

There Must Be More:
God's Prescription for Living the Abundant Life

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Dedication

First, to Jesus, who has given us abundant life. Secondly, my wife, Brenda, who helps me in all my educational pursuits.

Abstract

Abundant life is a life that finds true satisfaction and fulfillment in Jesus alone. It is living in such a way that we realize life begins and ends in Christ. We cannot find abundant life in temporary pleasures, wealth, earthly success, or the praise of man. Abundant life begins in justification, grows more complete in sanctification, and is complete in glorification. 2 Peter 1-11 is where God outlines abundant life here on Earth. It speaks directly to the sanctification part of salvation. Peter writes that faith begins when we are justified by Jesus at Calvary and that our sanctification is what we are to add to our faith in 2 Peter 1:5-7. These seven characteristics of life and Godliness of sanctification Peter writes about are essential to our lives here on Earth. These seven traits, once lived out, enable the Christian to have abundant life today. The traits serve as a plan for spiritual growth in the sanctification process.

Keywords: abundant life, salvation, sanctification

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A Heart for Abundance

As a pastor, my heart breaks when I see people live for the wrong things: for worldly status and success, for pleasure and wealth. Far too many people do not have any idea what abundant life is or how to live a Christian life. The abundant life gets misinterpreted because well-meaning people place the power of abundant life in thinking or doing. Abundant life becomes about success or status. Mega-church pastor Joel Osteen writes that abundant life comes from our thinking, “Everyone is addicted except you. You’re free. You’re clean. You’re helping others. Everyone is struggling, can’t make ends meet, and can’t get ahead except you. You’re blessed. Good breaks are chasing you down. Opportunities are looking for you” (Osteen 9). Abundant life does not put an emphasis on the Christian. A life of abundance is not successful living or believing that God will always fill our lives with wealth and happiness.

I have watched people I love walk away from the church, discard their families, and live in disobedience to God. They never find this abundant life Peter writes about in his final letter. When most people refer to abundant living, they focus solely on John 10:10. I believe the premise of Jesus' promise in John 10:10 is that we have abundant life once we are saved. Abundant life is available in justification. Knowing Jesus at salvation means eternal life is automatic, but abundant life is a process we must build in sanctification as we walk in obedience to God.

This walk of abundance is the walk of holiness. Pastor and author Eugene Peterson wrote an excellent book entitled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. The title itself describes abundant life in the walk of sanctification. One quote really hammers home the process: “there is a great market for religious experience; there is little enthusiasm for the

patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness” (Peterson 16). Holy living is abundant living.

An abundant life is not prosperity. It is not wealth, good luck, getting all the breaks, or success.

The Apostle Paul wrote that we “may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (NIV, Ephesians 3:18-19). John MacArthur writes about that passage: “The inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit leads to the indwelling of Christ, which leads to abundant love, which leads to God’s fullness in us” (*Ephesians* 111). To be filled with the fullness of God is not just the filling of the Spirit. It is knowing Jesus intimately.

Abundant living means we are to know Christ. Some would call this knowledge Lordship salvation. When Jesus is Lord of our lives, we live to please Him. If we are to really live differently than the world, we have to learn all about the life Jesus died to give us. An intimate knowledge of Jesus only comes when we fully surrender our lives to Him.

Jesus prayed in the Garden, “Now this is eternal life: that they *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (NIV, John 17:3 emphasis mine). Eternal life begins in justification, as does abundant life. However, abundant life is not realized here on earth until we understand that our sanctification depends on growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus.

Paul wrote, “that I may *know* Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (NKJV, Philippians 3:10 emphasis mine). This knowledge of Christ can be defined as growing in our faith or getting to know Jesus intimately.

The knowledge begins in salvation in justification and then grows in sanctification. Living abundantly is this cherished process of spending time with Jesus.

But how do we spend time with Him? Is there a plan to live abundantly by growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus? Does the Bible clearly define a plan to live this abundant life?

Peter outlines traits that enable the sanctification process to be added to our lives. God prescribes the systematic elements necessary for an abundant life here on earth in 2 Peter 1:1-11, that when added to our faith, allows for a grand entrance into heaven. The prescription is part of the sanctification process and leads to the glorification part of our salvation. In other words, knowing Christ entirely leads to an abundant life in sanctification and gives us a bountiful homecoming in heaven.

To fully understand abundant life in sanctification, we must begin with what Jesus stated in John 10:10: “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (NKJV, emphasis mine). This one verse is composed of two parts. First, there is a real thief. The context of John 10:10 speaks of a thief that wants to steal the fruit we can produce for Jesus, kill our faith, and destroy our testimony. Sanctification makes us aware of this enemy and the attacks that come against our spiritual walk with Christ. In my thesis, I believe that God revealed a plan for this abundant life and that He has designed a systematic plan for living abundantly.

Background

As a pastor for 28 years, I have seen too many believers fail to see the importance of coming to know Jesus more fully. The trap Christians can fall into is that living the Christian life means coming to church. The Christian life is attendance but no service. Families that I have

seen saved, baptized, and faithfully coming to church begin to fade away from the body of Christ because other things become more important than God.

As I said above, in John 10:10, Jesus promised that He has given us abundant life. We need to know what that promise means. We also must understand that John 10:10 has two parts. The first part explains that there is a thief. An enemy of God's people that wants to steal the abundant life Jesus promised. The enemy takes away families who believe that other things are more important than living for Jesus. But Jesus promised abundant life. The second part of John 10:10 is what most people quote, "I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly" (NKJV). Since Jesus promised it, why do people miss out on having this abundant life?

Because we have been lied to and blinded to the reality that this world we live in is at war with the great deceiver.

We have to see that this real enemy is out to get us. The enemy of our souls has convinced far too many Christians that their relationship with Christ is a small part of their daily lives. Satan has successfully made many of us non-fruit bearers. This enemy has stolen our fruit. This caused us to be unproductive in our walk with God. Beth Moore begins her book *Made to Flourish: Cultivating an Abundant Life* with the idea of bearing fruit as we stay connected to the vine. She states we will bear much fruit "if we submit ourselves" to God's plan (Moore 7). God's plan for us is to grow our faith by abiding in Christ. The enemy doesn't want us to grow or abide in Christ.

The passage Moore's book connects to is John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing" (NIV). The enemy persuades Christians not to abide or stay connected, and therefore many have

allowed their faith to die disconnected to the vine. When we fail to abide or stay close to Christ, we cannot be fruitful in our spiritual walk. Our faith begins to die apart from abiding. Dead faith leads to a destroyed testimony. Sadly, the thief has stolen this abundant life from many Christians.

Yet, in the same verse where Jesus identifies this thief, Jesus also gives a promise: “I have come that they may have life and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (*NKJV*, John 10:10b). Jesus says that He came to provide an abundant life for His people. In John 10:10, Jesus speaks about salvation, being justified on the cross, and the beginning of eternal life. But do we see abundant life in the light of sanctification as we live today? Ray Baughman believes that most do not have abundant life. He writes, “sad is the fact that most people, who have received Him as Savior and have passed from death to life, are not living the abundant life and have never really experienced it” (2). In other words, they have been saved by faith (justified) but are not adding those seven traits to their sanctification.

Passion for the Subject

My passion for abundant life comes from stories of hope and overcoming difficulties in everyday life. I know that Jesus gave us life and that if we genuinely want to live abundantly, we must persevere like so many heroes of the faith in the Bible and those who have shown us how to live the life of faith. If we as believers can learn to trust God when the going gets tough, nothing is impossible for all of us. We have so many stories in scripture and through nonfiction that are meant to inspire us to continue boldly with God.

I believe the stories within much of inspirational nonfiction motivate us to grow closer to Jesus. Inspirational nonfiction is a genre that “contains stories of people who overcome adversity or reach new levels of understanding that inspire and encourage the reader to do the same”

(Harcourt). Many inspirational and Christian living books have inspired me over the years. My love for this genre began when I was in middle school. I grew up listening to the radio. In the evenings, it was pop music, but every afternoon when I came home from school, an announcer called Paul Harvey told inspirational stories. Real people, the trials they overcame, or the inspiration they received came to life in my young heart.

Harvey's stories were split in half on the radio. He would speak for several minutes, then have a commercial break, and come back on with, "Now, the rest of the story." The story was written so that a twist, a solution, or a surprise came, and you were hooked. I can still remember his unique voice and his warmth that made you believe that there was always hope. One story, for example, was about a boy named Guiseppe who was easily seasick. His family had a fishing business, so his dad was very upset about this. His dad even called his son "good for nothing." The boy worked hard at other jobs and even helped his family by giving them money. Years later, the boy fell in love with baseball. The good-for-nothing son was later inducted into the Hall of Fame. A baseball legend named Guiseppe "Joe" DiMaggio.

Harvey's style came alive again for me in the writing of Max Lucado. I certainly relate to him as a pastor, but his writing style is much like the stories of Harvey. Lucado would introduce a story, then give sound biblical principles and offer "the rest of the story" at the end. I have done this several times in preaching and love to write that way as well. Lucado's simple yet powerful writing style is partly why I enjoy his work. One story is of two friends in Fairfield, Connecticut, who had been best friends for twenty-five years. They were both adopted, so many thought their connection made sense. As the story unfolded, one friend wanted to know his birth parents. To his surprise, he found out he had a brother. The brother turned out to be his best

friend (*He Chose 77*). Lucado used this adoption story to connect that we, as believers, have been adopted into God's family.

Several other authors have inspired me, including Steve Farrar, John Eldredge, Jim Cymbala, John Maxwell, and Randy Alcorn. These best-selling writers are known for their powerful storytelling, biblical teaching, and motivational principles of leadership. I enjoy reading these works of inspirational nonfiction because they focus on real-life, inspiring stories that cause me to examine where I am in my walk and to know that God isn't done working in my life. Many inspirational stories in these books all tie in with living abundantly or at least encourage others to keep their heads up and go forward. I see how the stories connected even deeper in my journey through the MFA program.

Vision for the Work

My vision for the work comes from the heart of a pastor. I can testify that many people, including myself, rarely believe that life is abundant. We don't see life as abundant because we think it is physical abundance. Physical abundance would mean that everything is supposed to be easier after salvation. The abundant life is spiritual abundance. We grow closer to God and see how God has moved in our lives. We grow spiritually when we seek Him. Do we not all secretly yearn for a much healthier spiritual life? I have seen far too many come to Jesus for salvation and start off with great joy, and then the thief robs them of the joy of their salvation, and they fail to enjoy the sanctification process. Something subtly happens, and these once joy-filled saints have diminished into occasional churchgoers.

We must examine the promise contained within John 10:10 from Jesus in the context of the verse. It is about salvation. The passage refers to Jesus as being the entrance the door to eternal life. The previous verse says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved,

and he will go in and out and find pasture” (*NKJV*, John 1:9). So, the promise of abundant life refers to salvation in Christ alone and that this pasture is abundant. The word abundant in Greek is *perissos*, meaning “considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate” (Russell 42). That integration of verses nine and ten means our eternal life in Christ begins in justification, grows in sanctification, and culminates in glorification.

Jesus gave us eternal life by being the door and a promise of going to heaven. However, why are so few people really living this abundant, more than we can ever imagine, way of life? My assertion is that many do not know Christ fully and fail to add to their faith the wonderful traits listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. What we have is a lack of knowledge about how we are to grow in sanctification practically. My hope is to help others live this abundant life.

Literary Context

I believe many professing Christians today are not filling their lives with inspirational stories in the word of God. The first five books of the Bible come from an oral tradition and were passed down through storytelling. Then God inspired Moses to write them. Even though we see Genesis through Deuteronomy as the book of the law or historical narrative, the stories of biblical characters are inspiring nonfiction stories. My belief is that inspirational nonfiction began with the Bible.

The genre began with Moses’ written creation account and was passed down through Noah and Abraham. Inspirational nonfiction spread throughout the Old Testament. We hear these Bible heroes stand tall in tough times, and we are encouraged. Biblical characters also teach us that God works through ordinary people. Yes, fictional characters can do the same, but knowing that these were real people somehow connects to the story of hope in God.

We see Bible heroes such as David standing against Goliath. Esther, the queen, saved all of Israel. What about the three Hebrew boys who went into the fiery furnace, and Jesus was in there with them? Daniel in the Lion's Den. Inspirational stories do help us try and find this abundant life that is only found in trusting God. The stories build our faith and move us forward in faith. They are indispensable to our spiritual growth.

We are then introduced to this life in Christ in the New Testament. Without Christ, there is no life. It doesn't have real, objective, transcendent meaning or purpose. However, we also find other real people who inspire us in the New Testament. Stephen preached one sermon and stood for God. He was killed, but the story continued through Saul, and Jesus met Him on the Damascus Road. Jesus saved him, and Paul became one of the greatest writers ever born.

Like Paul, many others have written inspirational nonfiction stories. Writing about faith, hope, God's love, Jesus' life, heroes of scripture, or people alive today who are serving the Lord all over the world helps us seek a closer walk with Christ. This life in Christ is supposed to be abundant, and God has provided a very practical way to achieve this life today. We see in scripture stories that inspire us to continue our walk of faith and move us to hope in God.

Few things in life move people more than good storytelling. This is true in whatever genre people feel more led to or connected to in their own reading. Stories move us, change us, and often shape our lives to be more than we ever thought possible. For me personally, Jim Cymbala's *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* radically changed my view of faith and the power of God because it is filled with real stories of how an extraordinary God moved in the lives of ordinary people and revived what is now one of the largest churches in America, The Brooklyn Tabernacle. Good storytelling connects with the reader and moves us to endure difficult days.

As a genre, inspirational nonfiction encourages readers to live a life of faith in God. Its origins are difficult to pin down, but by definition, inspirational nonfiction is a literary genre that often contains a religious theme and, more specifically, a Christian context of faith with a focus on stories that inspire. The genre has been around for a long time. Maybe the genre has been simply called “nonfiction,” and the world is catching up. Lee Gutkind says it well: “Don’t worry about what it’s called. Call it narrative nonfiction, or literary journalism, or creative nonfiction, or long-form narrative, or feature writing. Does it matter?” (1) Does it? I don’t think it does. Well, whatever it is, or wherever it comes from, I believe inspirational nonfiction is storytelling at its best because it can give us hope for abundance in our daily lives.

Inspirational nonfiction has a Christian theme. Christianity is a story rooted in a new life in Christ. According to John 10:10, this new life is abundant life. Abundant life begins with faith in Christ and should continue until we see Jesus in heaven. Abundant life is a quality of life better than we can imagine. Abundant life is eternal life from justification to sanctification and culminating in glorification. Jesus offers everyone this abundant life and has designed an orderly plan for attaining it in 2 Peter 1:1-11. The apostle Peter writes about abundant living as it pertains to all three components of our salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. God shows us this abundant life in Bible characters by writing their real-life stories to move us to know Him better. The idea that stories have a Christian theme ignites the hearts of believers because it points us back to Christ and brings hope into our daily lives.

The Premise of Inspirational Nonfiction

Inspirational nonfiction has at its core the art of connecting. Does the reader feel connected to the writer? Does the reader feel connected to the stories, lessons, or principles laid out in the book? Writers of inspirational nonfiction become a friend, companion, or guide whom

readers trust is telling them the truth and prodding them to live in the story being written. Acclaimed journalist, literary critic, and educator William Zinsser defines the connection between writer and reader this way: “This is the personal transaction that’s at the heart of good nonfiction writing” (5). That connection or transaction is what draws many readers to nonfiction. They connect with the writer and relate to the stories they share. These personal stories or examples from other people's lives inspire readers to add something from the story to their personal life. In inspirational nonfiction, these examples encourage the reader to live a more abundant life.

Nonfiction as a genre can be divided into many subgenres or categories, such as history, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, travel writing, science, philosophy, and self-help. Inspirational nonfiction is born from these categories and can be written within them. For example, the Bible, a work of religious nonfiction, contains the books of the law, books of history, books of poetry, books of wisdom, and books of prophecy in the Old Testament. Within those books are examples of inspirational nonfiction: the real-life stories of biblical characters can inspire us.

I contend that the roots of inspirational nonfiction begin with the Bible. For example, the Book of Job, the oldest book of the Bible, is commonly and rightly categorized as wisdom literature and epic poetry, but it is also an inspirational story about faith, patience, and unwavering trust in God. God’s blessing was upon Job, but Job didn’t have abundant life because of his wealth. Job had God’s blessing because of God and his relationship with Him. When Job lost his family and all his personal wealth, he still trusted God.

Time after time in scripture, we see followers of God living out faith and God granting them abundant life. Enoch comes to mind. He walked with God, and God took him to Heaven.

We read the story of Noah and learn that one man can make a difference in the world. We examine the story of Abraham, and his personal example moves us to trust God as he did. Their stories are in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Pentateuch, or the books of the law. These inspirational stories in the Bible are the first historical accounts of inspirational nonfiction, and they connect the reader to the writer.

Throughout scripture, we see this connection or “personal transaction” Zinsler wrote about linking the reader to the writer, joining the human writer of the particular story in the Bible and the Divine writer. After all, the Bible is the beginning of inspirational nonfiction because it claims to be inspired by God himself. In 2 Timothy 3:16, the Apostle Paul says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (NIV). Scripture is inspired or, as some versions say, “God-breathed.” Thus, the Bible is the foundation of inspirational nonfiction through the historical narratives contained within its pages that connect us to the Divine.

We recognize the genre of inspirational nonfiction throughout the different books of the Bible. The Old Testament begins with the Pentateuch or the books of the law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It contains the law God gave the Hebrew race, but the book begins with the human race. The first five books of the Bible are both historical narrative and inspirational nonfiction. The books of history are from Joshua to Esther, the history of the Jewish people once they reached the Promised Land. In those books, we see the victories and failures of the people of God. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes all express God’s heart for poetic writing. The Old Testament concludes with both major and minor prophets, present and future narratives that God spoke through ordinary men.

The New Testament also contains prophetic books. In 2 Peter 1:21, the Apostle Peter tells us that prophecy and the men who spoke and wrote them are inspired: “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (NKJV). We see within the pages of prophecy stories of men and women who were inspired to live their lives surrendered to God.

Inspirational nonfiction inspires the imagination. Leland Ryken explains that the truths in scripture connect to and inspire the human imagination: “The example of the Bible, which is central to any attempt to formulate a Christian approach to literature, sanctions the imagination as a valid form of expressing truth” (25). Similar to fiction, inspirational nonfiction engages the imagination by telling stories and encouraging readers to live out the connection to that truth. Again, this is why all historical aspects of nonfiction and inspirational nonfiction have their roots in the Bible.

Billions of readers have been inspired further by the New Testament. The Gospels contain a small window into the life of Christ. The Gospels tell us of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. These are only tidbits. There is no complete view of the thirty-three years of Jesus’ life. Even John said, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (NIV, John 21:25). So, the Christian must understand that the abundance of this life is centered on Calvary. A person's faith in God in the Old Testament is now found in a person (Jesus) and rooted in Calvary. But what does the cross show us? According to Max Lucado, “no gift reveals His love more than the gift of the cross” (*He Chose* 8). Believing in the finished work of Jesus on Calvary begins this new life, and we see *His Story* in the Gospels.

The Gospels also introduce us to the twelve apostles. Jesus picked the twelve to pour His life into during their three years together. MacArthur points out that “[t]he twelve were like the rest of us; they were selected from the unworthy and the unqualified” (*Twelve Ordinary Men* 11). The narrative of Jesus’ choosing of the twelve is inspirational nonfiction because it offers the Christian hope that if Jesus chooses ordinary people, He can work through anyone. A few of the apostles became writers and filled the New Testament with beautiful words about who Jesus is and what this new life means. Believing in the death of Jesus for our sins and trusting Him makes us children of God. As John wrote, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (*NIV*, John 1:12). The Gospels show us that God uses ordinary men and women just like the first twelve Jesus chose.

Some of these original twelve became the first ones to write about the new life in Christ, how to know Jesus, and how to live this life out in faith. The inspirational nonfiction of the New Testament shows us Jesus, centers on the cross, and then explains to us what this new life actually means. It is a crucified life—a life of surrender to Jesus and following Him. The apostles certainly were the first to understand this new life. They had an abundant life, even though it was a life of sacrifice. They were ordinary, yet, they laid down their lives for Jesus. They became real-life stories in the Bible of inspirational nonfiction.

The few details we know about the apostle Thomas are the ingredients of inspirational nonfiction. Like most of us, Thomas had moments of doubt and weakness, but he loved Jesus. He was brave. His devotion to Christ was inspirational. When Jesus made His final trip to Jerusalem after the death of Lazarus, Thomas said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (*NIV*, John 11:16). Thomas is sadly known for his moment of doubt, but his life is so much more than that. This life laid down is in Jesus’ death and also in the death of

Thomas. He took the gospel as far as India, where churches today claim him as their founding father. Thomas was also believed to have been killed with a spear (MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* 164), much like Jesus on the cross. Thomas's life and death inspire us to be bold in our faith.

The Promise of Abundant Life

Abundant life is the connection to the crucified life, dying to self, or what some call the exchanged life. The exchanged life is that since Jesus died for me, I allow Jesus to live through me. It is placing our faith in Jesus and surrendering our wills and wants to His will for our lives. It is faith in Christ first and then understanding that it is a daily decision to surrender, reject sin, and combat the enemy. Christian author and professor C.S. Lewis said it this way, "Christ says, 'Give me All.' I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you" (157). Again, Jesus promised we could accomplish this because He has: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (*NKJV*, John 16:33). As we surrender to Him, He lives through us, and our lives become His.

Many terms define a life of surrender and submission to Christ. These terms have been spoken of in a few different ways. The terms crucified, exchanged, surrendered, or abundant life are all interchangeable. They connect to the equation that surrender equals abundance. Stephen Olford writes, "The exchanged life is one of abundance" (xxii). We could say He died for us, so we should live for Him. But that's not complete. Abundant life is allowing Jesus to live through us as we walk by faith in Him. We submit our will to His and surrender our rights to His.

We appropriate this life by faith, and this leads to abundant life. Several books explore this subject and tell us how to have this abundant life. In *Made to Flourish: Cultivating an*

Abundant Life, Beth Moore writes about the heart's soil, being fruitful, gleaning, and fruit from the vine. In *The Abundant Life*, Ray Baughman connects abundant life with forgiveness and assurance and writes about reading the Bible and praying. In *Abundant Living: Two Truths from the Parable of the Sower Can Release You into Abundant Living*, Kevin Shorter mentions John 10:10 in his introduction and writes about the soil, seed, the parable of the lampstand, and hearing from God. In *Abundant Life: Don't Just Exist. Live Abundantly*, Tayo Tychus mentions John 10:10 and John 16:33 and speaks more to what we are and what we could be. These four inspirational nonfiction books all have different perspectives on how abundant life is defined.

The promise of abundant life is faith in Christ, but how to attain this abundant life must be rooted in scripture. We must follow the Word abundantly as it relates to life in scripture. Besides John 10:10, we are connected to abundant life in one other place. In 2 Peter 1:10-11, the apostle Peter writes, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV). Peter writes about living this life of faith or how to receive an abundant entrance into heaven. The abundant entrance implies there is a difference between someone just entering heaven and someone else hearing the words "well done." We only find abundant life as we live out God's Word.

It is important to remember that abundant life begins at justification with faith in Christ and grows in sanctification. Then glorification is where we see the final stage of faith. Faith is the key to all three parts of salvation. That is why 2 Peter 1:1 calls our faith "precious" (NKJV). Faith is the foundation of all we are, and in 2 Peter 1:1-11, we are told to add to our faith in sanctification so we fully understand this glorious salvation we have received. The foundation of

this thesis is that in sanctification, we must build our faith. The seven characteristics listed in 2 Peter 1:5-8 are crucial to living out our faith, making our calling sure, and knowing heaven is real because we lived a life of fully believing what Jesus promised.

Chapter 1: What is the Abundant Life?

A Biblical Definition and Exegesis of 2 Peter 1:1-11

Today, abundant life is too often misunderstood. Is it happiness? Is it a life of health, wealth, and prosperity? Is it living the dream or your best life? Is it a successful life? In our depiction of what an abundant life really means, we may be all over the place in the United States. If we asked people sitting in our churches, would they say they know the definition of an abundant life? In this chapter, I will argue that abundant life is not worldly prosperity; it is living a life surrendered to God's will, following the prescription laid out in 2 Peter 1:1-11.

Our culture might make this term relative. What you define abundant life and what I define abundant life can be two or several different things. In other words, where you find your happiness. If that's true, then some days, abundant life is living in the mountains, not going to work, or fishing all day. My boys would say abundant life is playing video games all day.

The conclusion must be that abundant life hasn't been defined clearly. That's right. We have not clearly found what Jesus said we have because we haven't had a blueprint of what abundance means. So, Peter tells us how to find this abundant life.

2 Peter 1:1-11 begins with Peter speaking to the attitude of the believer. He calls himself "a bondservant" (2 Peter 1:1). The word bondservant speaks to being entirely under the control of someone. A master over the servant. We understand this submission as allowing Jesus to live through us and a surrendered or a crucified life; they become interchangeable terms for the idea of a bondservant. I belong to the master. My life is not mine to live the way I want to, apart from Jesus.

Surrender or bondservant are not words we understand in society today. That is why we are speaking of spiritual terms here. A bondservant was someone who had no rights and could

even be killed by the master for no reason. We see a beautiful picture of this attitude with Job. He had what many would call abundant life; wealthy with a large family, Job's life screamed with success. Yet, the enemy gets permission to take it all away. Job loses everything we would want for happiness. Job defends God and says, "Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). God gave me life; I am His, and my master can take my life if He chooses. Wow!

The Path of Abundance

This path to abundance comes through surrender. We will never surrender our lives apart from crucifying this fleshly nature inside of us. The idea of surrender is foreign to the flesh. Lewis writes that surrender "is a terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ" (158). To further understand the idea of surrender, we see the word bondservant as a slave to Christ. That servitude comes after the believer's justification and works through us in sanctification. Having the attitude of a bondservant in the sanctification process reveals how we can live an abundant life.

Peter is uniquely qualified to write about abundant life. Peter validates his calling with the title: "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The apostle Paul defines what an apostle is in 1 Corinthians 9:1, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord" (NIV)? In a Christian context, the word apostle was designated to men who were called out and had seen the risen Christ. It is Bible time, people. Peter was an apostle because Jesus called him out to follow Him. Peter had also seen the risen Christ and knew Jesus intimately. He ran into the empty tomb in John 20:4, and Peter talked with Jesus in John 21. Peter has the authority to speak for God and was even given the keys to the kingdom here on earth in Luke 11:52. This is why Peter has the authority to define the way to live an abundant life in our sanctification.

Peter's qualifications don't make him more spiritual than the rest of us. MacArthur writes, "Peter was exactly like most Christians—both carnal and spiritual. He succumbed to the habits of the flesh sometimes; he functioned in the Spirit other times" (2 *Peter*, 37). Peter had simply learned to walk in faith that Jesus had provided for all of us.

In 2 Peter 1:1-2, we see that Peter calls our faith precious and that faith has been obtained "by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (NKJV). This speaks to our being justified by Christ's death on the cross. We have faith, which is precious, but the faith we have been given is only because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We have been made righteous because Jesus is completely righteous. Righteousness means "doing what God requires or doing what is right" (Vine 527). That definition is critical to understanding 2 Peter 1:1-11 and living an abundant life.

To understand the plan God has outlined in 2 Peter 1, we need to understand the meaning of the word "knowledge." Renowned wordsmith Kenneth Wuest explains in 2 Peter 1:2 in referencing the word "knowledge." This knowledge "speaks of experiential, that is gained by experience" (Wuest 18). The knowledge of Christ is gained through practically living out our faith. Practically refers to living out our faith daily, event by event. Experience comes from doing. In the excellent book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell asserts over and over that practical experience is achieved by doing something for 10,000 hours. We become experts once we reach that level of experience.

Our faith begins in justification. That is why 2 Peter 1:1-4 has to do with justification, and 2 Peter 1:5-10 speaks of this practical faith in sanctification. The passage ends with our glorification in v.11. The prescription for abundant life in 2 Peter 1:1-11 pertains to all three

components of our salvation. Understanding that all three elements of our salvation are revealed here in 2 Peter 1:1-11 is critical to recognize this passage as the blueprint for an abundant life.

Faith is the first step. It is precious to God and us, but Peter knows there is more. Faith is our justification. I like how the pastor and author Max Lucado defines justification: Jesus “did something more. He let you wear his own clothes so that you would be properly dressed” (*He Chose*, 75). As our righteousness is filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), as believers in Christ, we now where the righteousness of Christ.

In 2 Peter 1:1-11, we add Sanctification to our justification. Then Peter encourages us to grow in our knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus and instructs us to realize that God “has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (*NKJV*, 2 Peter 1:3). The seven traits of godliness in verses five through seven are available. Peter wants us to know that he has seen the evidence of God’s glory and virtue (verse 3) firsthand.

The promises of God further examine the evidence in verse 4, and the one we are hoping for takes us back to Jesus in John 10:10: “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (*NKJV*). However, the promise is not for a life of problem-free living. The promises are given to us to live out our faith by trusting in God and His Word. Warren Wiersbe explains it this way, “these promises are great because they come from a great God, and they lead to a great life” (437). That is why abundant life is available to all but must be practically added to our faith in sanctification.

To explain abundant life more clearly as a process or plan, John Phillips headlines his commentary of 2 Peter 1:1-11 with these words: How to be Sanctified (232). Phillips goes on to say how to be sure of our salvation. Being confident of our salvation means we are to depend on

Jesus. Phillips writes, “If everything depends on Him, then all is well. We can be glad that it does not depend on us” (229). There have been times in my walk of faith when I have not followed God. If salvation had anything to do with me, I’d be sunk.

Because salvation depends on Christ, salvation doesn’t stop at justification. Phillips builds through the pages of his commentary what Peter states clearly that we are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Justification not only makes us right with God and depends on Jesus, but it also gives us the power to live abundantly with a fulness of hope and joy and peace in sanctification. We now have this new nature, and it is the very nature of Christ.

Peter takes the salvation process further by claiming we have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4). We still live in the world even though we have a new nature. We’ve escaped positionally because our life is “hidden in Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). But practically, our lives still have a problem. The old flesh spiritual battle is the obstacle to growing our new nature in this flesh-filled world.

However, the flesh and the spiritual life battle practically. The two natures collide. Former Moody Church pastor, and respected commentator, Warren Wiersbe tells us that “nature determines appetite” (437). Abundant living depends on which nature we feed. Do we feed the flesh and give in to the world’s immorality? We have already escaped that depravity, but we must resist its temptation practically every day.

The temptation to sin is a daily battle. Christian radio host and author Brant Hansen informs us about sin, “my sin is sin because it stops me from who I’m supposed to be and what I could have been” (Hansen 56). Sin halts the sanctification process. We stunt our growth by giving in to the temptations the enemy places in our minds.

However, since we have God's nature within us, we should live in a spiritual state where we think of holy things, not worldly things. That's not to say we should not have problems and cares to take care of in this world; it simply means Christians should associate with the things of God.

Justification brought us the escape from the world, but sanctification must free us to live like we no longer allow the world to dictate who we are and what we do for the kingdom of God. We have this two-nature battle within, but we must make every effort to allow our holy nature to dominate our everyday lives. The spiritual state of who we are requires a daily determination in our sanctification process. That's how we find abundant life.

The Determination of Abundance

Could people not find this abundant life simply because they do not want to make an effort? That is why Peter writes, "giving all diligence" (*NKJV*, 2 Peter 1:5). Thomas Schreiner says this: "The priority of grace, however, does not cancel out strenuous moral effort. Believers must 'make every effort' or apply 'all diligence' (*NASB*) in carrying out Peter's commands. A godly character does not emerge from passivity or lassitude" (298). What would be the result if we examined idleness or laziness in the Christian faith? Is the reason that many today are not living abundantly more to do with a failure to understand the process through sanctification? Do we fail to give our lives over to Jesus as we follow His plan? Perhaps it is more of a difference between thinking and doing.

2 Peter 1:1-11 tells us to do these things. The writer of Proverbs 16:3 also makes this point when he writes, "Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established" (*NKJV*). The revelation is to do what is right, and then we can begin to feel and think about what is right. It's like doing the right thing, whether we feel like it or not. James said this: "Show me

your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (*NKJV*, James 2:18). How many times have we done what was right, made the phone call, visited the hospital, or helped someone else and wound up getting blessed? We may not have felt like doing it, but we did it anyway, and then we were glad we did. When we do what is right, we step into the plan to live an abundant life.

We must examine another truth here at the beginning of 2 Peter 1:5. The verse does not tell us that salvation depends on what we do. As we submit to the nature of God, our appetite for the old nature will diminish. That temptation will never entirely go away while on earth, but it should decrease as we grow in faith. However, the sanctification process of adding the seven traits in verses five through seven is letting Christ live through us and not giving in to sinful behavior.

Some Christians fail to understand the sanctification part of salvation because they do not understand what salvation entirely means. MacArthur points out that some people misunderstand salvation because they misinterpret the gospel. He comes to our passage with the position that these people feel that salvation is determined by the person to believe strongly enough and avoid certain sinful behaviors. He writes, “that salvation is an utterly sovereign, divine operation in which sinners’ redemption (from justification to glorification) depends solely on God” (*2 Peter*, 34). Please understand that justification was entirely the past work of Christ and that future glorification is God granting us heaven because of the past event of the cross. I am addressing that the works we do in the present sanctification part of salvation are determined by which nature we submit to while in this fleshly body.

Peter addresses justification in 2 Peter 1:1-4. The faith that we have, the grace God has given us, the peace God gives, and the righteousness of Christ. He moves into the operation of

making a conscious effort to grow our nature, and then the transition into the sanctification process is at the end of 2 Peter 1:5 when we are told to add to our faith. The sanctification and victory over sin are practically outlined in 2 Peter 1:5-7. This is what I call the prescription for an abundant life. We have abundant life because we are justified, and now we have to appropriate Christ's victory daily. Peter ends the text with glorification in 2 Peter 1:11. We need to focus now on v.5-7.

The Traits of Abundant Life

2 Peter 1:5-7 offers the prescription for an abundant life. It is a plan that says we are to add seven-character traits to our faith. Warren Wiersbe points out why this is essential: "where there is life, there must be growth. The new birth is not the end; it is the beginning. God gives His children all they need to live godly lives, but His children must apply themselves and be diligent" (437). He goes on to say that these traits are available but not automatic. Below, I have listed the seven traits from verses 5-7. Next to these traits, I have included some biblical characters who possess them.

1. Virtue—moral excellence and goodness of character. Mary, the mother of Jesus, possessed moral excellence, and so did a forgotten character named Jabez.
2. Knowledge—practical knowledge. It means knowing what to do in every situation and doing it. Caleb was one of two spies who knew what was right and did it. Another man in the Bible who did this was the prophet, Elisha.
3. Self-control—a fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:23. Letting the Holy Spirit guide us in our daily lives. Daniel is an example of diet and deed.
4. Patience—endurance in dealing with people and things. Who else but Job? We always hear about the patience of Job.

5. Godliness—this word simply means God-likeness. It describes a man who is right in his relationship with God. Who lives above the ordinary stresses that control other people. He is calm under pressure and seeks the welfare of others above his own. We have to see Joseph as an example of godliness.

6. Brotherly kindness—The love that binds us together. The love of a family. The church in Acts exemplified brotherly love. Jonathon's love for his friend David is undoubtedly another example.

7. Love—A love that can only come from God and is available only to Christians. Unconditional love for God and each other. It is love in the plural and means multifaceted love. Who else but Jesus can demonstrate this trait? No one loves as He does.

A closer examination of these biblical examples will be given in chapter three, but a short synopsis of the traits is in order. Peter begins the seven traits with virtue or moral excellence. Our character has to be Christ-like if we are to live in the world and be a witness for Christ. He saved me, so I should live as He changed me. The virtue we possess should be clear to everyone we work with, our families, and even change how we behave in the world. Character is not something we can turn on and off. Character counts in this life. It is only by demonstrating Godly character that we can begin to grow.

Growing is exactly what knowing means. We grow in character and the knowledge of doing what is correct as we make the right character decisions. We know what to do and do it. We have to look at this as growing up as spiritual children. We may have been saved as adults, but we need to grow in our spiritual knowledge of who God is and what Jesus has done for us.

Too many times in my life, I have focused on what I don't have. Things like money, recognition, and success seem to have eluded me. I'm sixty-one, and I will not be able to retire until I'm in my mid-seventies. Sometimes my eyes get focused in the wrong place. I worry about what I don't have or what I should have at this time in my life. Growing in the knowledge of God should push me to focus on what I do have and what I have already seen God do in my life. When I focus on what He has done, I begin to see all God has done, and it encourages me to realize I am still growing.

This knowledge only happens by doing what is right. Children can know what is right and still do what is wrong. We say to our children, "Don't do that!" And they still do it sometimes. We must grow past spiritual infancy and become spiritual adults. Adulthood only happens as we learn about God in his word and see how God works in our lives.

Self-control is next. The progression of sanctification and abundant living cannot happen without self-control. The word means "complete control of one's desires and actions" (Vine 555). This doesn't happen without character and knowledge. They are all connected, and one cannot occur without the other. Self-control is built through character and knowledge, and we, little by little, build more and more self-control.

Peter gives the next trait. In the NKJV, it is the word patience. I am not sure anyone likes the word patience. I like how the New King James Version uses the word perseverance. Sometimes in Scripture, the King James Version calls this word longsuffering. Patience with certain people probably does require longsuffering. The word refers to bearing up or being able to endure things and people. It is evident in life that people and circumstances need an extra amount of perseverance, and this trait again connects with the others that precede it. We grow into perseverance as we follow the prescription for an abundant life.

The trait of godliness informs us to grow in the knowledge of God and become more Christ-like in our actions. We live above the ordinary things of the world and don't allow those things to bother us. The word Godliness is also how we are to view God. MacArthur tells us the word Godliness "could also be translated 'true religion,' or 'true worship'" and conveys the idea that one who has it properly honors and adores God" (*2 Peter*, 42). Living an abundant life starts with how we honor and revere God and then how we demonstrate our reverence for Him in worship.

Godliness connects to the next trait, brotherly kindness. It is the Greek word *philadelphia*. The word means brotherly love. If we are not Christ-like, it will be hard for us to see ourselves as related to the family of God. As churches, these two must be championed, first, by showing the church and the world that we are a stable family of God. Second, by helping other churches worldwide by realizing that every one of us are related no matter where we live on the planet. Mission-minded churches get the connection and demonstrate these two traits.

The final one is love—agape love, in Greek. This is the love that only comes from God. A person may have brotherly love for their family, but agape love means to love the unlovable. We all love people who love us, but agape is loving those who will never even love us back. This love isn't possible without knowing Christ and allowing Him to live through us as we grow in our faith. Agape love is the final evidence that we are His children, and we have learned to see people as He sees them.

These traits demonstrate a life of faith. A life lived for Christ and a truly abundant life. Faith in Christ is where abundant life begins. It cannot be done any other way. However, the position of this paper is that people will not find abundance unless they follow the prescription laid out in *2 Peter* 1:1-11. It is also my position that many do not find the abundant Christian life.

Max Lucado, one of the most prolific authors of inspirational nonfiction, writes that we are in “an epidemic of commonness” (Lucado *Cure* 15). When we add sin, stress, emotion, and a lack of growth in our faith, are we surprised that we are not living abundantly?

These seven traits added to our faith are vital to the Christian life. 2 Peter 1:1-11 is the process of growing in faith or spiritual maturity. David Helm writes, “these qualities grow out of life and out of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not enough for the Christian to ‘let go and let God,’ as though spiritual growth was God’s work alone. The Father and the child must work together” (438). The reality of living a selfless life is not where most people want to live, so it is safe to assume that many will not work with God toward abundance. However, that should not exclude us from trying to attain every part of what God has for us in the sanctification process. MacArthur writes in his commentary, “The Lord bestows all these so that believers may become full partakers of the divine nature” (2 *Peter*, 30). The seven traits allow us to live fully in the divine nature.

So, if we have all the things we need for life and godly living, then what do we do? Well, Peter, inspired by God, doesn’t leave us there. He gives us the rules or directions to follow in a practical way of living. Abundant life is grasped as we follow the plan God laid out in 2 Peter 1:5-7. The passage instructs us that there are seven critical things we do in our lives that will lead to a successful walk with God. Peter states, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (NKJV). There are seven crucial action steps that we should take to govern our lives.

Again, biblical commentator, Warren Wiersbe, says this about verses 5-7: “It is impossible for fallen human nature to manufacture these seven qualities of Christian character. They must be produced by the Spirit of God.” (439). There are people who do not know Jesus, who are patient and possess self-control, but these characteristics give glory to self, not to God. We know as Christians that the only way we have these virtues is because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The divine nature becomes who we are as we grow our faith by adding the traits mentioned in verses five through seven to our faith. We trust God, and our character proves that we are His for all eternity.

Peter says we have been given promises, and we have the divine in us. Peter writes, “His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust” (NKJV, 2 Peter 1:3-4). He connects the life of faith in Jesus with promises and that we do not have to give in to sin.

The following few verses get practical: the “how to” live abundantly. Peter writes, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (NKJV, 2 Peter 1:5-8). Faith plus seven traits are connected to the idea of abundant living.

The By-Product of Abundance

Peter writes in verse 8 that if believers have these seven traits and they “abound,” their life will be fruitful. The word *abound* is *pleonazo* in Greek, meaning “to be in abundance” (Vine 5). In other words, Christians are to add to their faith these seven traits in abundance. Then they

can live with the assurance of salvation and persevere in life. Living out the seven-character traits Peter mentions demonstrates a life committed to following Jesus and shows everyone that we trust God with our lives. Our lives serve as examples that Jesus has changed us, and through the sanctification process of our salvation, we live out the plan Peter outlines in 2 Peter 1: 5-7. It is the plan God intended as He inspired Peter to write it.

2 Peter 5:8 connects with the previous verses with “For if these things are yours” (NKJV). It means “since these things are yours.” Christians already have these traits, but we must grow in them spiritually. Think of what we do have. We have Christ. We have abundant life available. However, if we do not realize what we already have, it’s like a man forgetting all the blessings, benefits, and love of his family. He can have more blessings, but once he takes his eyes off of what he’s got, he can fall into sin. I have seen too many families destroyed because the husband forgets all the good he had in his life.

The phrase, since these things are yours, should motivate us to enjoy what we have and allow them to grow in the knowledge of Jesus and let Him be evident in us. This knowledge of Christ in us will cause us to find out who we are and live a productive, fruitful life that is abundant before others. Not only abundance but Spirit-filled and flowing over into the lives of everyone you encounter. Since you have these things, why not make them prominent and beneficial to everyone else?

An examination of verse eight in Greek shows that this idea of making the traits of verses five through seven abound means that this is a superabundance. In other words, the idea is that we allow ourselves to be so full of our knowledge of God that our lives pour over into the lives of others. Wuest, in his word study, writes: “The source of the Christian life is God; the outflow, through the believer. But the Christian life that does not run over, or overflow with spiritual

blessings to others, is never a source of spiritual refreshment to others” (25-26). That superabundance speaks to our motivation. We are not to hoard the characteristics of verses five through seven so that we can get blessings from heaven.

There are two words to examine in 2 Peter 1:8. First the word barren. Barren means “idle or lazy” (Vines 47). Again, this points to the effort in living the spiritual life—the mindful daily determination to work at growing our new nature. We can be saved by Jesus and do nothing with the freedom we have to enjoy growing in our knowledge of who Jesus is and what He wants for our lives. The second word to examine is the word unfruitful. Vine writes that it means “being useless, in the sense of accomplishing nothing” (681). Many people want their life to make a difference. They want to live with a sense of accomplishment. Their hope is that when they get to the end that their life made a difference.

As a pastor, I have seen firsthand when a man or woman makes a difference in the lives of other people. Several times funerals revealed to me things about a person where they blessed others and caused people to want to do more with their lives. I have also seen the other side. Once I had to preach at a funeral for a man who didn’t live for Christ at all. His mom said he made a decision for Christ at a young age, but his life was unfruitful. His son spoke at the funeral, and the best words he could come up with were these: “Well, Dad lived like he wanted.” I will never forget those words about a man with a faith that was useless.

As we examine the word barren, we have to see that being productive for Jesus has nothing to do with our talent, gifts, or accomplishments. However, the reverse is also true. People can be gifted, have an excess of wealth, and accomplish nothing in this world for the kingdom of God. Even though they possess everything they need in the flesh, they never made

these spiritual qualities abound in their lives. They have done very little to cultivate their spiritual growth, so their spiritual abundance that should be fruitful is, in fact, useless.

The Significance of Abundant Life

Peter points out the importance of living an abundant life in verse nine. “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9). Without following the prescription for the abundant life in verses five through seven, the Christian is nearsighted. It means they cannot see the plan before them because they are not living out their faith by allowing the traits to abound. They can then become blind—no vision for their life as to what God has in store for them.

Believers who live this way have allowed the old nature to become their dominant nature. They have forgotten what it means to be saved and may even become ungrateful for the grace God has given them. They could look, talk, and act just like a lost person, and unless they told someone they were saved, no one would even know they are Christian. Living shortsighted and blind leads to wondering if that person has ever been born again.

Remember, verses five through ten are speaking of sanctification. Adding to our faith, verses five through seven are the qualities we want. However, eight and nine show us what happens if we don't add them to our faith. Verse ten issues a warning. Peter gives a clarion call to “be even more diligent” (2 Peter 1:10) to add these things. Why? There are some dangers. First, a believer may not know their calling in verse ten or even understand what God expects them to do with this glorious gift of salvation. They may attend church somewhat faithfully but not understand what they should become because of Christ. Second, a Christian may begin to doubt if they have been justified if they never allow the process of sanctification to grow. They

could live through a season or seasons of doubt. That is precisely what I went through for almost two years.

Finally, verse ten warns us that we could “stumble.” The word stumble speaks of a perpetual failure to obey (Vine 617). Failing to grow brings a sense of defeat and a life of not knowing all we could have done because we have already been promised victory.

The significance of this life is evident here on earth. But the passage doesn't leave us there in the life of sanctification. Peter continues the story in the remaining verses and offers the finality of abundant life in the closing verse: “for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*NKJV*, 2 Peter 1:11). This verse is our glorification. According to MacArthur (2 Peter), An abundant entrance into heaven results from living an abundant life in the pursuit of holiness and brings assurance of salvation. This assurance results in a great life and a grand entrance when we are finally home (45). Home in heaven is further evidence of abundance.

The idea of entering heaven is secure for every believer in Jesus Christ. The assurance of salvation is the life lived out, defined in 2 Peter 1:5-10. A believer will be assured of salvation because he or she is making these traits evident in front of others. This is essential in the Christian life. I went through a two-year period as a pastor where I doubted my salvation. I kept looking back at all my failures after being saved. I hadn't grown in my faith because I never knew how or why. Lack of assurance came from not growing and learning more about my life in Christ.

An Abundant Entrance

We are growing by obeying and increasing our faith so that other people can see that we are genuinely saved, and that lifestyle emboldens us to trust God no matter what we face. As our

faith grows by allowing these characteristics to flourish in our lives, we become more secure in our faith. The process is crucial in abundant living. However, Wiersbe, in his commentary, makes some astounding statements about 2 Peter 1:11. First, he writes that “the growing Christian can look forward to ‘an abundant entrance’ into the eternal kingdom! The Greeks used this phrase to describe the welcome given Olympic winners when they returned home” (440). This life of faith that grows in sanctification through these traits allows us to be assured and receive a glorious entrance into heaven. Second, Wiersbe writes, “Every believer will arrive in heaven, but some will have a more glorious welcome than others. Alas, some believers ‘shall be saved, yet so as by fire’” (440). Wiersbe is referring to 1 Corinthians 3:15, where we read, “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (NKJV). Some will enter heaven, but their work is for themselves and not for the glory of God. Believers that make the traits of 2 Peter 1:5-7 abound in their life will receive an abundant entrance into heaven.

Peter detailed living in such a way that it is not only abundant life in sanctification but also an abundant entrance in glorification. Living by surrender and growing our faith to be secure in who we are and what God has called us to do. Lewis puts surrender beautifully, “Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life, and you will save it” (177). I don’t see many Christians living this way, and I believe it is because they don’t see the plan of God Peter has revealed here in this text. The world has made too many sick without the prescription for an abundant life. When Christians don’t grow, they become fragile in their faith and try to find other things to hold on to rather than Jesus. Their view of Jesus is skewed, and their faith is stunted. 2 Peter 1:1-11 must be seen as the plan God laid out and gave Peter the blessing of writing such a worthwhile walk of faith. Peter lived this life of faith, and we should as well.

Chapter 2: Why Should I Live the Abundant Life?

A Teleological and Theological Defense for Living Out 2 Peter 1:1-11

Imagine being alive but not really living. That idea of not really living is probably more prominent than we want to admit. Mel Gibson’s iconic line in *Braveheart* is true, “Every man dies. Not every man really lives” (Stepping). Abundant life is living life to the fullest. It is not settling for just faith in Christ. It is as Paul wrote, “That I may know him” (*KJV*, Phil. 3:10). Why live the abundant life? Because it is only in the effort of living in abundance that we find Christ. In this chapter, I hope to make clear why we all should live the abundant life.

The seven traits listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 begin with faith. Peter unfolds the sanctification plan for abundant life with the words, “add to your faith” (2 Peter 1:5). The word faith means “believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance—to believe in, and to have confidence in God” (Vine 212). Throughout the Bible and throughout history, God has put a plan in place for His people to believe in and trust in Him. Faith in Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity. Faith defines who we are as believers and is the foundation we must build on to live with our confidence in God. The word faith can be studied in several different ways, with many biblical examples and inspirational nonfiction books to show us the purpose God has designed for us in our walk of faith.

The Teleological Argument

The purpose of abundant life is for us to grow closer to God as we walk in sanctification. We add to our faith by following what God shows us through His word and the writings of the Christian faith. God has inspired His Word, church leaders, and numerous Christian authors throughout church history to explain this life of faith with the goal of seeking God and living abundantly. They wrote about examples of faith and prioritized Christian living in allowing

Christ to live through them daily. Their works echo one of Jesus's core commands, that "whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (NIV, Matthew 16:24). This call to die daily and take up one's cross is the call to fight the battle between flesh and spirit. Just as Jesus died to justify us, we must die to grow in a deeper walk of sanctification. We have the plan for the deeper life written for us to follow throughout Scripture and in early Christian literature.

Early Christian Writers

The early church fathers wrote about the battle between flesh and Spirit. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Thus, my two voluntary inclinations, one old and the other new, one carnal and the other spiritual, were engaged in mutual combat and were tearing my soul apart in the conflict" (207). This conflict of old and new life or flesh and spirit is what makes prioritizing the traits of 2 Peter 1:5-7 the most essential purpose of the Christian life because failing to grow in sanctification attributes to living life in our flesh. We become vulnerable to the enemy's attacks and will lose the fight more than we win.

Later writers of inspirational nonfiction, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, were instrumental in expanding a life of faith and inspiring Christians to die to themselves. The writers took faith in Christ as the foundation of this new life. When Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of Wittenberg Castle church, his premise was "the just shall live by faith" (NKJV, Romans 1:17). Luther and Calvin expanded this life of faith in Christ by trying to help the masses know what faith is all about. Their writings in the Protestant Reformation took Christians from depending on the church leaders to relying on Jesus. These early writers utilized Bible characters to encourage their readers to live faithfully. The Bible tells us that living faithfully is what God desires. We are even reminded in Romans 1:17 that "The just shall live by faith"

(NKJV). The purpose of being made right with God through Christ is to live out our faith practically, as described in 2 Peter 1:5-7.

The purpose of our faith was further defined in the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation awakened many believers to obey God's Word, follow Jesus, and reject sin. Later, puritan writers, such as John Owen and Thomas Brooks, encouraged believers to live out their faith by rejecting sin and fleshly desires and resisting the enemy and his temptations. Owen reminds us of sin by writing, "leaving it alone lets it grow; not to conquer it is to be conquered by it" (30). This battle with the flesh tempts us to feed it and let it grow. In his introduction of *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, Brooks expounds upon 2 Corinthians 2:11, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (NKJV). Brooks compares Satan to a greedy merchant who takes every opportunity to entice and deceive the Christian. Brooks brilliantly writes, "Satan is that wily merchant, that devoureth, not widow's houses, but most men's souls" (2). Our new life should prioritize our faith in Christ, dying to ourselves, rejecting sin, and being aware of the spiritual enemy. Brooks later writes about Pietro Candiano, a duke of Venice who died fighting for the king of Italy, and links abundant life with fighting the enemy (187). The puritan writers help us see these truths and, like the early writers, connect this abundant life to the fight against the enemy. We must be clear: living an abundant life is a fight against Satan.

A.W. Tozer explained this life of faith as being made right with God because of what Jesus did for us at Calvary. Tozer writes, "when you attach yourself to the Lord of glory, you are connected with something righteous. He is righteousness itself, and all of the possibility of righteousness is summed up in Him" (*The Purpose* 161). Having the righteousness of Christ is understanding this crucified life.

The Crucified Life

However, there is more to this story. The crucified life is not what many aim for in their lives. Dr. Stephen Olford is the most significant pastor and spiritual mentor in my life. I have spent weeks studying preaching through his ministry. Dr. Olford has blessed my life in many ways. He writes, “we are living in an hour when the message of the ‘crucified life’ is the last thing many professing Christians want to hear” (30). Abundant life is found in the person of God, not in the blessings from Him.

The New Testament writers and other early church writers all wrote about our life found in Christ and the finished work of Calvary. They told us to die to ourselves, fight the flesh, reject sin, and know our enemy. Their real-life stories of faith in Christ inspire us to live out the faith we have been given. We see this again, describing inspirational stories of faith with biblical and historical characters. Owen makes this point clear by describing the treachery of sin and examining it in the life of David (96). But this life means we die to ourselves and pursue a life of faith in Christ.

Wonderful pastor and author A.W. Tozer explains this crucified life and the reason many don’t pursue it: “Living the crucified life is a journey not for the faint of heart. The journey is rough and is filled with dangers and difficulties, and it does not end until we see Christ” (*The Crucified* 21). Inspirational real-life stories reveal the importance of living our lives in faith.

Christian thinker Justin Martyr was a godly man who earned the title of his last name. His final words were, “We desire nothing more than to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ; for this gives the salvation and joyfulness before his dreadful judgment seat, at which all the world must appear” (Gansky 46). Living an abundant life is not easy, but it is the only way to live in such a way to be able to stand before our Lord with the joy of living out the faith He gave us.

Even contemporary nonfiction books find inspiration in the stories of the Old Testament. Steve Farrar's book *God Built* is based on the life of Joseph. In it, we find examples of inspirational stories of other people connected to themes in Joseph's life. One chapter has the story of General Dwight Eisenhower, who, like Joseph, could have given up too soon. Eisenhower was almost ready to retire and was finally promoted to commander and chief of Allied forces. What if Eisenhower had quit? That question is connected to Joseph's tenacity while in jail. In 2 Peter 1:5, Peter uses the phrase "giving all diligence" (NKJV). It literally means "to give every effort" (Vine 167). The word speaks to the tenacity of the believer to never quit and to keep following the purpose of knowing God to experience abundant life.

We also see the story of David and Goliath by authors Malcolm Gladwell, Mark Rasmussen, Nell Mohney, Max Lucado, and many others. Lucado reminds the Christian, "Giants. We must face them. Yet we need not face them alone" (*Facing the Giants* 8). Two particular moments from David's life inspire many readers. The first one is when David stands before Goliath and declares who God is and how Goliath will be defeated: "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands" (*NIV*, 1 Samuel 17:46). The second moment is after David is made king of all Israel. Nathan, the prophet, informs the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you" (*NIV*, 2 Samuel 7:3). The Bible is full of stories that are featured time and time again in inspirational nonfiction literature. Scripture is used often to remind the contemporary reader that "the battle is the Lord's" (*NIV*, 1 Samuel 17:47). We can overcome and live abundantly, trusting God and following His plan for our lives.

Authors such as John MacArthur, Ruth A. Tucker, Mary DeMuth, and Shannon Bream have written about Sarah, Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, and Esther and how their lives are connected to ours as well. The famous verse in Esther is used repeatedly in devotional and Christian living

books: “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?” (NKJV, Esther 4:14) These stories are the foundation of living out faith practically to attain a deeper relationship with God and finding the life of abundance Jesus promised in John 10:10.

Like the Bible, many authors give us the good, the bad, and the ugly of a particular person or story. We get all sides of a person, their victories and losses, and their fortes and flaws. We see the mistakes made by Adam, Abraham, David, and Solomon. We read about the doubts and failures of the disciples. We are free to judge these characters and decide how we can learn from their mistakes and the principles outlined in what we read. Ayn Rand argues that one of the responsibilities of a critical reader is to “decide whether it or he is good or bad” (30). The character, or our perception of the character, determines if we are encouraged or discouraged by their actions as we examine our own actions. Encouraging stories bring us back to the premise of inspirational nonfiction, an abundant life of faith in God. We use the good and the bad in the Bible and inspirational nonfiction to find strength and faith. We see the truth in Job’s amazing words, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (NKJV, Job 1:15). God gives abundant life and can be trusted to complete His purpose for our earthly lives.

However, the teleological argument begins in faith or justification, but it deepens in sanctification. MacArthur writes, “Saving faith is the ground in which the fruit of Christian sanctification grows” (2 Peter, 39). God has a systematic plan for our sanctification. We could view 2 Peter 1:5-7 as the seven features of a healthy body. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 that all Christians are part of the body, that we each are a part, and that the body cannot be whole unless all the parts are healthy and working together. Think of a bodybuilder who skips leg day.

We have seen the guy with a massive upper body but two scrawny legs flexing his biceps in the mirror. However, is his body really fit? Well, his upper half is but not his lower half. We can see a clear illustration of the physical and spiritual life. Likewise, sanctification secures the believer's health spiritually. Adding to our faith enables the individual spiritual body and the church as a body to become what God plans for us to be.

The sanctification plan in 2 Peter 1:5-7 allows us to view where we are in our spiritual growth. The plan God showed to Peter has been promised, talked about, and lived all the way back to Genesis. A beautiful picture of sanctification in the Old Testament is found in a simple statement about a man who built his faith to near perfection. The Bible says, "Enoch walked with God" (Genesis 5:24). Walking with God is the purpose of abundant life. Communing with God is the only way to find abundant life. When we walk with God, we then understand that we must add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, Godliness, and brotherly kindness. The seven characteristics of sanctification are intertwined with living like the Bible characters, past church leaders, and beloved Saints through the centuries.

The Heroes of Abundance

We have examples of heroes of the faith, and they are the best argument for living a life of faith. However, there must also be an understanding of what Paul writes in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death" (NKJV). These words directly connect to abundant life, and the process of sanctification Peter defines in 2 Peter 1:5-7. When Paul writes the word "know," it is the root word of the knowledge that Peter is speaking of and can best be described as living with the goal of knowing Christ more fully. In the Abundant Life Bible, we read these words, "the secret to the abundant life is a close relationship with God as we follow the truth of Scripture"

(A10). That is precisely what Paul and Peter are talking about, and that is the goal of sanctification.

Knowing Jesus is connected further to Paul and Peter's words with the word fellowship. Koinonia is a Greek word that is used for our word fellowship several times in the Bible. The word means Christian fellowship with God and other Christians. We have a koinonia relationship with Christ through the deeper walk of knowledge of Him as we live out the traits Peter encourages us to add to our faith. The idea here is that the fellowship we gain can be, and probably must be, accomplished with great spiritual struggle. In Philippians 3:10, Paul writes that fellowship comes in suffering. We only need to examine the heroes of the faith to see that this is normal in the Christian life. Spiritual struggles lead to abundant living.

Again, abundant life is not a life of health, wealth, and prosperity. Martyred missionary Jim Elliot believed that God was calling him to Ecuador as a missionary to the Auca Indians. The Auca were a tribe that many considered savages. Little was known about them because they lived deep in the jungle. Elliot had earlier wholly given his life to be used by God however God saw fit. Elliot wrote in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" (Akin 74). Jim Elliot was willing to give his life for a tribe that had never heard the Gospel, even if it meant he lost his life. Elliot and four other missionaries were killed, but later the entire tribe was saved. Struggles in life should push us to surrender to find abundant life.

The more we grow in our faith and increase our fellowship with God, the more the enemy attacks our faith in God. That trial is why Peter called faith precious and why James said: "Knowing this the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3-4). The tests and trials come to grow our faith and to gain new knowledge about the purpose of God in our lives.

The connection between blessings and battles and the deeper life of the believer is evident throughout God's Word and Christian literature. The purpose of abundant life is to make us like Christ as we grow in our knowledge of Him. Trials and struggles help us know Him more intimately. Ann Voskamp writes about struggles this way: "Somehow the miracle of communion, oneness, wholeness, abundance, it happens in the exact opposite—in breaking and giving" (32). All of the words she uses connect with our examination of abundant life. The word communion is mentioned by the Apostle Paul as "being conformed." That word conformed means to be similar or to share in His likeness" (Vine 126). That is what Peter is writing in our text and what Paul is stating as the end goal of sanctification. To be like Christ is the purpose of our walk of faith.

The Theological Argument

Understanding that the justification side of salvation is a past event is critical to the theological argument of abundant life. In 2 Peter 1:4, the Bible says, "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust" (NKJV). These "great and precious promises" are connected to the promise of abundant life in John 10:10. Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (NKJV). The thief is the enemy that is constantly trying to get us to sin and to live our lives in the flesh. However, Peter writes that we have escaped the "corruption that is in the world." As Christians, we have escaped the flesh if we live according to the Spirit. Since we have been justified on the cross, we now need to learn to behave in a way that glorifies God as we live out our lives.

Justification comes when we believe. We believe in Jesus and his finished work on the cross. But now, based on the promises of faith and in Jesus' words in John 10:10, we must learn to behave in faith to live abundantly. Behavior is the key to understanding the traits listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. John Phillips' commentary points out that Peter is referring to the book of James. Phillips writes that "James was a longtime colleague of Peter in the Jerusalem church" (233). James is a book that focuses on doing or behaving correctly, and in James, we read, "But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (NKJV). James isn't speaking of works salvation. He addresses the idea that our belief in Christ should lead to the correct behavior. Pastor and author Max Lucado writes these words: "God's eyes fall on the work of our hands. Our Wednesday's matter to Him as much as our Sundays" (*Cure*, 97). What we do and why we do it matter to God.

The Behavior of Abundant Living

Behavior is why Peter writes the phrase in 2 Peter 1:5, "for this very reason" (NKJV). Phillips, in his commentary, says that phrase is only used here. It presents the idea of placing something beside something else, and then Phillips adds, "Faith, however, does not stand in isolation from works" (233). So, the faith in 2 Peter 1:4 that justifies us because of Jesus should come alongside the works/behavior of our sanctification in 2 Peter 1:5-7. This is critical to living our lives so that all may know we have been saved, and it brings us assurance of our own salvation as well. If we are not living our lives as an example of faith, how can we really enjoy the precious promises of faith? Peter is prodding us to live this faith because Jesus has given us everything, we need to live an abundant life. In his commentary on 2 Peter 1:5, Schreiner writes, "Believers should live in a way that pleases God *because* Christ has given them everything they

need for life and godliness” (296). Our behavior and life should both be abundant because of what Jesus has already done on our behalf. Our sanctification should be a process of behavior that demonstrates our gratefulness for all God has given us in salvation.

MacArthur calls our traits of 2 Peter 1:5-7 virtues. Since virtue, by definition, means “behavior showing high moral standards” (Virtue), we quickly see how the traits listed by Peter connect one to another. David Helm, in his commentary, makes the connection between all seven traits with a Golden Chain. He writes, “To put an image on it, we could liken verses 5–8 to a golden chain or to stairs that lead one to the stars. Each stair or characteristic is built upon the strength of the previous one. And each subsequent one rises to a higher plane” (*2 Peter*, 195). This new behavior is linked to the growth of knowing God more and more as we progress upward to heaven.

By the time we finish our sanctification, we should look like Jesus as we take the next logical step into glorification. This is the plan of God as we are being made in the image of Jesus. Our belief in him should cause us to behave with the highest moral standards and lead us to abundant life. A higher plane is breaking new ground in living out our faith.

The Explanation of the Traits

Peter writes his last letter to instruct the believer to reach the new ground in the process of sanctification. Peter writes, “add to your faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5). MacArthur points out that virtue is “moral excellence” (*2 Peter*, 40) and that this word for virtue is heroic. It means the best quality in a person’s life and even expresses courageous accomplishments. The word virtue then moves the believer to live a life that people will praise. We see a praiseworthy life, usually at the end of life. I have preached many funerals, and you certainly can tell the difference between someone who lived with moral excellence and someone who did not. Family, friends, and

coworkers praise the person who lived a life that gave evidence of their faith with integrity. We could say moral excellence is evidence of a brave and generous person. Virtue gives verification of faith in the life of abundance.

Virtue is tied to knowledge. Peter gives knowledge as the next trait and connects moral excellence with the knowledge of knowing God. The two traits could be translated as knowing what is right and doing what is right. It is certainly good to know the right thing to do, but it is better to do the right thing every time. We would want our kids to do the right thing, so it goes without saying that our Heavenly Father wants that for His children as well. The connection of knowledge as a trait goes back to verse two, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2). Grace can be translated as favor or goodwill. We have God's favor in our lives, and as we do the right things, we grow in the knowledge of His favor. We know him more and more.

Peace in verse two means “freedom from anxiety and worry” (Vine 463). The knowledge of God should grow in our lives, and then we will have freedom from the stresses of life. We need to understand that where we place our focus frees us from anxiety and worry. I have taken my eyes off of Jesus and looked at my circumstances and worried that people don't like me or the situation is terrible. There is no way I'm going to get through this, and then the next day, the situation is all worked out. When we focus on who Jesus is, worry and anxiety disappear. We can know Jesus more entirely and live above the pressures of the world and live an abundant life.

As Peter leads Christians through the seven traits, he mentions self-control. Self-control is essential because it is also part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23. MacArthur points out that self-control “was used of athletes who sought self-discipline and self-restraint, even beating their bodies into submission” (2 Peter 41). We could certainly see self-control as necessary in the

physical sense, but the theology of abundant life pushes this trait into the spiritual realm as well. To control our bodies physically, we must exercise and eat healthily. However, spiritual discipline is also essential if an abundant life is to be lived. We must discipline ourselves through prayer, Bible study, and worship. These lead to moral excellence, the knowledge of God, and ultimately to a disciplined life that flees from evil desires. Again, the theological argument rests on the premise that abundant life is not only a reality but a promise Jesus has given us because we have been made alive through His death. We have overcome the corruption of this world, and self-control can enable us not to give in to the lust of the flesh. Only through self-control can abundant life be attained.

If the abundant life can be broken down in theological terms, then Peter's inclusion of perseverance in 2 Peter 1:6 is the next step in the sanctification process. The connection to faith and works in perseverance after self-control is critical to our walk of abundance. MacArthur makes this connection with patience and endurance and doing what is right. The traits build upon each other. To see perseverance lived out is impressive. A person can start growing in moral excellence and learning more and more about God. They can demonstrate self-control, but it is in overcoming difficulties that we see the abundant life clearly.

My call as a pastor puts me in situations where I have to see good friends; Godly people go through terrible times. One friend I will never forget. Steve Cubbege, had a brain tumor. They removed it, and it stayed away for almost a year. Then another surgery, and this time the doctors told he and his wife it would come back, and that would be the end. He was a dear friend, and I learned how to live and how to die through him. One time he told me, "It's okay, preacher. Either way, I win." That's a life of perseverance in the faith.

We could say perseverance is a patient resolve to trust God no matter the circumstances of life. Our minds might immediately run to Job as a character with all the traits that Peter has listed, yet he was thrown into the fire of perseverance. Abundant life is much like the title of Eugene Peterson's book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Perseverance means sticking with the long walk of abundance.

The trait of godliness is seen throughout scripture. The Apostle Paul uses this word in Titus 1:1, "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness" (NKJV). Some versions call godliness godly living. Notice that Paul says that "knowledge of the truth" is what brings godliness, again connecting the knowledge of God as something to grow in as we live our lives. The connection is further made to 2 Peter 1 with what Paul writes in Titus 3 that godliness is connected to "doing what is good" (Titus 3:8). Peter also wrote about the connection in 1 Peter 2:12, "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (NKJV). Conduct or behavior is linked to good works, and good works are tied together with the trait of godliness.

We should live in such a way that the world sees God in us, and because of our good deeds, they give God glory. We are a living testimony of the faithfulness of God. An abundant life should be a continuing process of making us more and more in the image of Christ. Being made in His image means learning about the skill and abilities God has placed in all of us. Lucado writes, "When God gives an assignment, he also gives the skill. Study your skills, then, to reveal your assignment" (*Cure*, 2). Using our spiritual gifts, answering our call, all of that is

designed for us to be more like Jesus. When people see how we live, they will glorify whom we know.

In 2 Peter 1:7, I believe the argument can be made that to add brotherly kindness to our lives, we first must add godliness. The connection biblically goes all the way back to the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments are upward, or a better definition is our relationship with God. The last six commandments are outward, or our relationship with humanity. We first must have a relationship with God before we can ever have right relationships with people. Brotherly kindness is defined as a right relationship with our Christian brothers. Churches fall apart when relationships aren't right.

So, the priority is to maintain unity. We must, as Paul wrote, "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Peter wrote about this in 1 Peter 3:8, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind" (ESV). I have always believed that church unity is a fragile thing. All it takes is for someone to be upset over something. When I came to my present church, they told me about a church split they had ten years ago. The pain of that split is now sixteen years old, and still, many friends may never be friends again. My prayer is that a tender heart, a humble mind, and placing unity, above all else, will lead the church to see abundance again. Lord, help us to maintain unity.

Throughout the New Testament, we have examples of unity. The book of Acts speaks of unity as being of one mind or "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). Jesus' prayer in the garden for all of us was "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Brotherly affection brings unity in the body that proves we are His disciples. Abundant living isn't realized until brotherly kindness brings unity to our fellow believers.

Theologically, love in 2 Peter 1:7 cannot be realized until this golden chain connects all the traits together. Agape love cannot happen apart from a spiritual connection with someone else. This is the final stage of sanctification. Helm writes, “In poetic form, Peter has given us the golden chain. The way forward for fallen people—the ascending journey home for any who desire to finish well—has been written down” (199). The plan of sanctification is unveiled for us in Peter’s traits. These traits build one upon the other, making us more and more like Christ and landing us safely in heaven.

Building the seven traits of faith in Christ in our lives prepares us for heaven, but it also keeps us from theological waywardness. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:14, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (NKJV). The golden chain mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7 is critical to our sanctification and to us becoming firm in our faith. When Christians don’t grow, they can very quickly wander, be tossed around, or even be shipwrecked in their belief in God. When a person is not solid in their faith, they can lack assurance of their salvation or even believe that the Bible is not God’s Word. Unbelief cannot lead to an abundant life.

The Reality of Abundance

Peter addresses the idea of allowing the seven traits to grow within us and connects them to seeing with our eyes of faith. In 2 Peter 1:9, he writes, “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins” (NKJV). When believers fail to add the seven traits, they cannot see what God wants them to do. They are blind to His will and may even forget that they have been forgiven of their sins. They are floundering in their sanctification and forgetting what Jesus did for them in justification.

When Christians aspire to know God and seek God, they will begin to comprehend all God has in store for them here on the path to abundant life.

Peter then addresses the final stage of the process in 2 Peter 1:10-11. He says to make our salvation so secure that heaven is absolute to us here and will be abundantly realized as we enter those gates. Schreiner writes this about 2 Peter 1:11, “Furthermore, believers will have a “rich welcome,” and the word “rich” (*plousiōs*) indicates that the eschatological reward is gracious, that believers receive much more than they ever deserved” (306). We not only believe God is gracious in justification and that He proves Himself gracious in our sanctification, but we also see that He is gracious in glorification. The evidence for the argument to live this way is apparent all through our salvation from Calvary to heaven. We learn to walk by faith and add the traits Peter shows us then see the reality of abundance both here on earth and when we finally go home to be with God forever.

The argument for abundant life is made clear in Peter’s last letter. Jesus gave His promise to us in John 10:10, but the systematic plan is before us in 2 Peter 1:1-11. All three aspects of our salvation are presented to us, and we are instructed twice in the passage to be diligent in doing what the passage says. The theological argument for abundant life is evident throughout the pages of Scripture. I once heard a man say, “You can take the whole Bible and break it down into two words—trust and obey.” The simplicity of that statement may make some people feel that it cannot be that easy. The statement is almost flippant. However, that is the theological argument for the Bible and this passage. Will we trust God to do what He promised? Jesus said abundant life is a guarantee. However, will we obey God by adding these traits to our lives? Will we trust God to keep His promise and faithfully obey His word? Peter's process in our text is as simple as that previous statement. God can be trusted to do what He says. Jesus can be trusted to

not only save us but to take us safely home. The actual argument is: will we obey Him and follow the only plan that will give us an abundant life of faith in Him?

Chapter 3: How Do I Live the Abundant Life?

A Practical Guide to Abundance

I think the best plan laid out for living an abundant life (outside of the plan God gave Peter in our text) is what has become known as “Pascal’s Wager.” Eight years after the brilliant mathematician Blaise Pascal died, friends found a collection of his notes and had them published. Actually, the notes were supposed to have been included in his next book. What did this magnificent mind who invented the first calculator, the syringe, and calculated the density of air, and many other accomplishments have in mind for his next book? The notes which became his next book are best described as our wager about God. The wager Pascal lays out is the how-to for an abundant life. It’s the plan God wants us to understand—trust Him with your life, and it will be abundant.

Pascal's notes paraphrased are described as “God exists, or He doesn’t. A game is being played in which you make a choice about God’s existence. You wager your life on this decision” (Gansky 196-197). One of the greatest minds in history puts together a humble point “you can’t lose betting on God, but you can lose much betting against Him” (Gansky 197). God’s plan is that you and I trust and follow Him to find the purpose He has planned for us.

What else do we need to live out abundant life? 2 Peter 1:5-7 reminds us of the seven traits Peter writes to add to our faith: “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love” (NKV). These are the traits we build in sanctification to find abundant life.

However, if 2 Peter 1:5-7 provides a plan, then can’t we just follow the plan and find abundance? That would make this easy. We like easy. Today, whenever we have a question, we

Google it. We can find how-to videos on YouTube to rebuild an engine, write a song, or find ways to care for our pet iguana.

We need to search deeper. The prophet Jeremiah tells us, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (NKJV Jer. 29:13). If our heart wants to grow closer to God, then God provides people who have lived this life as examples for all of us. People who have lived these seven traits provide us with a practical guide to abundance. So, we search the scriptures to find these traits in people as a practical guide for an abundant life.

The Biblical Examples of Virtue

Peter started with the word virtue. In Greek, the word virtue means moral excellence and goodness of character. When I think of virtue, I think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and an Old Testament man named Jabez. They are heroes of the faith, and as far as God’s word is concerned, there is not one blemish on their character. They are human, so they did sin. Yet, scripture doesn’t list one for either of them.

Mary’s example of virtue must begin with the fact that God chose her to be the mother of His Son. If we had no other scripture to find out about her, that fact would be enough. Honestly, if you and I were choosing someone to be the mother of our child, what kind of person would we choose? I hope we would all say someone who consistently demonstrated moral excellence of character.

Let’s look at what Mary did to exhibit virtue. In Luke 1:46-55, we find what scholars have called, *The Magnificat*. Mary visits her cousin Elisabeth, who is pregnant miraculously with John the Baptist, and both Elisabeth and the baby acknowledge God through Mary’s pregnancy. They claim she is the mother of the Lord. In verses 46-55, Mary breaks out in a song of praise of God and all that He has done.

Mary states that her soul magnifies God, and her Spirit is rejoicing in God, her Savior. She is filled with the Spirit and begins to praise God. Filling of the Spirit always leads to praising God and our Lord Jesus. If we are to be people who believe the Bible and live the Bible, we must constantly ask the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit.

Mary puts all her attention on God. Fifteen times in verses 48-55, Mary says He, Him, or His. You can know if you are filled with the Spirit by what you focus on. That is a test of where we are spiritually. Personally, I know this to be true because when I am full of myself, all I think about is myself. I have pity parties because my needs are not getting met. I take my eyes off God, look at what I want, and wonder, *why does this always happen to me?*

I should look at Mary's example. A life of virtue is death to self—selfish ambitions and committing ourselves to God. Just as Mary had to make a total commitment to God, we must fully commit to God to have a life of virtue. I believe Mary's life was fully submitted to God before she found out what God had planned for her. That is why God chose her to be our Lord Jesus's mother.

She uses the words low estate and maidservant in Luke 1:48. A person of a low estate is a person of low rank in the world. Mary claims her standing in the world is nothing. The reverse of this is that her standing with God is at the top of the list. A maidservant is a female slave. That is the same connection we have with Peter as a bonds slave.

Think of what is going on here. God is turning Mary's life upside down. She is about to become a scandal that looks like the next reality TV show, but she places all her faith in God. My boys and I occasionally play poker for fun. Don't worry. It's poker chips, not real money. When we play "Texas Holdem," someone will say, "I'm all in." We know what that means. I am

betting every chip in my pile on that hand. Mary is showing us we can bet our life, everything we are and will ever be, on God.

Mary calls Israel God's servant. She says, "He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy" (Luke 1:54). She claims that God is merciful to Israel and that His mercy is evidence of God's great love. What character she possesses! It's not what we do for God; it's what He has already done for us. Think of it, what has He done for you already? Salvation, family, job, or security? He has done great things, and Mary shows us that a life of virtue is the only way to live a life of abundance.

The second biblical character of virtue is Jabez. The life of Jabez is stuffed right in the middle of the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles. These nine chapters are so and so begat so and so. It lists all the men of Israel, starting with Adam to about 1056 B.C., covering around 3,000 years. But nestled right in the middle is Jabez. The author stops, puts his pen down, and for some reason, thinks of Jabez. He's not Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, or David, but this guy stood out for some reason. The reason was that his character was more honorable than others. So, God granted his request.

I've often wondered what made this guy so special. We are told about him in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, 'I gave birth to him in pain.' Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request" (NIV). Jabez's name means pain. In Hebrew, your name was your destiny. Jabez knew that without God's help, he would be nothing.

So, this might beg the question: what makes someone special? Someone that stands out in the crowd. Maybe it's timing or luck. Have you ever heard of Clarence Chamberlain? Clarence

who? The reason many people never heard of Clarence is all about timing or bad luck. He had a plan—a plan to cross the Atlantic from New York City to Berlin (Aurandt 131). He succeeded. Unfortunately, a man named Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic fourteen days earlier. Lindbergh flew from New York City to Paris. Clarence flew farther, but Clarence wasn't first. He didn't make the cut.

Every now and then, my wife cooks something that doesn't fit in or makes the cut for her guests to eat. One time she made a dessert that someone couldn't eat because of an allergy, so she made another one just for him. As I write this, she hands me a plate with two deviled eggs that were misfits for her Thanksgiving platter. I can eat them. They might not fit in the beautiful picture of her meal presentation, but they sure taste good to me. We may have a view of ourselves like we don't make the cut, but when we give ourselves to God, we can be significantly used for His glory. A specific person may look like they can't make the cut in the world, but with God, they fit into His plan perfectly. That is what makes all of us unique.

Jabez was someone the world wouldn't pick. He didn't stand out in the crowd and wasn't what the world would call unique. Jabez simply said to God to "bless me." It means bless me with overwhelming blessing. Bless me, Lord, abundantly. I want to be used for Your glory.

Not only did Jabez ask for God to bless him, but now He calls on the God of Heaven to enlarge his territory. Jabez was asking for God to increase his influence for God. He wasn't asking for more property or more wealth; he was surveying his circumstances and asking God to help him do more in God's kingdom.

When Jabez asked God that His hand would be with Him, what Jabez is saying is actually that God's presence and power would stay with me. Chuck Swindoll, former pastor and chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, writes this about God's hand on Jabez: "Jabez

prayed, ‘Lord, I’m counting on you to do these things in Your time and in Your way. But when you do, I don’t want to go it alone. I want You to guide each step I take with Your mighty hand’” (195). Jabez was requesting that unless God was with him, Jabez didn’t want to go. Imagine waiting and requesting that with every step we take, we walk with God.

Jabez’s life is an example of wanting a life that glorifies God. Jabez is a further example of moral excellence because he asked, “keep me from harm.” That part of his prayer points to how Jesus said to pray in the Lord’s prayer. In Matthew 6:13, we read, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (ESV). We should pray not to be tempted and that the enemy will stay away. Jabez prayed this way because he didn’t want to live up to his name by causing pain. That sounds like a good plan for moral excellence. What do you think?

The Biblical Examples of Knowledge

Moral excellence is given to us by Jesus in salvation so we can grow in the knowledge of him. Growing morally leads to knowing Jesus more completely. The word “knowledge” in 2 Peter 1:5 means being deliberate in doing what is right every time. Doing what is right is always the right thing to do. God blesses us abundantly when we do what is right.

We need to see two biblical characters that, according to the Bible, always did the right thing: Caleb and Elisha. The Bible tells us that Caleb “followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly” (*NKJV*, Joshua 14:8). We are also told that Elisha asked Elijah, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me” (*NKJV*, 2 Kings 2:9). We see in these characters a commitment to want more knowledge about who God is and what He would do in their lives.

The world would tell us to seek knowledge. More education, or more learning about a subject, obviously is reasonable as to knowing what to do. We need a doctorate to teach someone with a master’s degree and a master’s degree to teach someone getting their bachelor’s degree.

We need a bachelor's degree to teach high school. More education should equal more knowledge. But what knowledge are we seeking?

Caleb shows us the first step to knowledge: "follow God wholeheartedly." If we are to know Jesus, we must follow him and seek to know Him more. That hunger for knowledge starts with obedience. Caleb submitted his life to obeying God.

We are first introduced to Caleb in Numbers 13. God told Moses to "send men to explore Canaan, which I'm giving to the Israelites. Send one leader from each of their ancestors' tribes" (*NKJV*, Numbers 13:2). Caleb was selected from the tribe of Judah. The twelve spies were sent to map out the land and bring back word of the people, places, and things they saw. It was simply a mission to gain knowledge of the Promised Land.

The spies were not sent to give their opinion of taking the land because God had already promised it to Israel. The land was already the home of Israel. Much like our promise of abundance. Jesus gave His word that we could have abundant life. We, like Israel, should simply trust God to keep His word.

When the spies return in Numbers 13, ten say they cannot take the land. The people are too strong for them. See the problem? They failed to trust and obey God. Obedience and trust are two sides of the same coin. Only Joshua and Caleb remained obedient and trusted God. Listen to what Caleb said, "Let's go now and take possession of the land. We should be more than able to conquer it" (*NKJV*, Numbers 13:30). Caleb didn't say those words because he was cocky. He wasn't itching for a fight. He simply saw that God had fought for them before and would fight for them again.

Haven't we seen God always keep His word? Hasn't God been faithful, and when He promised us something, He did it?

In my life, God has been faithful. When my wife and I celebrated our eight-year anniversary, we were still childless. We wanted a child and finally looked into adoption. God gave us a son. He has grown up, and now we have two grandsons. When I became a pastor five years later, my wife got pregnant for the first time. We now have four grown sons who are serving the Lord in their churches. God can be trusted with our hearts and lives.

Caleb knew that God could be trusted. He knew of all the times God had been faithful in the past and knew God would be faithful wherever Caleb and God's people went.

Forty years later, Joshua and Caleb have a conversation between Joshua and Caleb. Octogenarian Caleb says, "I *am as* strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength *was* then, so now *is* my strength for war" (NKJV, Joshua 14:11). Caleb claims he is as strong at age 80 as he was at age 40. Forty years of wilderness wandering did not take his strength. How? Caleb knew: "It may be that the LORD *will be* with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said" (NKJV, Josh. 14:12). God was with him and gave him the ability. God had already promised Caleb that He would give Caleb that mountain.

What a lesson.

What has God promised in your life? He will always keep His word. It may take forty years of obedience, but God will never let us down. Like Caleb, you can possess the knowledge of God's faithfulness.

We see this knowledge of God also in the life of Elisha.

In 1969, God led a Pastor and educator named Ted Rendall to write a book about Elisha's life. The title is appropriate to this study: *Elisha Prophet of Abundant Life*. I've had the honor of Ted Rendall teaching me about preaching. I didn't know I'd be writing this thesis when I bought Ted's book several decades ago. I just like Elisha's story.

Ted Rendall's introduction provides a definition of abundant life: "The abundant life is the life that knows personal blessing and victory over sin, and which in turn brings blessings to others" (16). Rendall makes the case that the abundant life has been promised and that "the life and ministry of Elisha the prophet illustrate for us what it means to live the abundant life" (17). Elisha's life should be studied. If there was ever a man filled with the Spirit and the knowledge of God, it was him.

When Elisha asked for a double portion of God's spirit, he showed us the connection of Mary, Jabez, and Caleb. They knew that without God, nothing was possible, so they trusted God to use them simply because God was good. God could be trusted with inferior human beings that simply believed God could do in them whatever He chose to do to accomplish His will.

Think of Elisha and his connection to abundance. He was like Caleb. He gave himself wholeheartedly when he surrendered to God. God called Elisha as he was plowing in the fields. Elisha answered the call, killed twelve yoke oxen, and provided a feast for the people (1 Kings 19:21). He gave his inheritance away to follow God completely.

We also see Elisha's connection with abundance in 2 Kings 3. When the prophet Elisha's instructions were followed, "the country was filled with water" (2 Kings 3:20). However, the biggest blessing of abundance as it relates to others is in the story of a widow whose husband served the prophets and honored God was penniless. The creditors were coming to take her sons as slaves for payment. Elisha comes to her home, and she has only one jar of olive oil. Elisha tells her to break out the pots and pans and borrow more from her neighbors. God works through Elisha to pour olive oil into every single vessel she has, and the Bible says, "'There is not a jar left.' Then the oil stopped flowing" (*NKJV*, 2 Kings 4:6). Abundance was supplied in the knowledge of God.

Elisha's life has example after example of knowing God intimately and believing that God would supply everything Elisha needed to help God's people. Over and over again, his life is a continual reminder of abundant life. Ted Rendall's book examines twelve areas of Elisha's life and ministry that demonstrate abundant life. Rendall writes, "by this recital of all the great things Elisha did, we can clearly see that both in his personal life and in his public ministry 'abundance' was the keynote" (19). The knowledge of God is the path to abundance.

Perhaps knowledge and abundance help us see what others don't. The eyes of faith see clearer as we grow in the knowledge of God. Take Elisha's example again in 2 Kings 6. The king of Aram was angry with Elisha, so he sent his army to capture Elisha. The army surrounded the city at night, and when Elisha and his servant walked outside the next morning an army was against them. The servant was scared. Elisha said, don't be scared, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (2 Kings 6:16). Then a very simple prayer is made from Elisha to God to open the servant's eyes. The Bible tells us then that the servant "looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17). The knowledge of God opens our eyes to see that we aren't alone in the battle.

Like Elisha, we can trust God. We are told in Psalm 91:11, "He has given His angels charge over you to keep you in all His ways" (NKJV). That promise is available to all of us as we grow in the knowledge of God.

But what do we do with this knowledge? Can we just pray and strike out to face any army we choose? Can I fly over to Iraq and take on Isis? No.

Common sense doesn't go out the window just because we are saved. I've known too many Christians who think they can do whatever they want to, and God will rescue them no matter what. We have to add another trait to our knowledge of God.

The Biblical Example of Self-Control

We must add the next trait of self-control. The trait of self-control is letting the Holy Spirit guide us every day. We can't just do anything we want when we believe it's time to do it. We must add the trait of self-control when we are facing every battle.

In the book of Daniel, young Daniel was taken prisoner by the Babylonians. God's people had gotten so far away from God that God allowed another nation to conquer His people. That was how God pronounced judgment on His wayward nation. Daniel is a lot like Caleb. The Babylonians chose him to represent Israel. Daniel was the best of the best, and His best was all God.

In Daniel chapter 1, we are introduced to the test of moral excellence, knowledge of God, and how it connects with self-control. Because Daniel would obey God no matter what, he would not defile himself with the food and drink of the Babylonians. It sounds trivial to us today, but just think of what Daniel is doing. The word self-control means "complete control of one's desires and actions" (Vine 555). Daniel is under the control of the Holy Spirit because he has submitted himself to God.

Like Daniel, John Hooper, a sixteenth-century Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester, was a young man when he surrendered to God. Hooper graduated from Oxford University in 1519. As Hooper grew in the knowledge of God, he realized he must submit himself under the control of the Holy Spirit. His fervency for God's word put him in a position that stood against the church of England in the sixteenth century. Hooper had learned under one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, a man named Zurich from Switzerland. Hooper's strict stance on salvation by grace through faith placed him at odds with the church and with the Queen of England. Hooper refused to surrender to their demands and was burned at the stake on February

9th, 1555 (Foxe 160-165). Hopper, like Daniel, was led by the Holy Spirit, even in immense trial and at the risk of his life, to demonstrate this trait of abundant life.

After Daniel proved his excellent health and good standing with God, he could give good advice to the king of Babylon for many years. He was placed in precarious predicaments where his life was jeopardized many times. Near the end of his life, the pagan advisors deceived the king into signing a decree that placed Daniel in another life-threatening position. Daniel in the lion's den is a story many tell in Sunday School. What should be told is what the king said to Daniel 6:16: "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you" (NKJV, Daniel 6:16). Daniel's and Hooper's lives bear witness to life under God's control. It's a life that becomes a walking testimony to who God is and that God is always faithful.

The Biblical Example of Patience

I believe the fruit of the Spirit is sequential. I also believe these characteristics of living are in order. In other words, we must be holy to do what is right, and then we have self-control, and only then can we have patience. I believe patience is developed when we exhibit self-control. I think developing patience is problematic because it goes against human nature.

Patience is not something we are born with. A baby wakes up in the middle of the night and is hungry or has a wet diaper. The baby doesn't lay there and think; *I know Mom and Dad are tired, so I'll just wait until a more convenient time to let them know that I need something to eat or my diaper changed.* No. The baby cries uncontrollably until it gets the attention it needs.

We also don't live in a patient society. We have fast food and then try weekend diets. We speed date. Our society is set up to buy anything with a simple click. One Calvin and Hobbs comic strip pictured the father sitting at a computer saying, "It used to be if a client wanted a job done in a week, it was a rush job, and he would be lucky to get it. Now with modems, faxes, and

car phones, everybody wants everything instantly.” At about that time, Calvin walks by, holding a microwave dinner, and reading the instructions. He says, “It takes 6 minutes to microwave this? Who’s got that kind of time?” We are in a hurry. This is why self-control comes before patience in abundant life.

So, the Bible introduces us to a character that demonstrates perfect patience. Look at his introduction, “In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (*NIV*, Job 1:1). Job is introduced with all the character traits we have mentioned. He was morally excellent, knowledgeable of God and self-control, and honestly possessed all seven traits. But it is the patience trait we are most drawn to when it comes to this guy Job.

The word patience in 2 Peter 1:6 is the word perseverance. That word more aptly defines what Job lived through. God allowed Satan to take all that Job had, and in the 1st chapter of Job, Job lost seven sons, three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 donkeys, all his servants, and homes. He lost every material possession and did not deserve to lose any of it. God allowed Job to suffer at the hand of Satan.

If life never gets tough, if trials don’t come, it is easy to believe in ourselves more than God. Trials lead us to abundant faith in God.

Job realized that patience is developed in trials. The Bible says in James 1:3-4, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (*NKJV*). Our faith is built in the battles. When all hell breaks loose against us, we must learn to persevere and, if God wills it, see the victory in the battle.

God allows a fiery trial to perfect us. The trial is best for us. But how do we behave in the trials? The trials are unavoidable. Some say don't pray for patience because a trial will come. Trials are going to come anyway. Trials build our faith for the patience we need for the next battle.

I'm sure you have seen God build your faith in the battle. I have seen that I can persevere because God has been with me in every struggle. When I was a pastor years ago in Tennessee, a family who had influence in leadership disagreed with me about worship style. My son was asked to lead worship, and the man's wife was no longer in the limelight. She initially wanted my son to lead, but she protested when he started getting more attention than her.

My ministry was over in less than two years, and we had to find another place to go. I can tell you today that God taught us how to persevere. God led a friend to call me out of the blue and come alongside to provide work for a couple of months. God didn't give us a church immediately. We worked long days in a physically demanding job. An abundant life sometimes comes through hard work. God never left us, but He was with us through the difficulties. After two months, a church called me to see if I was interested in becoming its pastor. We have now been at this church for six years, and I can tell you that God has taught us how to wait on Him patiently.

Job's friends told him He must have some secret sin for the awful mess he was in and that God was punishing him. His own wife told him to give up. However, in his perseverance, he uttered some of the most remarkable words in the Bible, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him" (*NIV*, Job 13:15). How could he say those words? He had given himself entirely over to God. His integrity was before God, not man.

Job had learned that God could be trusted with his life and death. Only faith through perseverance can build that into our lives.

The misconception of what abundant life really is cannot be underestimated. Too many believe that abundance is wealth. Abundance is everything we want, we get. It could be happiness, health, comfortable living, retiring well, and kids happy and healthy; they all sound like an abundance of blessings from God.

As we are seeing, none of that is true. Abundant life is building faith in sanctification. Faith is built through difficulties. The apostle James says, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (*KJV*, James 1:3). Patience can also mean perfectness. God is perfecting or completing our faith. Job showed us that perfecting faith may be tough to live. I believe that the genuineness of faith is why so many fail to let God grow them in sanctification.

The Biblical Example of Godliness

We see genuine faith again in the trait of godliness. Too many would never reach the level of self-control, let alone patience. But to pursue God in such a way is to walk in the abundance of honoring God even though we are punished unjustly, well that sounds crazy,

God then demonstrates godliness in the life of Joseph. Let’s see if any of us can relate to Joseph. Dysfunctional family? Check. My family tree has some strange fruit hanging from it. How about you? But do our brothers hate us so much that they would sell us into slavery? Would they then tell dad that his son died?

I think Joseph’s life demonstrates that to really honor God and develop this trait of godliness, we must be willing to endure anything the enemy can throw at us. Joseph was sold into slavery and brought to be a slave in the house of Potiphar. We don’t know much about Potiphar except that he was the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph excelled there as a slave and

became the manager of Potiphar's entire household. The Bible says, "So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, and he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome" (*NIV*, Genesis 39:6). We could say Joseph had it good.

Like all of us, Joseph was thrown into a situation where his faith would be tested. He was in charge, trusted, and good-looking. However, Potiphar had a wife that was pagan and promiscuous, and she set her sights on Joseph. Joseph knew that to give in to sin would dishonor God and be disobedient to his boss. He refused, and Potiphar's wife lied about him. Joseph, the slave, was placed in prison.

We could say God wasn't fair. Excellent pastor and men's Bible teacher Steve Farrar wrote this about Joseph's predicament: "Why was Joseph in jail? What had he done wrong? Nothing. He had done what was right" (99). Why would God let someone lie about us and place us in prison? Because God had bigger plans for Joseph. Sometimes it makes no sense that our lives get upended because we can't see the bigger picture. Abundant life leads us to be godly even if the reward of standing for truth is not realized here on earth.

The trait of godliness came through for Joseph in prison. Since Joseph honored God, God honored Joseph again. Joseph was placed in charge of the entire prison. He managed the prison system for the country of Egypt. God then arranged for Joseph to meet two men who had been in the presence of Pharaoh. Joseph honors God and interrupts their dreams. God uses Joseph mightily, but it takes another two years for Joseph to meet Pharaoh and finally be released from jail. We may never know what God is doing, but He can be trusted with our lives.

In 2016, with the ministry finished in Tennessee, I felt depressed and defeated. On top of all that, we went through financial difficulty. We honored God by paying off our debt, but we

struggled with renting out our house in Tennessee and renting a house here in North Carolina. The housing market in the small town of Harrogate, Tennessee, was not good. Okay, I'll say it, it was awful. Like Joseph, it took two years of struggle. But God came through. For some strange reason, the housing market in Tennessee exploded. Our house went up in value by \$50,000 as people flocked to that area. It made no sense, but in God's timing, we were able to sell that house and pay off all our debts. God knows what He is doing, and we can trust Him, even when the situation makes no earthly sense.

The big problem for us is that we cannot see what God is doing under challenging circumstances. Rather than trusting God, we sometimes want to question God or quit altogether. Joseph continued to trust God and God revealed a master plan of abundance. Joseph wound up rescuing his brothers and the entire nation of Israel. As we grow in godliness, we begin to see that God's plan is much bigger than ours. We can trust Him to do what is best for us and for others.

The Biblical Example of Brotherly Kindness

The trait of godliness moves us to not just think about ourselves. The ultimate aim of the sanctification process is to put others first. Paul wrote about this in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves" (NIV). Thinking of others before ourselves is not something we do on our own. That is why the trait of godliness connects to what Peter called brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness or brotherly love is exemplified in the church of Acts.

The story of the church on the move after the ascension of Jesus demonstrates a Spirit-filled, united church focused on doing what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission. We are to go and make disciples. Win souls and teach the Bible so people can grow spiritually to be

more like Christ. The church of Acts understood its mission. The book of Acts uses a phrase that speaks to unity. Three times in the first two chapters, we read the words “one accord.” It means to do it together in complete agreement. Imagine being in a church where everyone sought the good of others in the body and agreed together that the church should fulfill the mission God had placed in front of it.

I have pastored a couple of churches where this happened. Where the body puts the needs of others and the church itself before its own. That is a church God blesses. We see this in the first church with an explosion of growth and His supernatural protection that God placed on that new church.

In Acts 5, Satan tried to attack the first church. A man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property and lied about the amount. God struck them dead. Not for withholding funds. They could have sold it and given a portion. God struck them dead because they allowed Satan to fill their hearts. Peter, as spoken for this first church, declared: “how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit” (*NIV*, Acts 5:3). God holds the unity of the church, the brotherly love we should have, as essential to the health of His bride.

I’ve been in lousy business meetings and been yelled at as a pastor because someone wants to place themselves in front of what a church has voted to do. I’ve seen God humble men who have caused division, and I have seen people get away with being ugly to others. That is not a Christian trait. The failing comes in when we fail to heed Paul’s words: “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (*NIV*, Philippians 2:4). When a church and its people have placed themselves after the interests of others, it will grow and blossom. Acts 2:47 is our example of a church of brotherly love. They were “praising God and

enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (NIV). That’s how the church ought to be today.

The Biblical Example of Love

The final trait is love, which is only possible in abundant life as we submit to the sanctification process. The trait of agape love isn’t possible unless I first love others. We won’t have this love from Jesus unless we don’t take these traits and grow our faith to want nothing but Jesus. If Jesus becomes our greatest aim, we can step into this final trait with an awareness of seeking His will for the church and others. Maybe a better way to say it is that Jesus must be everything.

Jesus certainly is why we have faith or justification. It all begins with Him, but it also ends with Him. The writer of Hebrews said it this way: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (NKJV, Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is the author of our faith in justification and the finisher of our faith in sanctification.

Jesus is also our model for life. When Paul told us to put others before ourselves, in he added Jesus as the example in Philippians 2:5, 7, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (NIV, Philippians 2:5, 7). Paul tells us that when we deal with others (brotherly kindness), we should have the same mind Jesus had. He made Himself nothing. Jesus took on human flesh and came down to His creation as a human being. He placed the call of God first in all that He was an example of how we should live today.

The agape love Peter writes about is only available with Jesus. This love comes from Him and then flows through us. Agape love is loving people who may not ever love us back. The

other missionaries asked Jim Elliot if they should take their guns with them as they met the Auca Indians in South America. Elliot said, "We will not take our guns," and added, "because we are ready for heaven, but they are not" (Aiken 81). Elliot and his fellow missionaries were killed on that trip. The Aucas didn't know the missionaries, but Elliot and his friends sure loved them.

Think about what Jesus has done for us. How can we not love people enough to tell them about the source of life and love? As Elliot stated about missionaries, our lives should be "simply a bunch of nobodies trying to exalt Somebody" (Aiken 82). Paul says it this way, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (*NIV*, 2 Corinthians 5:14). The love we have for Jesus should motivate us to love people enough to share His love with everyone.

The love of Christ and these traits mean that we place Jesus first. The great missionary to China in the early 1900s was a man named Bill Wallace. Dr. Bill Wallace was from Tennessee. He did his residency in Knoxville and had a fantastic career in front of him. But at the age of 17, he had an experience with the Lordship of Christ. He asked, "What shall I do with my life?" Then he realized that was the wrong question, so he asked, "What does God want me to do with my life?"

So, in the mid-1930s, Wallace left his home, church, friends, and practice and became a medical missionary to China. In those days, China was unstable politically and did not welcome any foreigners.

Wallace served the Chinese people for 15 years. He helped them physically and shared the gospel with everyone he could. The government imprisoned him, beat him with bamboo poles day and night, starved him, and brutally interrogated him. Then they hung him in his cell. What can so change a person is that they will give up everything, money, position, family, and friends to risk it

all. (Aiken 29-46). Will we risk it all? Will we let Jesus be the author and finisher of our faith? We will submit our lives in humility to grow in the sanctification process. We have the plan and examples to look at as we move to a deeper knowledge of God.

Epilogue

Finding the Right Perspective

The final part is challenging to overcome. It involves you and I believing that we are people who can possess great faith. We too often wrongly believe that folks in the Bible, missionaries, or famous preachers like Billy Graham are somehow better at this faith business than we are. They have Superman faith. They have powers that the rest of us can only hope to have.

The Bible doesn't teach this. Jesus never said that only a few special people have better faith than the rest of us. As a matter of fact, Peter used the phrase "like precious faith" in 2 Peter 1:1 to refer to everyone who has ever been saved. We all possess the faith we need to learn to live an abundant life. This life is available, and it is available to every Christian.

Hebrews 11 is called the Roll Call or Hall of Faith. We see a list of great Bible characters within that one chapter of the Bible. The Roll Call includes Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. Hmm. It appears many are missing. I mean, Joseph's the only one I mentioned earlier that made this list. Let's be honest. There are some great heroes of faith that aren't listed here, and there are a few who are questionable.

Would Barak, Samson, or Jephthah make our list of heroes? Barak refused to go fight unless the prophetess Deborah went with him. God brought a great victory for Israel through Barak, but Barak's not a spiritual giant. Samson made this illustrious list? A womanizer, a party guy. Samson is on the list, and he'd never be allowed to pastor a church today. Jephthah? God used him to bring a significant victory in the book of judges, but then Jephthah offered to make a pagan human sacrifice out of the first person he saw. It was his daughter, and he sacrificed her.

All these people had faults and failures of faith. A few of them were jumbo-sized character flaws of faith. But God used them. They all had a part to play for the people of God. God will use anyone who is willing to submit themselves to Him.

Seeing ourselves as inadequate or inferior is not the answer. Our names may never be used in conversations with great heroes or extraordinary people, but we must see that all of us have a role in the roll call of faith. Abundant living is simply learning to fulfill our role.

When cotton crops had drained the nutrients from the soil in the post-civil war south, God raised up a man named George Washington Carver. He tried to convince them to plant other crops, but the southerners refused. A boll weevil came from Mexico and devoured what was left of the cotton crops. Carver swayed the farmers to burn off the fields and plant peanuts. Carver prayed for God to show him what to do with the peanut, and God gave him a lifetime of inventions (*Facing*, 11-12). Carver played his part and lived out his faith to help others.

What's your gift? Or, as some would say today—finding your why. Why do you do what you do? What gift has God placed in you, and how will you accomplish God's plan for your life? God has placed the faith inside you to believe, and now you must build your faith in Him to be used by him for His glory.

That roll call of faith has within it a connection to our passage in 2 Peter 1:5. The word diligent in 2 Peter 1:5 is used again by the writer of Hebrews: “But without faith, *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (*NKJV*, Hebrews 11:6). Diligently seek Him. In other words, we can't do any of this halfheartedly and find abundant life. We cannot play around with faith in God through the sanctification process. We must commit our lives to Him to find abundance.

God's plan for abundance is available to all, and it begins with any believer who allows the Lord to live through them. We see ordinary people used powerfully for God over and over again in Scripture. One lady who didn't make it into Hebrews 11 was certainly on Peter's mind in the plan of abundance. Her placement in the Persian court came through strange circumstances of the world's choosing, but nonetheless, Esther became Queen. Like a Disney Princess movie, Esther was loved by the most powerful man in the world. She didn't seek the job, she wasn't the one the world would pick, but God chose Esther to be the proper lady in the right place to save His people.

Esther was an orphan raised by her uncle Mordecai. The Jews were a conquered nation, but God was using Mordecai and Esther to bring about Israel's deliverance. As Esther questioned her role, Mordecai delivered some of the best words in all the Bible. Mordecai told her that she could keep quiet and that God would use someone else to set His people free, and then Mordecai exclaimed: "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). Like Esther we all have our role to play. Just as sure as the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 and as the Bible characters we talked about in this thesis, every one of us ordinary people of faith are called by God to complete our task.

The reality is that we may never fulfill our part in the plan of God if we don't follow the prescription, He has laid out in 2 Peter 1:1-11. Because spiritual growth is a difficult task, we must be on guard against everything that takes us away from the purpose God has for our lives. When we examine the phrase "giving all diligence" Peter used in 2 Peter 1:5, we see that we must "make every effort," as the New International Version states. The word for diligence in Greek can also mean "to do one's very best" (Vine 167). So, this life of abundance can only come when ordinary Christians give themselves entirely to God to be used for His glory.

The seriousness of the entire surrender of self and adding these traits to our faith cannot be said emphatically enough. Twenty-four years ago, as a young pastor, I almost did something that would have shipwrecked my faith. I wasn't growing and coasting in my Bible study and prayer life. I was preaching every Sunday and Wednesday, and yet my faith was floundering. I have seen too many Christian friends go through the motions of faith only to fall into a temptation that cost them their families. We need to add these traits to our lives diligently. It is only because of God's great love that many more of us haven't failed in our walk with God.

Maybe you have failed. Maybe as you read this, you feel like God can't use you because of something in your past. If so, look to a guy that the apostle Paul refused to take with him on another missionary journey. Young John Mark started out with so much promise. He is first mentioned in Acts twelve, where we find Peter's miraculous jailbreak. Peter comes to a house where believers are praying for his release. According to Acts 12:12, the house Peter went to was "the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark" (NIV). We learn that Mark is the cousin of Barnabas in Colossians 4:10, and Paul and Barnabas take Mark on a mission trip. However, the going gets tough, and young Mark leaves them in Acts 13. He quit somewhere in his faith.

The Bible gives us many stories of failed faith. Some gave up all together, and some were restored. Mark is a story of restoration. He wound up reconciling with cousin Barnabas and launching out on another missionary journey. Even though Paul split with Barnabas over Mark, Paul would later say that Mark was helpful to him and instructed Timothy to bring Mark to visit Paul. Of course, Mark went on to write the first gospel and shared Jesus with the world.

We may fail in the faith, and we may find ourselves feeling like God couldn't possibly use us after we quit on Him. None of those thoughts are true. We have seen numerous times that

God uses ordinary people who simply seek to know God and have given themselves to Jesus. One such man was D.L. Moody. Moody was a shoe salesman who attended a church in Chicago. Edward Kimball was his Sunday School teacher and led Moody to faith in Christ. Moody started preaching and was influenced by some words spoken by a British Revivalist named Henry Varley. Varley said to Moody: "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him" (Fackler 1). Moody would later add, "I'll be that man." Through years of faithful service, Moody touched two continents for the kingdom.

Moody, a simple shoe salesman. Peter a humble fisherman. Both men prove to us that God uses ordinary people who simply believe they need God to live. Men and women who have surrendered to the reality that if God doesn't work through their lives, then nothing will become of them. God calls you and me to join him in this great purpose of abundant living. There is no higher call. We all take our place in the kingdom to fulfill what God has in store and, in this world, find abundance in Jesus. Jesus promised abundant life and wants us to find it through trusting Him.

Through Jesus, Peter was given the keys to the kingdom in Matthew 16:19. I believe the prescription outlined in 2 Peter 1:1-11 is a big part of kingdom life. Peter details the step-by-step plan in these verses with the single-mindedness to reach life's ultimate climax. To not be barren or unfruitful in the kingdom of God so that all of us can reach a glorious entrance into heaven. There is nothing better in this world than to spend our lives living for Jesus, and there will never be anything better than reaching heaven with eternal peace with God. Abundant life only comes by adding all the seven traits to our faith so that we can fulfill our purpose in playing a small part in His glorious kingdom. That is a life worth living. That is a life worthy of the call that Jesus has given to us.

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