

# ***“Everything We Need”***

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***Friends remind friends what matters most.***

**2 Peter 1:1-4**

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***Nothing new***

What do you do when you need to remind remember something important? Maybe you're a sticky note person. Maybe you even tie a string around your finger. My main source of reminders is my Excel spreadsheet task list. It gets updated all day long.

Lately, I've also been using the alarms on my phone. Our elders and pastors have set up a 24/7 "on call" rotation for pastoral care, so my phone reminds me every Monday that I'm on call from 7 AM to 7 PM.

I had volunteered to order the flowers to place on the altar this morning from the church staff in honor of our church family on our first Sunday together since March 15. After forgetting until late in the day on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I realized it would be really awkward if I also forgot Thursday and Friday. So I set a reminder on my phone for Thursday morning.

Today we begin a study of the New Testament book we know as 2 Peter. We're going to read every verse of these three chapters in worship over the next six Sundays, starting with the first four verses only today. But I want to sneak a peek at a couple of sections to point out Peter's purpose in writing. It's about reminders.

*So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon*

put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure *you will always be able to remember* these things (2 Peter 1:12-14, emphasis added).

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. *I have written both of them as reminders* to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. *I want you to recall* the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles....

As a preacher who has been churning out at least one sermon a week on average for more than three decades, it's incredibly freeing to have Peter say that his primary role is to give reminders. I don't have to be profound or original every time I preach. A sermon is more like, "You know this, but you need a reminder at least once a week."

Before we dive into 2 Peter 1, indulge me a couple of minutes to address the part where Peter says, "This is my second letter." Many people through the centuries have come to the conclusion that Jesus' disciple Peter didn't write 2 Peter, and to a related second conclusion – that 2 Peter doesn't belong in the New Testament. Those topics are connected because one of the criteria for including a book in the canon was its origin or validation from the original apostles.

One argument against Peter writing 2 Peter is that it doesn't sound very much like 1 Peter. But some of those same objectors will say that 1 Peter doesn't sound like it was written by a Galilean fisherman. At the end of 1 Peter, we saw that Peter admitted he used a ghost writer, Silas, a companion of the Apostle Paul. No wonder 1 Peter sounds a lot like what Paul wrote. And if Peter wrote 2 Peter without Silas' help, maybe this book actually represents more of Peter's original thought processes.

Another reason people doubt 2 Peter's place in the Bible is because it was among the last, if not the last, book to make the cut. To that I'm just going to remind you of a Hickory boy named Ryan Succop, who was the last player selected in the 2009 NFL draft, earning the infamous moniker "Mr. Irrelevant." His NFL career has been anything but. Even if 2 Peter was the last one chosen, it was still validated by the early church and the Holy Spirit over dozens if not hundreds of other writings that never made the cut.

2 Peter is not "Mr. Irrelevant." It offers some important first reminders.

### ***First reminders***

*First reminder: Your faith is precious (1).*

The writer identifies himself as "Simon Peter." "Simon" is the name his parents gave him. In fact, he uses the spelling "Simeon," which is more authentically Hebrew.

He adds the name “Peter,” the name Jesus gave him. You too have at least two identities – who you are by birth and who you are by grace.

After his names, he describes himself as both “servant” (literally, “slave”) and “apostle.” Some people come across as a nobody and others as a somebody. We are all both, aren’t we? When we think of ourselves or communicate as one or the other we diminish our impact. But if you’re a nobody and God has made you a somebody you can change lives. But there’s more. He’s a nobody (a slave) of Jesus Christ, and he’s a somebody (an apostle, one who is sent) of Jesus Christ. He’s happy to be someone owned and directed by Jesus and completely under his control, and also honored to be someone whom Jesus has chosen and sent. That makes him pretty special, right? Yes.

Unique? No. That’s the point of the second line in verse 1. Peter says his readers “through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.” Peter is saying, “My status in Jesus is no better than or less than yours.” Jesus appoints us to different kinds of service, but our standing before God (“righteousness”) and the way to that standing (“faith”) are great equalizers.

I love that word, “precious.” I’ve seen it in operation the last few weeks. I gave Linda a diamond ring 43 years ago. It’s fallen out a couple of times through the years, but she’s always found it. This spring it fell out and we looked and looked and never located it. Before we went on vacation, I bought her a new diamond to replace the original, and even more than ever before she treats it as her “precious.” She took it off before swimming in the ocean. She checks it constantly. It’s her single most valuable possession. It’s treasured, honored, invaluable. Your faith is like that.

We admire Peter because he was in the top twelve, maybe the top three, of Jesus’ draft picks, and Jesus had to put up with a lot to get him to the place where he could be a world-changer. Peter says his readers’ faith, and by extension your faith, is equally significant in your sphere of influence. That’s a critical reminder.

*Second reminder: Knowing God is primary (2).*

Verse 2 is another one of those introductory greetings it would be easy to pass over lightly. Easy, but a mistake. “Grace and peace be yours in abundance,” he writes. I said a lot about “peace” last week as we finished our studies in 1 Peter. It’s the deep soul-satisfaction that only God can give, enabling you to trust God completely and release your need to control others. Almost every culture and religion seeks peace. Has your peace number grown since last week?

Grace is a more distinctively Christian virtue. The grace of God through Jesus Christ allows us the freedom to live in peace. I know I’m loved and forgiven without deserving it, and therefore I can extend that grace to others.

Peter says both grace and peace come “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Here’s why that is important. In chapter 2, Peter’s going to blast the enemies of the Church and of Jesus in language that makes me cringe a bit. It’s some of the most judgmental – in every sense of the word – language in the New Testament. To give you one little hint: “Blackest darkness is reserved for them” (17).

What’s at the root of this false teaching Peter will condemn? It’s a primitive form of Gnosticism, from the Greek word *gnosis* (knowledge). These self-described prophets distort the gospel by claiming secrets not accessible to others, and their insider faith results in gross immorality and arrogance.

Here in 2 Peter 1:2, Peter adds a prefix to *gnosis* – *epignosis*. It means a personal intimacy, a relationship, a connection. The Christian faith is not a matter of accumulating facts, especially facts inaccessible to everyone else. It is intimate knowledge of God – personal acquaintance through experience. I have knowledge of Ryan Succop. I know his name and that he’s from Hickory and a little about his NFL career. But we have no relationship. He probably doesn’t know my name. We wouldn’t know each other if we passed on the street. There’s no *epignosis*.

Peter’s telling us at the beginning that grace and peace don’t come through knowing about God but knowing God – his character and attributes, what matters to him: truth, justice, compassion. We know we are coming to know God better when he looks less like us. If we just create our own God to share our priorities and prejudices and principles, that’s not true knowledge of God, not intimacy with him; it’s idolatry.

*Third reminder: We have everything we need (3-4).*

Verses 3 and 4 are one long and complex sentence in Greek. If your Bible has a period anywhere before the end of verse 4, it’s covering up Peter’s run-on sentence. Just for fun I tried diagramming the English Standard Version of the Bible. Notice I said, “Just for fun.” Maybe that’s not your idea of fun? The reason I did it was to make sure what I thought was the main point is the main point. The main clause is: “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life.”

I wrote a paper on this verse for seminary. I no longer have it, because when I moved to my current office last year I finally discarded yards of paper files. The paper was written for a professor who believed it is possible to live a Christian life without succumbing to temptation, without sinning. I wrote the paper to please him because he was a valued mentor.

But it wasn’t my experience then and hasn’t been my experience since that it’s possible to live consistently, much less absolutely, without sinning. And now that I read this verse in its broader context, I think the theoretical question is not what Peter’s after. He certainly wouldn’t want you thinking, “I keep stumbling into sin, therefore I must not be a real Christian.”

He's setting you up for his diatribe against the false teachers who say, "It doesn't matter how you live in the body if your soul is good. As long as you've got the secret knowledge, then what you actually do about your addictions and your lusts and your greed and your bitterness and your prejudices and your...whatever – you can't help it anyway, so just give in to it. You know you're OK with God and the universe by your secret knowledge, so treat people the way you want, live to possess and to have fun, climb the ladder of personal privilege and claim what's yours. Really, there's no other realistic way to live your life."

Peter knows his readers who have been exposed to the Gospel of Jesus understand that is false teaching. And what he wants to say at the beginning of his letter is that passive resignation to narcissism in the name of religion is a lie of the devil. "You have at your disposal the tools you need to live a godly life." What are those tools?

- *His calling.* He has personally claimed us – "called us by his own glory and goodness." He knows your name, knows your story, knows your past and your future. You know how he called Peter at the Sea of Galilee. Your calling is just as precious to him.
- *His promises.* These are "very great and precious." I won't go into it here because I've done so in other sermons, but please be careful what Bible verses you call "promises." The Bible uses that word in reference to the big picture of God's ultimate purposes and justice – not that everything's going to turn out right for you. God has come to us in Jesus and will come again – that's a promise. He will never abandon you – that's a promise. He will finish what he started in you – that's a promise. He has given you everything you need for a godly life – that's a promise.
- *His nature.* His first letter emphasized being "in Christ," that you participate in what Jesus did – his suffering, his death, his descent into hell, his resurrection, his ascension. You have been given a nature transplant. As Paul said last night, it's as if he turned you from a pig into a lion. Your appetite has been changed from the inside.
- *His deliverance.* Christ has freed you from the "evil desires" of this world's system. It's not that they have no attraction or lure; it's that you used to have no choice, no reason, not to stay there. Now you have an option.

### ***Dear friends***

I started this sermon admitting to you that what you'd read in 2 Peter, and therefore what you'd hear today, would not be new. These are "reminders." And I told you there are things that help me remember – my phone, my calendar, a sticky note.

Most of us need not only a device but people who help us remember. When I come in the house after running errands, Linda asks me, "Did you wash your hands?" She also asks me, "Did you take your On Guard capsule?" Friday I answered honestly, "I

take it every time I remember it.” Which isn’t very often, so I added that reminder to my phone as well, and left her a note Saturday morning so she knew I did.

There was an important phrase in that second section of “reminder” verses I noted earlier. “*Dear friends,*” he said, “This is now my second letter to you...” And again, “Do not forget this one thing, *dear friends*” (emphasis added).

Here’s my one key reminder for this week: “Friends help friends remember what matters most.” Dear friends, that’s my role as your pastor. That’s Peter’s role as he nears the end of his life. We need friends who are centered in Gospel truth who will remind us what matters most. We especially need that right now.

Pastor Amy sent me [a link](#) yesterday to an article in The Atlantic that says well what we all feel. Our brains are not equipped for the mess we’re in. It’s the mess of inconsistent messages from government leaders, the mess of uncertainty as stay-at-home orders are lifted or modified but we still know it’s dangerous to ourselves and others to be out there. It’s the mess of not knowing how long this will last.

We were all good with four weeks of that mess, but then it became two months and three months and four months and there’s still no end in sight. We’ve got big decisions to make. At one point Paul and I talked about how crowded the calendar would be this fall as everything postponed from spring was rescheduled one week after another. We’ve since postponed our Israel trip to 2021. We’ve got decisions to make about church this fall – not just Sunday worship but children’s and student ministries, small groups and Sunday School classes, Wednesday night dinners, other events and programs. And you have a myriad of similar decisions – about school, work, travel, shopping, finances, and more.

My job as your pastor and friend is to remind you what matters most. I love how Pastor Paul applied this text in the contemporary service and again this morning at 8:30. He said, “If you don’t believe God has given you everything you need it may be because your goal is not a godly life.”

I can’t promise you that God has given you everything you need for making decisions that will ensure your financial well-being or the way of life you’ve been accustomed to or that dream vacation you’ve planned or even your safety and health and life. I can promise you that God has given you everything you need for a godly life no matter how it all plays out. That’s what matters most – to truly know him, to grasp his heart, to live lives consistent with the calling to be his slave and his ambassador.

This is Peter’s goal in 2 Peter – to be the kind of friend who reminds us of what really matters and how we can live fully into this life we’ve been called to live. We can live godly lives in this moment, and he will tell us how. Stay tuned! Amen.