

LEADER GUIDE

CHARACTER COUNTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER

BIG IDEA: God equips us for Christlike character.

DATE: Sunday, August 16, 2026

SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1:1-11

OPENING QUESTION

Who are some positive role models in our culture today? What qualities do they possess that you admire?

A phrase you hear a lot these days is, “Fake it until you make it.” Of course, the idea is that you should act as if something is true and then eventually it becomes true. But is that really the case? Anna Sorokin pretended to be a wealthy German heiress, defrauding people and financial institutions for more than \$200,000. For a while, it seemed that she had it made. But her crimes were prosecuted, and she went to jail. Pretending to be someone she wasn’t did not create anything new. In the end, her character was simply exposed. Pretending to be a certain kind of person only delays truly becoming that person. But can we lay aside the charade and become who we would like to be?

RECAP: Character is how we describe who we really are. An ancient letter written to some believers in Christ affirms that what is needed for a character makeover is available to those who believe. While it takes some effort on our part to experience deep change, it brings lasting benefits.

In this new series we will look at a different character trait each week – godliness, humility, contentment, generosity and integrity. Today we are going to look at the importance of character, and the good news is *God equips us for Christlike character*.

BACKGROUND

The book of 2 Peter. The apostle Simon Peter was the writer of the book. While he did not indicate either his audience or the book’s destination as he had done in 1 Peter, it is possible that he wrote this letter to the same group of believers in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), whom he’d addressed in 1 Peter. Whomever the audience, Peter’s purpose was to strengthen these true believers’ faith in the face of false teachings that had arisen from within their church.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 PETER 1:1-11 (CSB)

Simeon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who have received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. ² May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ His divine power has

given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, ⁶knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, ⁷godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble. ¹¹For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

DISCUSSION

READ: 2 PETER 1:1-4

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses to explain the background for the book of 2 Peter.

Recap: A genuine renewal of character isn't something we're *guilt tripped* into. It's something we're *called* into. The greatness and goodness of Jesus drew Peter toward a transformed character. He came to realize that Jesus was so much better than he was (Luke 5:1-11). But it also dawned on Peter that this teacher from Nazareth had the power to change his life.

That's why he wrote to those early believers and assured them God had given them everything they needed to grow in Christlike character. And nothing has changed about that. The same is true for us.

Discuss: How does it change your outlook if you realize you've been given everything you need to live a godly life?

Do you feel guilt-tripped or called to building your character? How does each stance affect your attitude?

How have you seen grace and peace multiplied in your life?

Transition: God has empowered us to grow in Christlike character. In the next verses, we see that diligence in our growth makes us useful for God's kingdom.

READ 2 PETER 1:5-9

TRAIL MIX ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use this activity to help the group consider how these character traits work together. **In advance**, bring the ingredients to make a simple snack like a trail mix. Have the ingredients ready to mix in a large bowl. Invite someone to slowly read 2 Peter 1:4-8 while you stir each ingredient into the bowl. Discuss together how we are not to have a Christian life where we're "this" but "not that." Instead, like the mix in the bowl, each Christian characteristic ought to be added in, mixed in, and increasing over time as we trust Jesus through our lives.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses to explain the divine nature Peter describes.

Think of the growth God desires us to experience in our lives. Think of each of these as a necessary supplement to growth. Ask your group to give definitions of these divine character traits before sharing the notes below.

- **Goodness.** Good character has a magnetic quality to it. We are drawn to people who are truly good.
- **Knowledge.** A desire to pursue goodness is stimulated by understanding.
- **Self-control.** People of character are called (v. 3), not driven. Discipline is internal.
- **Endurance.** All attempts at personal spiritual growth will meet with resistance. When we fail, we must begin again.
- **Godliness.** A person can attempt to grow in character for selfish reasons or out of a desire to impress others. True godliness points to Jesus.
- **Brotherly affection.** True growth doesn't take place in a vacuum or in an ivory tower. It always transforms relationships with others.
- **Love.** My affection and adoration of God increases if I'm experiencing true personal transformation.

Discuss: Which of these means of supplementing our faith do you find most challenging?

When it comes to growth in character, how can we balance reliance on God with diligent effort?

How can our diligence in spiritual growth make us useful for God's kingdom?

Transition: In the next verses, we see that Christlike character points to our relationship with Christ.

READ 2 PETER 1:10-11

Help your group consider these traits by doing this exercise together:

The Importance of Character. For each of the Christlike character qualities below, write how increasing progress in this quality might make you more useful in God's kingdom.

Goodness:

Knowledge:

Self-control:

Endurance:

Godliness:

Brotherly affection:

Love:

Recap: In Peter's era, the churches he ministered to were plagued by false teachers. But it wasn't

just a leadership issue. Even at the most basic entry level, congregations had to sort through whose faith was genuine. So, the aged apostle used an important word in verse 10: “confirm.”

Some professing believers at the time of the writing of 2 Peter weren’t growing in their faith. Their experience of God’s grace wasn’t real to them. Peter described it as a failure of memory, the opposite of what it means to remember. Spiritual realities must be brought back into the center of our spiritual life.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses to explain the confirming of our calling and election.

Recap: One more thing to note about character as confirmation. In practicing the qualities listed in verses 5 through 7, we protect ourselves from stumbling spiritually. Peter made it clear that if you practice the attributes of Christlike character, if you strive to affirm you belong to God’s family, “you will never stumble” (v. 10).

Confirmation of our faith is found in godly character. As we grow in these qualities, we verify our possession of true faith. The great news in all of this is that we don’t have to pretend to possess the qualities of character. **It’s about progress, not perfection.** We can be confident that the qualities which Peter called for can be authentically found in us.

Discuss: How can our group help one another develop godly character?

How can looking back at God’s forgiveness keep us from stumbling in the future?

Remind your group that *God equips us for Christlike character.*

RESPONSE

If character matters so much and God has equipped us for growth in it, how does that actually come to pass? Choose one of the following applications this week:

Decide. Before anything else, decide if you really believe that a change of character is possible. Don’t give verbal assent to something you’re not quite ready to accept as possible.

Develop. Examine the virtue catalog in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Seek the Holy Spirit and pick one quality on which you need work. Come up with an action plan to grow in that area. After you’ve made progress there, select a second one and do the same.

Dialogue. Have a conversation with someone close to you. Consider someone who doesn’t have anything to lose by telling you the truth. Ask them to identify some growth areas in your character traits.

Pray: Thank God for our group that helps us in the developing of Christian character. Ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit to live out a godly character so the world can see Christ through us.

COMMENTARY

2 PETER 1:1-3

Connection to The Point: God has given us everything we need to grow in Christlike character.

Much of these false teachings denied the future return of Christ and the final judgment (chapter 3). This opened the door for immoral living and a libertine lifestyle (chapter 2). Peter wrote to remind his audience that Jesus would return, that God would judge the living and the dead, and that grace should produce holy lives, not immoral ones.

His divine power (v. 3). Peter emphasized that God's *divine power* was the source of the believer's spiritual growth. The kingdom of God has come in God's power (Mark 9:1). God's power is also associated with Jesus's miracles (Mark 5:30; Luke 5:17; 9:1). The power of God is at work within believers to enable them to live holy lives (Phil. 2:12-13; Gal. 5:16-25), and this power is beyond anything we could think or ask (Eph. 3:20-21).

Everything required (v. 3). In Jesus, God has provided everything necessary for the Christian's spiritual growth in Christlikeness. Certainly, this includes salvation itself, or as the verse states, **the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness**. Believers are enabled to grow in Christlikeness because it is God who is at work in them (Phil. 2:12-13). He has given us His Holy Spirit who indwells us and produces the life of Christ in us (Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:16-25; Phil. 1:19). God has also provided His Word as a guide for us, as a lamp and light for our path (Ps. 119:105). In addition, God has given believers a living hope that Christ will return, and we have an eternal inheritance and home with Him (1 Pet. 1:3-4). This should motivate us to holy living. Furthermore, God safeguards believers through His power ensuring that we will endure to the end (John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:31-39; 1 Pet. 1:5). These are only some of the things God has provided believers, but Peter emphasized that God has given us everything necessary to grow in Christlikeness. No elements are missing.

Life and godliness (v. 3). Some interpreters believe that *life* refers to eternal life, and *godliness* refers to spiritual growth in this present life. Therefore, the meaning of the phrase is that God has given believers everything they need for eternal salvation and present sanctification (growth in Christlikeness). Other interpreters believe *life* indicates that God is the source of our physical existence on earth, and *godliness* refers to the transformation of one's life in spiritual growth into Christlikeness. In both cases, the emphasis is on the gifts that God has given. While spiritual growth involves human effort and is our duty as believers, transformation into Christlikeness would be impossible without the work of the Lord within the believer.

By his own glory and goodness (v. 3). How did God call believers to salvation and spiritual growth? It was **through the knowledge of Christ** and *by his own glory and goodness*. The term *knowledge* refers to the intimate relationship believers have with God through both their initial conversion and throughout their ongoing sanctification. Christ's *glory* refers to the splendor and majesty of Jesus. Jesus, fully God and fully man, is one of a kind. He is God's "one and only Son" (John 3:16). God called us to Himself through Jesus's glory. He also called us by Jesus's *goodness*. This refers to Jesus's moral excellence; He is completely sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26). "When Christ calls people to himself, they perceive the beauty and loveliness of his moral character. His character becomes exceedingly attractive to them, and they trust God for their salvation."¹ Peter recognized the Lord's holiness when Jesus called the fisherman to follow Him (Luke 5:8). Even the demons recognized that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). Christ, being both God and man, was able to be the mediator between holy God and sinful humanity; because of His sinlessness He was the perfect substitutionary sacrifice through which our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to God (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:12; see Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:19-22).

2 PETER 1:4-8

Connection to The Point: Diligence in our growth makes us useful for God's kingdom.

Very great and precious promises (v. 4). Through Christ, God has given believers these *promises*.

While Peter did not specify what these promises are, he was most likely referring first and foremost to the gospel of salvation through which Christ provides everything believers need for life and godliness (v. 3). Jeremiah described the new covenant of God in detail (Jer. 31:31-34). Ezekiel promised a new work of God as well (Ezek. 34:25-30). God has also promised us “a living hope” and an imperishable inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3-4) which entails eternal life in heaven. Peter reminded us that God had made promises such as these, and He would fulfill all His promises.

Share in the divine nature (v. 4). The promises of God in Christ are fulfilled in the believers’ sharing in *the divine nature*. However, this does not mean that believers will become divine like God; rather, through moral transformation they share in certain characteristics and attributes that are divine in nature. Peter viewed this process of becoming more and more Christlike in terms of **escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires**. In other words, human beings can only escape the evil desires of their fallen nature and their consequences when they receive the promises of the gospel through Jesus Christ by placing their faith in Him as their Savior and Lord. This process begins at the moment of conversion (justification), continues throughout this life (sanctification), and will be completed at the end of this age with the return of Jesus (glorification).

Supplement (v. 5). The Greek term for *supplement* can have the meanings of to bestow a gift, to provide or supply something, and to support someone by providing what is necessary for his well-being, to be a benefactor. In the New Testament, the word can refer to God’s benevolent, generous acts toward believers (2 Cor. 9:10; Gal. 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:11). But as in this context, the word is also used in reference to the believer’s actions toward God. It appears prior to the list of seven attributes believers are to develop as they mature in Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

Peter’s statement does not imply that believers are lacking in anything necessary for spiritual growth; that would contradict his previous, definitive statement that God has provided everything needed to live a godly life (v. 3). Rather, it is an encouragement for believers to cooperate with God’s work of maturing us in our faith by developing/practicing the qualities of **goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love** within us.

Possess these qualities in increasing measure

(v. 8). The Greek term for *increasing measure* suggests having more than needed, to have in abundance. In this context it also emphasizes that the process of growing to spiritual maturity is ongoing and will not be completed until we are glorified with Christ at the end of the age. One of the ways in which believers can evaluate their spiritual growth is if the qualities Peter identified in verses 5-7 are increasing in our lives (similarly with the fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22-23).

Useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 8). The Greek term translated *useless* should not be confused with being worthless. Rather the term refers to someone who is unproductive, idle, or lazy. Useless believers are ineffective workers in God’s kingdom. Jesus used the term to describe idle workers who wasted their time in the marketplace (“doing nothing,” Matt. 20:3,6). We render ourselves idle when we do not grow spiritually. Conversely, maturing Christians work diligently for the Lord.

Unfruitful means lacking results. In the parable of the soils Jesus used the term to describe the “one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22). As believers grow spiritually, they produce fruit. Jesus said concerning His relationship to His disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5). He also declared, “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples” (v. 8). Disciples produce fruit because they are connected to Christ and growing in their knowledge of Jesus. The Greek term for *knowledge* is the same word used in verse 3 and

refers to relational knowledge of Jesus which comes through faith and growth toward spiritual maturity.

2 PETER 1:9-11

Connection to The Point: We confirm our relationship to God as we grow and live with godly character.

Blind and shortsighted (v. 9). Those who are spiritually *blind* and *shortsighted* are those who for whatever reasons are failing to grow spiritually in Christ. They have lost sight of the fact that God has poured out His grace upon them by redeeming them in Christ, and therefore out of gratitude for what He has done they should be living for Him. They also are shortsighted in the sense that the day will come when all believers are judged for how they lived or did not live for Christ after placing their faith in Him. Those who lived for Christ will be rewarded, while those who failed to do so will be saved but their actions will be shown to be empty because they were not done in Christ (1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Confirm your calling and election (v. 10). Peter urged these believers to make sure that their *calling* and *election* were genuine (Rom. 8:30). The Greek phrase for **make every effort** means both to hasten and to be zealous in one's actions, to exercise diligence. The term for *confirm* has the sense of making sure something can be relied upon so as not to be disappointed. Lack of spiritual growth could indicate there was a cause for concern. God's grace should not lead to spiritual lethargy but rather to determined, faithful action.

Spiritual immaturity can cause believers to have doubts and a lack of assurance concerning the validity of their salvation because they do not see the signs of progress in spiritual growth and maturity. The cure for such doubts is diligence in living out one's faith through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit—not for the purpose of *being saved*, but rather because God *has saved us* in Christ.

This will enable believers to have the assurance that what God has begun in them He will bring to completion (Phil. 1:6). In this way we can grow strong or confirm our *calling* and *election* and prevent a disastrous **stumble**. The Greek term for *stumble* can mean to lose one's footing, as well as to experience disaster. While even mature Christians fall short of who God wants them to be at times, in this context the term refers to the disastrous stumble of the person who either takes God's grace in Christ for granted in the sense of choosing not to grow in Christ or worse falsely assumes he or she has received salvation in Christ (Luke 6:46-49). Works do not save a believer, but they are the necessary result and evidence of the genuine nature of the believer's faith.

Entry into the eternal kingdom (v. 11). The *eternal kingdom* refers to heaven where the believer will spend eternity with God. Until the Christian enters the eternal kingdom, God keeps the believer safe in his or her salvation. Jesus said that nothing could pluck believers out of His hand or the Father's hand (John 10:28-30). The apostle Paul assured the Philippian believers that God would bring His work of salvation within them to completion (Phil. 1:6), while at the same time urging them to work out their salvation because it was God working within them (2:12-13). Believers can trust that God will keep them and enable them to faithfully endure to the end of this life. But at the same time, He desires and expects believers to cooperate with Him in growing toward spiritual maturity until we are called home to heaven.

Richly provided (v. 11). The Greek term for *provided* is the same word translated "supplement" in verse 5. The two uses together reflect the cooperation between God and the believer in spiritual growth. While Peter encouraged believers to be diligent and expend great effort toward spiritual

growth, he qualified this with the fact that it is God who has provided everything necessary for that growth to take place (v. 3). Indeed, it is God's Holy Spirit who indwells believers (Rom. 8:9-11) and empowers them to bear spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-25).

The Greek term for *richly* was often used to mean great wealth, as well as to describe how someone has been abundantly supplied with something. Paul used the term when he encouraged the Colossian believers to "let the word of Christ dwell richly among you" (Col. 3:16). He also used it to describe the abundant way God has poured out His Spirit upon believers ("abundantly," Titus 3:5-6), and how richly God has provided believers with all things in Christ (1 Tim. 6:17). God is not stingy in regard to what He has given to those who receive His Messiah Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and He fulfills all His promises.

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