long history and many associations in the Greek language. And, in essence, I think the best translation is "excellence." And it's excellence in any area in which you find yourself doing something. For instance, the ?arete? of a horse is to run fast. That's what you expect of a horse, to run fast. So, it's not simply moral goodness. In a certain sense, it's efficiency. It's doing whatever you do right.

And this is what I believe Peter means. The key to it is that you apply your faith. You don't merely have faith and say, "I'm a believer," but you make your faith work wherever you are, in what area of life you find yourself, whatever calling or vocation. You make it plain to people to whom you testify that you're a believer that your faith is doing things for you which you could not do for yourself.

You see, James says in his epistle, chapter 2, verse 17, "Faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." I'm afraid there's an awful lot of dead faith in the church. Faith that's just words. People testify but they don't produce. What Peter is saying is add to your faith excellence, make your faith work. Show people that it produces results that are worth having.

Talking about achieving excellence out of our faith I'm going to take three simple examples from everyday life. The example of the teacher, the housewife, the young person. For five years in East Africa I was principal of a college for training teachers. It was a Christian college and our primary motive was to make good Christians out of those teachers. And I praise God, that as I look back, that many of them came to know Jesus Christ in a personal way. But their reaction was often, what I would consider, illogical. They would say, in effect, "Now I've become a Christian, you're going to treat me differently. You're going to expect less of me. You're going to let me get away with things that I didn't get away with before." And I would have to say to them, "Don't imagine that for a moment. If you could be any kind of a teacher before you were a Christian, after you've become a Christian you ought to be at least twice as good a teacher. If you could do it without the help of God, without prayer, without the wisdom God can give you, how much better you should be as a teacher when you have all that help from God. So, don't lower the standard. Raise the standard." I would say, "In fact, I'm not really convinced that you're a Christian until you begin to produce excellence in your job."

Or, let's consider the example of a housewife. Something that is perhaps a little bit looked down on in our contemporary culture but the truth of the matter is, we need housewives. And I'm glad for a wife who is a housewife as well as a helper in many, many ways. I've noticed sometimes with Christian women that when they've had a real experience with the Lord they tend to get super-spiritual. Their life is given up to prayer meetings, reading spiritual books, listening to spiritual tapes and sometimes they're my tapes. Well, I'm all in favor of listening to my tapes but I want to ell you that if your husband isn't a believer and you approach him on that basis, he's probably going to stay an unbeliever. Because, he doesn't want to go to bed at night with the sound of Derek Prince's voice in his ears if he isn't a believer. He wants to see that

you're a better housewife than you ever were before. That you cook better, that you keep the house cleaner, that you take better care of him. And when he sees that, believe me, sooner or later he's going to want to know what made the change in you. Then you'll have an opportunity to tell him about your faith in Jesus and he'll believe you because he's seen the evidence. You see? So what we've got to show people the evidence in excellence.

The third example I would just mention is that of a young person. Say a teenager or a college student who has had a wonderful dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ. One of the first tests of its reality will be the relationship of that young person to his parents. And many young people, even though they have a confession of faith in Jesus, have never adjusted or set right their relationship with their parents. I want to remind you that the first commandment with promise is "honor your father and mother, that it maybe well with you." And I tell you from long personal observations of many cases, if a young person becomes a Christian and does not learn to honor father and mother by obedience, by yielding to discipline, by sometimes sacrificing his own will and interests for those of his parents, it never really will go well with that person. But the young person whose life is so changed that he's obedient, that he's courteous, that he does whatever he's asked to do cheerfully and efficiently, believe me, that young person is going to have a very good chance to win his parents to the Lord. I'm talking out of personal observation and experience. So remember, add to your faith excellence.

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 week's challenging theme, "Progress To Perfection."

Radio Program

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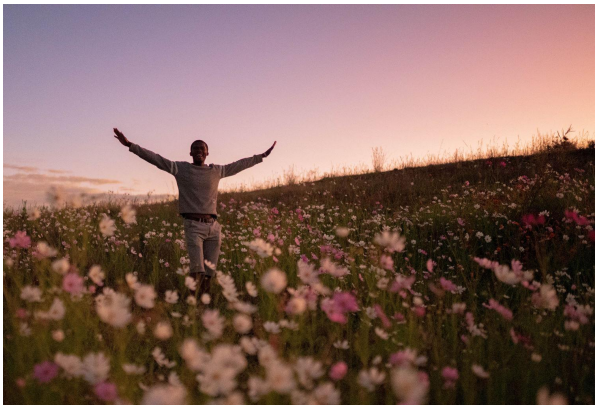

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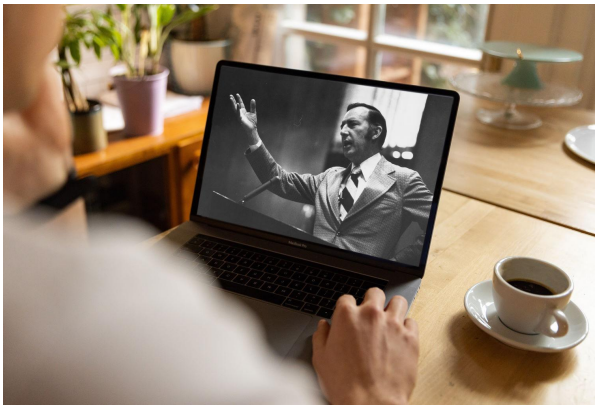

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