

## ***11 tests for assurance of salvation (John MacArthur)***

### **1**

#### **In Order That You May Know**

**“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).**

*The apostle John presents eleven objective and subjective tests for assurance of salvation.*

The New Testament epistles are filled with enough material on assurance to fill volumes of commentaries. Yet there is one small epistle, 1 John, that was written to deal exclusively with the issue of assurance. The apostle John states his reason for writing this letter in our verse for today: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *in order that you may know that you have eternal life*” (emphasis added). John did not want his readers to doubt their salvation; he wanted them to have full assurance of it.

Certainly what John wrote in this epistle will not disturb genuine believers, but it will alarm anyone who has a false sense of assurance. In fact, he directed his letter to those who have placed their faith in Christ, which is the bedrock of all assurance: “I have written to you who believe.” There is no place for self-examination outside of faith in Christ. That’s why everything John says about assurance is predicated on faith in Christ and the promises of Scripture.

Throughout his epistle, John maintains a delicate balance between the objective and subjective grounds of assurance. The objective evidence makes up a doctrinal test, while the subjective evidence provides a moral test. John moves in and out between the two kinds of tests as he presents a total of eleven criteria that will indicate whether one possesses eternal life.

As you study through these tests, they will confirm for you, if you are a genuine believer, the reality of your salvation. But if you have been given a false assurance, you will know where you stand and what you need to do.

#### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

If you are a true believer, ask God to use these upcoming days to give you a greater love for Him. If you’re not sure if you truly know our great Lord and Savior, ask Him to reveal Himself to you so that these next few days will be life-changing ones.

## ***For Further Study***

Read John 20:31. How would reading through the Gospel of John also provide assurance of salvation? Begin such a reading plan.

## **2**

### **Fellowship with Christ**

**“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).**

*Enjoying communion with both God and Jesus Christ is solid proof that one’s salvation is real.*

When we hold baptisms in the church I pastor, invariably every person who gives their testimony will describe the overwhelming sense of forgiveness they now feel and the new purpose they have for their lives. They are expressing a wonderful result of salvation in Christ, of which Jesus said, “I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10). By saying that life could be *abundant*, Jesus was saying that salvation would result in more than a change of position—it is a change of experience! The Christian life is a rich life in which we are meant to experience joy, peace, love, and purpose.

The abundant life in Christ begins with a close communion and fellowship with the living God and the living Christ. The apostle Paul says, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). In Galatians 2:20 Paul describes what that fellowship meant to him personally: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” Great intimacy with Christ belongs to all genuine believers.

Have you experienced communion with God and Christ? Have you sensed Their presence? Does your love for Them draw you into Their presence? Have you experienced the exhilarating joy of talking in prayer to the living God? And have you experienced the thrill of discovering a new truth in His Word? If you have, then you have experienced the abundant life that Jesus promised to all who put their trust in Him.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Much like God asked Israel to recount the great works He had done for them, meditate on the many ways God has made your life richer as a result of knowing Him.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Romans 8:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 5:19; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 4:16; and 1 Peter 5:10.

- What does each verse teach about your relationship with God?

In what ways is your life abundant as a result?

## **3**

### **A Sensitivity to Sin**

**“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:6-10).**

*True believers are sensitive to their sin and confess it.*

Throughout Scripture, light is used as a metaphor for truth—both intellectual and moral truth (cf. Ps. 119:105, 130; Prov. 6:23). When the apostle John writes, “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), he is stating that the Lord is absolutely sinless since light and darkness cannot coexist.

Some claim to have fellowship with God (v. 6), to have no sin (v. 8), and even to have never sinned (v. 10). But they are living in darkness; it is characteristic of unbelievers to be oblivious to the sins in their lives. But that is not true of genuine believers. They have a right sense of sin: they “walk in the light as He Himself is in the light” (v. 7), and they “confess [their] sins” (v. 9). True believers know that if they want to commune with God, they need to confess their sins and turn to Christ as their “Advocate” before God (2:1).

The apostle Paul was very sensitive to the sinful realities of his life (Rom. 7:14-25). What about you? Are you aware of the spiritual battle raging within you? Do you realize you must live a holy life to have fellowship with God? Are you willing to confess and forsake any sin in your life? Do you realize you can choose not to sin? Are you weary of doing battle with the sin in your life (cf. Rom. 7:24)? If these things are true of you, rejoice in the assurance of your salvation.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Confess any known sin to God right now, then forsake it.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Romans 7:14-25.

- Make a list of all the ways Paul was sensitive to his sin.
- How many of those can you relate to?

How should you respond?

## **4**

### **Obedience to God's Word**

**“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).**

*True believers obey God's commandments.*

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven after His resurrection, He gave the following Great Commission to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Notice that a true disciple was to observe, or obey, all of Christ’s commands.

The apostle John understood well the Lord’s instruction. He knew that obedience to the commands of God produces assurance—the confidence of knowing for sure “that we have come to know Him” (1 John 2:3). The Greek word for “keep” in that verse refers to watchful, careful, thoughtful obedience. It is not an obedience that is only the result of external pressure; it is the eager obedience of one who “keeps” the divine commandments as if they were something precious to guard. Such obedience is motivated by love, as John indicates in verse 5: “Whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.” That’s supported by the word translated “commandments,” which refers specifically to the precepts of Christ rather than laws in general. Legal obedience demands perfection or penalty, while 1 John 2:3 is a call to gracious obedience because of the penalty Christ has already paid.

However, those who claim to know God and yet despise His commandments John calls liars: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (v. 4). “They profess to know God,

but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16).

How can you determine if you are a true Christian? Not by sentiment, but by obedience. If you desire to obey God out of gratitude for all Christ has done for you, and if you see that desire producing an overall pattern of obedience, you have passed an important test indicating the presence of saving faith.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

If you have found your obedience is predicated more on the act of obedience than on gratitude for God, confess that now and seek to change your attitude.

### ***For Further Study***

Memorize 1 Samuel 15:22 as motivation for the right spirit of obedience.

## 5

## **Rejection of the World**

**“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).**

*Genuine believers love God and reject the world and all its philosophies.*

As the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), Satan has designed a system that the Bible simply calls “the world.” The Greek term (kosmos) refers to a system encompassing false religion, errant philosophy, crime, immorality, materialism, and the like. Of it the apostle John wrote, “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16-17). While the world and its fleshly preoccupations are but temporary realities, the true believer has eternal life and will abide forever.

When someone becomes a Christian, he acquires a new set of goals and motivations; the world and its lusts no longer attract but repel him. He no longer loves “the world, nor the things in the world” (v. 15). At times he may be lured into worldly pursuits, but he is doing not what he loves but what he hates (cf. Rom. 7:15). That’s because new life in Christ gives the believer a love for God and the things of God.

Jesus said those who follow Him are not of the world, just as He was not of the world. We still move about in it to do His will, but we are not of it. That’s why Jesus specifically asked the Father to keep us from the evil one (John 17:14-16). We’re vulnerable to

being sucked into this evil world's system now and then, but our love is toward God. That love is what will redirect our focus toward heavenly priorities.

Do you reject the world and its false religions, damning ideologies, and godless pursuits? Instead, do you love God, His truth, His kingdom, and all that He stands for? If you reject the world and its devilish desires that is a strong indication you have new life in Christ.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Ask God to reveal to you ways you may still be clinging to the world. When He does, sever those connections.

### ***For Further Study***

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:1-3; and James 4:4. What is Satan's ultimate goal in pulling people into his system?

## 6

### **Anticipation of Christ's Return?**

**“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).**

*True Christians long for the return of their King.*

The words of the old hymn, “This world is not my home,” express the attitude of every true child of God. True Christians have a hope in their heart, a hope focused on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the apostle Paul, we long to be set “free from the body of this death” (Rom. 7:24); we “groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). We long for the day when “just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15:49).

Our hope is a sanctifying one. John writes, “Every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3), while Paul reminded Titus that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great

God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:11-13). Our hope is a sensible one, leading to godly, responsible living. It does not justify careless living (2 Thess. 3:6-15); there is no such thing as someone who is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good.

Do you find yourself longing for Christ to return and “transform the body of [your] humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21)? If so, take heart. That’s another evidence that your salvation is genuine.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray with the apostle John, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

### ***For Further Study***

In Philippians 3:20 Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven,” while in Colossians 3:1-2 the apostle commands us to focus on heavenly things. Where is your focus? What do you spend your time on? Rearrange your priorities and schedule to give first place to eternal realities.

## 7

### **A Decreasing Frequency of Sin**

**“No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).**

*A decreasing pattern of sin in a believer’s life means his faith is genuine.*

A sinful life pattern is incompatible with salvation. If you could continue in the same sinful pattern after being saved from sin, that would mean salvation is ineffective. Therefore, 1 John 3 deals with the saving work of Christ and reveals just how effective it is.

Verse 5 says Christ “appeared in order to take away sins.” If you say someone who has had the work of Christ applied to him is continuing in sin just as before, you are denying the purpose for which Christ came. He died to take away the pattern of sin as well as the penalty.

Therefore, if you are truly a believer you will relate to God in a totally new way, because the Christian “abides in Him” (v. 6). You are no longer a perpetual slave to sin, but you now have the option and ability to do good (see Rom. 6:14, 17-18). You will always be acutely sensitive to sin (Rom. 7; 1 John 1:8-9); yet, because of Christ’s abiding in you,

your struggle will decrease over the years, and sin will be less and less a pattern in your life.

That brings us to 1 John 3:9, which is a reminder that believers have been born anew by the Holy Spirit. Your new nature or new disposition of life is the “seed” verse 9 speaks of. Just as the seed of a plant, when placed in the soil, produces a distinct kind of life, the divine seed produces a righteous life in you that ends sin’s dominance. And that seed will never die—1 Peter 1:23 says it is “imperishable.”

What does all this mean to you if you’re a genuine believer? It means you will see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life because you now have holy affections. It doesn’t mean sin will be eliminated, because your unredeemed flesh is still present. It means the more you practice righteousness—with its right motives, right desires, right words, and right actions—the less you sin, and the more you can be assured you’re a child of God.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

If there is a frequent sin you struggle with, ask God to help you defeat it.

### ***For Further Study***

Record at least five truths contained in Romans 6:1-11. How do they help give victory over sin?

## **8**

### **Love For Other Christians**

**“The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him” (1 John 2:10).**

*Loving other Christians gives assurance to your own faith.*

Loving fellow Christians is instinctive for genuine believers. Paul told the Thessalonians, “Now as to the love of the brethren . . . you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9). He further encouraged them to “excel still more” in love (v. 10) because there is always room for believers to love one another more completely. Nevertheless, if we are truly saved we will show love, since love is inherent in our new nature (see Rom. 5:5).

Jesus said this about love among believers: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). If we are truly Christians, we



will “fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22). Love is a test of our divine life and signifies that we have crossed over from darkness to light (1 John 3:14-15).

The apostle John goes on to define love as being sacrificial and practical: “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (vv. 16-18).

Therefore, you should ask yourself some basic questions: Do you care about other believers, or are you cold and indifferent? How do you respond to opportunities to give of yourself in various ministries? Do you look forward to having fellowship with other Christians—talking with them, discussing the things of God, studying the Word together, and praying with them? When you encounter a friend at church who has a need, are you willing to provide money, time, prayer, resources, service, or even a sympathetic ear?

If you can answer yes to those questions, you have great reason to be assured of your salvation. Like Peter, you can appeal to the love God sees in your heart (John 21:17). That love won’t be perfect, but it’s there and will manifest itself to others.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that your love will grow stronger and be more consistent.

### ***For Further Study***

Read John 21:15-17.

- What should Peter’s love result in?
- How does Galatians 6:10 support that?

## **9**

### **Answered Prayer**

**“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).**

*The answers to believers’ prayers bring assurance of salvation.*

Another reliable way to know if you are a Christian is if God answers your prayers. The apostle John gives us the infallible reasoning for this statement. First, you can know your prayers will be answered if you keep His commandments (1 John 3:22). And second, John says the only way you can obey God’s commandments is if you belong to Him (v. 24). Therefore, an obedient believer proves He is abiding in Christ and receives further assurance when his prayers are answered.

However, the only prayers God answers are the ones prayed according to His will. If you are an obedient believer, you will fashion your prayers in line with what Scripture says about His will. The answered prayer that follows will bring you confidence and assurance (see 1 John 5:13-15).

Some believers miss out on that assurance because of their skimpy prayer life, which obviously results in few answered prayers. How sad for them, and how disappointing for God, because He would do so much more for those Christians if they would only ask Him.

What about you? Has it been a pattern of your life to experience answered prayer? Ask yourself questions like the following: Have you prayed for someone’s difficult situation and seen God turn it around to one of joy and blessing? Have you seen an unsaved person for whom you prayed come to Christ? Has God filled a void in your life after you prayed that He would? Have you ever prayed that God would help you in teaching His Word and then experienced much grace in presenting it with clarity? Have you prayed for boldness and power to proclaim the gospel and seen God work through you? Have you asked for contentment during a trial and received God’s peace? Have you known forgiveness and a clear conscience after you prayed to that end?

If you can answer yes to those questions or ones like them, you have good reason to believe that you belong to the Lord and He belongs to you.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Thank the Lord for His power through prayer and for the answers He’s granted you.

### ***For Further Study***

Read 1 Kings 17:1; 18:41-46.

- What does the second passage reveal about Elijah’s prayer life?
- How does that support James 5:16b-18?

## The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

**“By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13).**

*Experiencing the ministry of the Holy Spirit is evidence of genuine saving faith.*

In John 14:26, Jesus described the Holy Spirit as “the Helper.” One of the most important ways He helps us is by assuring us that we belong to God. Several works of the Holy Spirit, if present in our lives, give evidence of the genuineness of our salvation. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul writes, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Apart from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, you would not know who Christ was, nor would you confess Him as Savior and Lord. If you have experienced that work of the Holy Spirit, that is evidence you are a true child of God.

Another essential ministry of the Spirit is that of illuminating Scripture. First John 2:27 says, “The anointing which you received from Him abides in you . . . His anointing teaches you about all things.” Do you understand the Bible when you read it? Does it convict you of sin? Does it lead you to rejoice and worship God? If so, that is evidence of the Spirit’s illuminating work in your life.

Do you long for intimate fellowship with God? That, too, is the result of the Spirit’s work in your life (Gal. 4:6). Do you feel compelled to praise God? The filling of the Spirit produces praise (Eph. 5:19). Does your life manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? Are one or more of the gifts of the Spirit operating in your life (1 Cor. 12)? Those, too, are evidences of the Spirit’s work in your life.

All of those ministries of the Holy Spirit are the way He “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). If they are manifest in your life, they provide evidence that you abide in God and He in you (1 John 4:13). Let the Holy Spirit’s work in your life dispel the dark shadows of doubt.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that God would help you examine your life for evidence of the Spirit’s work.

### ***For Further Study***

Read 1 John 3:24.

- What is our part in obtaining assurance?

- Are there any commandments you are willfully violating? If so, confess them, repent of them, and begin to experience the blessedness of assurance.

## 11

### Discernment Between Truth and Error

**“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:1-3).**

*God’s children are able to discern false doctrine.*

A sure mark of every false religious system is doctrinal error, particularly about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Those systems deny that He is Savior and Lord, God in human flesh, the only way to the Father (John 14:6) because salvation comes only through Him (Acts 4:12).

A sure mark, then, of all true children of God is that they believe the truth about Jesus Christ and do not deviate into doctrinal error. Although they may be temporarily duped by false teaching, they will not be permanently deceived by it. The apostle John wrote, “[False teachers] are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:5-6).

When you were saved, you were clear about who Christ was. “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ,” writes John, “is born of God” (1 John 5:1). Had you not passed that doctrinal test, you wouldn’t have been saved. God’s children distinguish spiritual truth from doctrinal error because the Spirit of truth (John 14:16) indwells them.

“O Timothy,” Paul exhorted his beloved son in the faith, “guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Tim. 6:20). I pray that you will guard the precious treasure of truth entrusted to you in the Scriptures and so assure your heart that you belong to the God of truth.

#### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Thank God for revealing His truth to us in the Bible.

## ***For Further Study***

Read John 1:1; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9. What do they teach about the Person of Christ?

## **Reminders of Assurance**

**“Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you” (2 Peter 1:12).**

*Remembering where you’ve been is the key to getting where you want to go.*

The summer of 1980 was a turning point in my ministry. After nearly a dozen years as pastor of Grace Community Church, I took a three-month sabbatical. In my heart I wasn’t sure if I would come back. I felt I had taught my congregation all I knew, and I feared boring them by reiterating the same old things.

But during that summer the Lord taught me a spiritual truth that revitalized my ministry. He showed me the importance of reminding believers of truth they already know. As I read and studied 2 Peter 1, I realized the Lord had called Peter to that same ministry. The more I thought about it, the more important I realized such a ministry is, for it is all too easy to forget spiritual truth. The tragic story of Israel, whose forgetfulness of spiritual truth led to disaster, is a sobering warning.

One of the primary purposes of Communion is to remember the glorious truths about our Lord and His sacrifice on our behalf. Remembrance is also an essential aspect of assurance of salvation.

What are we in danger of forgetting? As he begins his second epistle, Peter lists several key truths Christians must not forget. He reminds us of the realities of our salvation and of the saving faith God graciously granted us based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1), resulting in grace, peace, and knowledge of Him (v. 2). As a result, we have “everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (v. 3).

Having reminded us of the glorious truths of our salvation, Peter then calls us to remember several key virtues that need to be manifest in our lives. As we study them over the next several days, I pray that God will help you to remember what you know and thereby grow in your assurance of salvation.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Thank God for the unsearchable riches of His salvation.

### ***For Further Study***

Begin a program of Scripture memorization today to saturate your mind with the truths of God's Word.

## **Key virtues that need to be manifest in our lives.**

### **Diligence and Excellence**

**“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence” (2 Peter 1:5).**

*God's provision does not preclude our responsibility.*

There are some who believe that since God has provided everything needed for the Christian life, believers should expect Him to do everything for them. Their motto is, “Let go and let God!” If Peter had a motto for the Christian life, it would have been more along the lines of the popular World War II song, “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition!” Peter knew the Christian life is a struggle in which believers need to expend the maximum effort to equip themselves with godly virtues—the virtues that, when present in our lives, produce assurance of salvation. He therefore prefaces the list of those virtues in verse 5 by saying, “Now for this very reason also,” thus pointing us back to God's provision of salvation in verses 1-4. That provision is not meant to eliminate our efforts in living the Christian life but to enable and encourage them. We must, says Peter, live our Christian lives by “applying all diligence” to develop godly virtues.

Heading the list of virtues that should characterize our lives is “moral excellence.” The Greek term *arete* can also be translated “virtue.” In classical Greek literature, it often referred to the ability to perform heroic deeds. It refers to the quality that makes someone or something stand out as excellent. An *arete* knife was one that was sharp and cut well; an *arete* horse was one with speed and endurance; an *arete* singer was one who sang well.

“Moral excellence,” it should be noted, is not an attitude but an action. In fact, some suggest the meaning “moral energy” for it—the moral energy that gives us the power to

do excellent deeds. Our model for that kind of active excellence is Jesus Christ, who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Never waver in your pursuit of excellence. In the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, “Excel still more” (1 Thess. 4:1).

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

- Thank God for supplying everything you need to live the Christian life.
- Ask Him to help you to be diligent to develop godly virtues in your life.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Proverbs 4:23; 8:17; 12:27; 13:4; 21:5. What do those passages teach about the importance of diligence?

## **Knowledge**

**“. . . in your moral excellence, knowledge” (2 Peter 1:5).**

*Moral excellence cannot develop in an intellectual vacuum.*

It’s a frightening thing to realize the extent to which our culture downplays knowledge in favor of emotions. These days people are more likely to ask, “How will it make me feel?” instead of, “Is it true?” Sadly, the church has bought into the spirit of the age. Many people go to church, not to learn the truths of God’s Word, but to get an emotional high. The focus of theological discussion also reflects the contemporary hostility to knowledge. To a shocking extent, truth is no longer the issue; the questions being asked today are, “Will it divide?” or “Will it offend?” To ask if a theological position is biblically correct is considered unloving, and those who take a stand for historic Christian truth are labeled as divisive.

But knowledge is inseparable from moral excellence and Christian growth. It should be obvious that people can’t put into practice truths they don’t know; we must first understand the principles of God’s Word before we can live them out.

Peter knew well the importance of knowledge in developing a stable Christian walk and the assurance of salvation that accompanies it. Therefore, he urged his readers to add knowledge to their moral excellence. *Gnosis* (“knowledge”) refers to insight, discernment, and proper understanding of truth. Lacking such knowledge, believers become “children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of

doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). The resulting turmoil is not conducive to spiritual growth or the development of a settled assurance of salvation.

The Bible commends child-like (i.e., trusting, humble) faith, but not childish faith. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking . . . in your thinking be mature" (1 Cor. 14:20). "So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord," urged Hosea. When we do so, "He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth" (Hos. 6:3).

I pray with the apostle Paul, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9).

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that God would enable you to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

### ***For Further Study***

Read Proverbs 23:7 and Philippians 4:8. What do those verses teach about the importance of godly thinking?

## **Self-Control**

**"And in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance . . ."**  
(2 Peter 1:6).

*Personal self-control demonstrates the certainty of your salvation.*

In Peter's day, the word translated "self-control" was used to describe athletes. The successful ones abstained from sexual activity and an unhealthy diet for the sake of disciplined training exercises. You practice personal self-control when you control your desires and don't allow them to control you.

Let me share some practical tips that have helped me with self-control.

1. *Start small.* For example, begin by cleaning your bedroom or office, then extend that discipline to the rest of your home.
2. *Be on time.* This is more than good advice; it's based on Scripture (see Eccles. 8:6; Eph. 5:15-16). Learn to budget your time, and discipline your desires so you can arrive at places on time.



3. *Organize your life.* Use a schedule book, or make a daily list of things you need to do. Don't let circumstances control your time.

4. *Practice self-denial.* Periodically refrain from something that is all right just to remind yourself who's in charge. Sometime when you want a hot fudge sundae, have a glass of iced tea instead.

5. *Do the hardest job first.* Doing this will keep you from letting the difficult tasks slide by undone.

6. *Accept correction.* Constructive criticism helps you become more disciplined because it shows you what to avoid. Acknowledge the courage of the one who corrects you. It's almost always easier to keep silent, but that person, especially if he or she is a believer, spoke up because he or she likely had your best interest at heart.

7. *Welcome responsibility.* If you're qualified for a task or assignment that arises, such as opportunities at church, volunteer occasionally. That will prompt you to be disciplined and organized.

Some of the items on my list may not seem very spiritual and may even sound silly. However, I've found that pursuing discipline in the secular realm often carries over to the spiritual. Any theology that separates faith from practical conduct is heresy. Self-control is a great Christian virtue and solid proof that one's salvation is genuine.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Ask God to help you get better control of an area in which you lack discipline.

### ***For Further Study***

Read 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 2:2. How do those verses underscore the importance of self-control? Explain.

## **Perseverance and Godliness**

**“. . . And in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness”  
(2 Peter 1:6).**

*Godly perseverance is a sure evidence of true salvation.*

Commentator Michael Green has this to say about the believer who displays biblical perseverance: “The mature Christian does not give up. His Christianity is like the steady burning of a star rather than the ephemeral brilliance (and speedy eclipse) of a meteor.” The Greek word translated “perseverance” in today’s verse (*hupomone*) refers to consistent endurance in righteousness and faithfulness in resisting temptation.

The precise meaning for *hupomone* is hard to pinpoint. There is no exact English equivalent, and it’s not common in classical Greek; but the Bible often uses it in reference to the toils and troubles that are unwelcome in life and produce inconvenience and harm. This word even includes the idea of death, as in the Jewish writings in which *hupomone* speaks of spiritual stamina that empowers people to die for their faith in God.

Despite its scriptural associations with painful difficulties and death, *hupomone* has a positive meaning. William Barclay notes, “*Hupomone* does not simply accept and endure; there is always a forward look in it. It is said of Jesus . . . that for the joy set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2). That is *hupomone*, Christian steadfastness. It is the courageous acceptance of everything that life can do to us and the transmuting of even the worst event into another step on the upward way.”

Godliness is at the heart of scriptural perseverance. The Greek for “godliness” (*eusebeia*) denotes a practical awareness of God in every area of life—a God-consciousness. The word could also be translated “true religion” or “true worship.” It gives God His rightful place by worshiping Him properly, something that is not often done in the contemporary church. Genuine public worship is more than “relevant” programs, new rituals, or catchy music—it contains much reverence for God.

If you are truly a Christian, you will also revere God in your devotional life and obediently persevere in His will daily. You will rejoice and be aware of God in every detail of life.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Ask the Lord to increase both your perseverance and godly worship.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13. What are the results and benefits of faithful perseverance?

## **Brotherly Love**

**“And in your godliness, brotherly kindness . . .” (2 Peter 1:7).**

*Real Christian discipleship will include practical brotherly love.*

A genuine love for God will invariably lead to a love for others. That’s what Jesus said of the two great commandments (Matt. 22:36-40) that summarize the Ten Commandments. The apostle John also related love for God and love for others: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

The kind of love that’s called “brotherly kindness” in today’s verse is very practical. It’s a translation of the Greek *philadelphia*, which might best be rendered “friendship.” We are to be affectionate toward one another. But that does not always happen, especially for those attending big churches. There I fear many people sit on the periphery without developing any relationships. They come to the morning service and then go their way. But that’s not Christian discipleship; we’re to add friendships to our faith and be involved in others’ lives.

People in many different churches want to know more about discipleship, as if it were some complex program surrounded in mystery. But discipleship is simply friendship with a spiritual perspective. Disciples will talk about God, the Scripture, ministry opportunities, and prayer requests—not merely sports, the weather, gardening, or home remodeling. Each is concerned how the other handles the daily affairs and important matters of life. I would encourage you to build friendships and be a part of a Bible study and fellowship group—but make sure your small group does not become exclusive and keep out newcomers.

I once talked to a pastor who had attended one of the annual pastors’ conferences at my church. I asked him what impressed him most about the conference, and he said, “The love of the people for each other. I was drawn to tears when I sensed them worshipping God in the midst of genuine love.” He had seen an application of Jesus’ words, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). You can’t get more practical about Christian love than that!

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray for other members of your small group. If you’re not in one, ask God to lead you to a group.

### ***For Further Study***

Read 1 John 4:7-19.

- With whom does love originate?
- What are the results of that love?

# Agape Love

**“. . . And in your brotherly kindness, Christian love” (2 Peter 1:7).**

*Sacrificial love proves genuine faith.*

Classical Greek had three common terms for love. As we saw yesterday, *phileo* (*philadelphia*) is the love of give and take, best expressed in friendship. *Eros* is the love that takes—one loves another strictly for what he or she can get out of that person. It is typical of the world’s sexual and lustful desires, which are always bent toward self-gratification. *Agape* is the love that gives. It is completely unselfish, with no taking involved. This is the highest form of love, which all the other virtues in 2 Peter 1 ultimately lead to. It seeks another’s supreme good, no matter what the cost. *Agape* was exemplified perfectly by Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf.

But what does this highest type of love look like? A brief survey of the *one anothers* in the New Testament gives an excellent picture. We are commanded to:

Edify one another (Rom. 14:19).  
“Serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).  
“Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).  
Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21).  
Forgive one another (Col. 3:13).  
Instruct one another (Col. 3:16).  
“Comfort one another” (1 Thess. 4:18).  
Rebuke one another (Titus 1:13).  
Encourage one another to do good (Heb. 10:24-25).  
Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).  
“Pray for one another” (James 5:16).  
“Be hospitable to one another” (1 Peter 4:9-10).

The Lord Jesus Christ was involved with individuals. He was a true friend who caringly, lovingly, and sensitively interacted with feeble, needy, and unimportant people and made them eternally important.

Nevertheless we still find people spiritualizing love into a meaningless term. “I love so-and-so in the Lord” really means, “He irks me, but I guess I have to love him if he’s a believer.” Don’t let yourself say that. Instead, display genuine love.

## ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Thank God that Christ showed *agape* love toward you on the cross.

## ***For Further Study***

Memorize one of the verses in the list of *one anothers*, and apply it at every appropriate opportunity.

## **Fruitfulness**

**“For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8).**

*If you are a Christian, your life will produce spiritual fruit.*

If you want to enjoy assurance of salvation in all its richness, you need to faithfully pursue all the virtues we have been studying this past week. The reason is simple—they produce fruit in the Christian life, and nothing is a better indicator of true salvation than that. It was the criterion Christ used to distinguish between the true and false believer (Matt. 7:15-20).

The reasonable question that ought to arise next is, what is fruit? The New Testament says it encompasses many righteous activities. Paul says winning souls to Christ is fruit (Rom. 1:13). The apostle calls the house of Stephanas “the first fruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). In Philippians 4:17 Paul refers to money given in the support of ministry as fruit. The writer of Hebrews says praise is the fruit of our lips (Heb. 13:15). The act of praying is also a spiritual fruit.

Behind every one of those righteous actions is the right attitude, because “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). If you act without a godly attitude, it is only legalism, not genuine spiritual fruit.

All the Spirit-endowed virtues, actions, and attitudes we have discussed, if they are in your life, will assure you that you’ll be “neither useless nor unfruitful.” “Useless” is also used in James 2:20 in relation to dead faith. If you incorporate into your life the virtues of 2 Peter 1:5-7, your faith will not be dead or ineffective.

“Unfruitful” is also used in Matthew 13:22 of the person with a weedy heart and of false, apostate teachers in Jude 12. When you don’t live a virtuous life, you are the same as an apostate or a worldly hanger-on in the church.

“In the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” refers to true believers, those who possess truth as opposed to error. Because you know Christ, you have the ability to live a virtuous life (see Eph. 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3). When you do, God will give you true assurance.

## ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that God would strengthen any of the virtues that are weak in your life.

## ***For Further Study***

Read Matthew 7:13-23.

- What is the first essential for fruitfulness (vv. 13-14)?
- What will happen to many who do good works (vv. 22-23)?

## **Spiritual Amnesia**

**“For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins” (2 Peter 1:9).**

*If you don't practice spiritual virtues now, you'll forget their significance later.*

Physical nearsightedness and mental amnesia both are unwanted conditions. Nearsightedness (*myopia*) causes people's eyes to focus the parallel rays of light in front of the retina. They can clearly see things right in front of them, but the farther out they look, the more out of focus objects become.

Amnesia, of course, is memory loss. Sometimes it's selective, but usually it's total—everything prior to a certain time or incident. It often causes people to forget their name, their family, and everything about their identity and background.

Those two impairments should be even less welcome on the spiritual level. Professed believers who are unfruitful become spiritually nearsighted. They focus on temporal fads and passing earthly fashions. By the time they try to look ahead to eternity, it is so out of focus for them that they can't see it.

Those with spiritual amnesia, because they see no increase of spiritual virtue in their lives, forget they were supposed to be saved from their sinful lifestyles. They don't remember the spiritual “purification” (*catharsis*) that should have occurred in their lives—a reference to a deep internal purging or cleansing.

If you are not diligently pursuing spiritual virtue and moral excellence, you will have a very fuzzy view of your true condition. You may connect an outward action or emotional experience with the time you professed Christ, but you will not have a sense of assurance. Commentator Richard Bauckham explained it this way: “The ‘knowledge of Jesus Christ’ [v. 8], received at conversion, came as illumination to those who were

blind in their pagan ignorance (2 Cor. 4:4), but Christians who do not carry through the moral implications of this knowledge have effectively become blind to it again.”

Regarding 1 Peter 1:5-9, it all comes down to this: if you are seeing your life grow in moral virtue, you have proof of salvation and a reason for assurance. If you are not seeing your life grow in virtue, you have no proof of salvation and no reason for assurance. Be diligent to avoid spiritual myopia and amnesia in your life.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that you would have clear spiritual vision at all times.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Hebrews 6:1-12. How can this passage help you avoid spiritual amnesia?

## **Spiritual Growth and Rewards**

**“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Peter 1:10-11).**

*The pursuit of virtue results in assurance now and eternal reward later.*

Assurance is a great blessing, as Peter tells us in verse 10 of today’s passage. However, it is not the only thing you will enjoy if you are pursuing godly virtues. Years ago a Jewish teenager named Marvin learned about the additional blessing of rewards from the lady who led him to Christ. Before he left home to join the Marines as a struggling, often persecuted believer, she told him: “You’re a true Christian, Marvin. . . . One day when your earthly life ends you will go to Heaven because of what the Messiah has done for you. But if, when you get to Heaven, there is a great big parade and if in the front of the parade there is a great big band—if you don’t change your way of living, you’ll be so far back in the line that you won’t even hear the music.” Marvin got the message and eventually became a dedicated Christian teacher and evangelist.

You and I also must be living our lives in light of eternity—laying up treasures in Heaven, pursuing the virtues symbolized by gold, silver, and precious stones, not giving attention to those lesser things represented by wood, hay, and straw (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Those of us who earnestly pursue the virtues of 2 Peter 1 will receive a superabundant reward. And that’s not a crass motive for good works, because all

believers will one day place their crowns (rewards) before God's throne as an act of homage (see 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 4:10).

Examine yourself to see if there's any moral virtue in your life. If you see none, you can't assume you're saved. If you see some and it's growing, though not perfectly, you can be "certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Peter 1:10). And you can be confident His reward "will be abundantly supplied to you" (v. 11).

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Thank the Lord for the eternal rewards that await those believers who have been faithful.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Ephesians 1:18; 2:7; and 1 Timothy 6:17. What do those verses say about God's blessings and rewards?

## **The Blessings of Assurance**

**"For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).**

*Assurance of salvation lets us enjoy earthly blessings.*

It is encouraging that scriptural assurance results in specific, practical blessings in the Christian life. Here are six I'd like to share with you today.

*Assurance makes you praise God.* There is no way you can be filled with praise and gratitude to God if you're not sure you're saved.

*Assurance adds joy to your earthly duties and trials.* No matter what happens to you, you can be certain that all will work out well in the end. Difficulties are easier to handle when you know they're temporary.

*Assurance makes you zealous in obedience and service.* If you're doubtful about your salvation, you will be apathetic and discouraged. But if you're sure, you will be hard-working and encouraged in serving the Lord.

*Assurance gives you victory in temptation.* When you are confident about your salvation, you can overcome the strongest temptation (see 1 Cor. 10:13). Even if you stumble occasionally, you will know that those events have not changed your standing before God. But you will be depressed and discouraged by temptation if you have no



assurance. You'll doubt your ability to cope with temptations and will wonder if falling victim to one or two will send you to Hell.

*Assurance gives contentment in this life.* You'll rest secure in the promise that you have a glorious heavenly inheritance to look forward to. At the same time, you will be happy and satisfied that God "shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). But if you lack assurance of salvation, you'll scramble and reach for all the world's material goods and feel cheated when you don't obtain them.

*Assurance removes the fear of death.* If you know you're a child of God, you can be sure that the moment you die you will enter Heaven. If you don't have that assurance, however, you'll be even more afraid to die than one who has never heard of Christ.

If you are growing spiritually, you will have assurance, and that will let you enjoy these and other blessings as you look forward to being with the Lord for all eternity.

### ***Suggestions for Prayer***

Pray that God would help you share the blessings of assurance with someone else.

### ***For Further Study***

Read Psalm 138.

- What was David thankful for?
- What reassurances are there for every believer?