

READ 2 PETER 1:1-4 & PRAY

Like many people, I have a checkbook to pay for things. I know that you millennials probably don't use one. Now you use a credit card or Apple Pay or Google Wallet to make a purchase. But there is a generation that still writes checks.

Now suppose I was a billionaire and I wrote you a check for \$1 million. And I handed it to you and said this is legit, this is real money, and it's for you. Take it. What would you do with that?

Well, you might do nothing if you thought I was a fraud, if you didn't believe it was real money. You might toss the check in the trash and forget about it. But if you thought it was real and that I wasn't a fraud, you'd cash it or deposit it in your account. What you wouldn't do, if you were sane anyway, is put it in a frame and hang it on your wall and look at it every once in a while and say, "Isn't that a wonderful check? I just love that check."

That wouldn't be rational would it? But I want to suggest to you that we might be doing that very thing with something vastly more precious than money. We can do that with the promises of God.

We are told in verse 4 that God *has granted to us his precious and very great promises*. Precious like rare jewels; in fact, precious like *the precious blood of Christ*¹ that takes away our sins, which is the only other thing Peter ever called *precious*. God has made promises to us that are worth more than anything in this world. They are *very great*.

But what we can do is read them, or hear them, and say "That's a nice promise. I like that" but not actually do anything with it. Like an uncashed check, it sits there waiting to do us good, but we don't act on it; sometimes, because we don't really believe it.

The Lord would not have it be so with us, friends. He would have us trust and act on his promises that we may experience the good that he intends to do with it. And what God intends is no less than this: *that you may become partakers of the divine nature*. We're going to see what that means this morning as we think through the passage. And my hope is that it will stir up each of us to trust the *very great promises* of God and see him work wonders.

So, let's go back to verse 4 and see what it says. I'm going to ask a series of questions of the text and see how it answers them. Here's the first question:

Q: WHAT HAS GOD GRANTED US?

A: PRECIOUS AND VERY GREAT PROMISES

...by which [that is, by God's own glory and excellence, verse 3] he has granted to us his precious and very great promises.

¹ 1 Peter 1:19

So, what is a promise? A promise, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary is "a declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance of a specified act."

For example, someone says to you, "I will pick you up for dinner at 6PM Friday night." You have a right to expect them to do it. If they don't show up, they've broken their promise, and that's no good.

Well, God makes promises to us. He says, "I will do this" or "I will not do that." And we have a right (if we can talk that way) to expect him to follow through. Not because we inherently deserve God to do anything for us, because we don't; we aren't worthy of it because of our sins. What we truly deserve is God's just punishment. But once God has said he will do something, then it isn't our worth that holds him to it, but it is his own worth, specifically *his own glory and excellence*.

By his own glory and excellence he has granted us his promises. So if he says, "I will do this" or "I will not do that," but doesn't follow through, then we would have to say, "You're not very glorious. That's not excellent." It would undermine his own perfections to break his promise. And he will never do that. As Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"

So God makes promises. And we are to expect him to keep those promises because of who he is, no matter how unlikely the thing promised seems to be.

For example, think of what God said to Abraham in Genesis 18:10. *"I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."* Now, that seems doable, not particularly extraordinary. Women have babies all the time. Except that Sarah was 90 years old and physically unable to bear a child. *The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.* This seems like an impossible thing to promise. But that's no problem for God. *Has he said, and will he not do it?* And he did. *The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised* (Gen. 21:1). The next year, Sarah had a son and they named him Isaac.

God makes promises, and he keeps them all. And they are *precious* and *very great promises*. Let me tell you some of the things God has said he will do or will not do.

Hebrews 13:5 *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* That is, I will never abandon you in your hour of need. I won't turn my back on you. I promise.

Isaiah 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* In other words, when you face something fearful – the waters

of affliction and fiery trials like a cancer diagnosis, or a stressful job situation, or persecution for your faith - when you actually get to that moment that you fear, I will be there and I will get you through it. I promise.

Matthew 11:28 *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Jesus says, you who have worn yourself out trying to find life and peace, come to me, you'll find it in relationship with me. I promise.

John 11:25 *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."* There is life after death for those who believe, I promise you.

These and hundreds more like them are promises that God makes to us, promises he is bound by *his own glory and excellence* to keep; promises that are intended to bless us mightily. They are *precious* and *very great* promises. And the Bible is full of them.

Now, I should address a possible objection here. Someone might say, "Well, I've trusted God's promises but it doesn't seem to me like God has kept them. I feel forsaken. I feel like I'm doing this alone. My soul isn't at rest. So these promises don't seem very great to me."

Here's how I think we can answer that. When it doesn't look like God is keeping his promises it could be for three reasons. One is that we don't understand the promise.

For example, for God to not forsake you doesn't mean God won't let you experience affliction and fiery trials. Jesus said to his disciples, "*In the world you have tribulation.*" Tribulation is part of your experience. But the Lord uses tribulation to do us good in the end. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17, *this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* If God is using your hard circumstances to produce eternal glory for you, then he isn't forsaking you. So it could be that we just don't understand what God is promising.

Second, we may have wrong expectations about when God is going to fulfill the promise. For example, God told Abraham that he would give him the land of Canaan for an inheritance. But it wasn't until 500 years later that the promise was fulfilled when the nation of Israel conquered the land under Joshua. We're not used to God's timetable. We live in an age where if someone doesn't answer our text message within the hour that we've been wronged. We expect things to happen fast, but God has his own timetable.

And the third reason it might seem like God isn't keeping a promise is the most serious one. It could be because he hasn't made that promise to you in particular. And that brings us to the second question to ask this text.

Q: TO WHOM EXACTLY DOES GOD MAKE THESE PRECIOUS PROMISES?

A: TO BELIEVERS IN JESUS

Again verse 4: He has granted *to us* his precious and very great promises. Who is the *us* there? It's people with a saving faith in Christ. The *us* refers to Peter and the people he is writing to, whom he greets this way in verse 1: *To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

This is a beautiful description of a genuine Christian. Think of what this says.

You have *obtained a faith. Obtained.* That word is only used 3 other times in the New Testament and it always means receiving something not by effort but by someone else's choice. You have obtained this faith because it was given to you, that is, given by God. This is Ephesians 2:8 kind of language. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* To be saved by grace through faith is the gift of God. Not only is salvation a gift, but the faith that lays hold of it is a gift. The whole process of being rescued from sin and given eternal life is gift.

So Peter is talking to people who have put their faith in Christ as Savior because God put it in their hearts to do so. And then there is this amazing statement about that faith. Peter says it is *of equal standing with ours.* He's saying to all these thousands of believers who will read this letter that your faith is as good as mine; it's as good as the faith of any apostle, in this way: we have *equal standing* before God. If you and an apostle approach the gates of heaven together, the apostle doesn't have a better pass than you do to get in. You have *equal standing.* God accepts you both on the same basis.

And what is that basis? What makes your faith as good as that of Peter or Paul or John? It is a faith you have obtained *by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

The word *by* could be the means of obtaining the faith or the object of the faith, but either way it tells us that this is a faith that depends on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who obeyed God perfectly in his life, and who obeyed God perfectly in his death by paying the penalty for my sins. It is a faith that looks away from our own sense of how well we have lived and looks only to the righteousness of Jesus and says "That's where my hope is. I have nothing to bring to God for acceptance. I need Christ to give me his righteousness in exchange my sin." And when we put our faith in Christ as Savior, that's exactly what God does.

So to whom exactly does God make *precious and very great promises*? To those who rely only on the righteousness of Christ for acceptance before God. To believers in Jesus. That's why this faith is *of equal standing* with the apostles, because it puts its hope in the same place as the apostles, which is in Jesus Christ.

And that is why God can make wonderful promises to us even though we are weak, even though we fail, even though we still struggle with various sins. Because the basis of the promise is the righteousness of Christ not your righteousness. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians

1:20, “*All the promises of God find their Yes in him,*” that is, in Christ. Christ has secured the Yes answers to God’s promises for genuine believers by his life and death for us.

So I urge you this morning, if you have not done so already. Do not think that God’s promises are for you if you think your own goodness is what gives you *standing* before him. It doesn’t. Turn away from yourself and turn to Christ, and say “I need you to save me. I need to exchange my sin for your righteousness. Will you do it?” And he will answer that prayer. And then all God’s promises will be Yes to you.

Let’s keep going and ask a third question of the text.

Q: WHAT IS HIS PURPOSE FOR THE PROMISES?

ANSWER: TO SHARE IN THE LIFE OF GOD

It’s a little risky to talk like that. That could be misunderstood. But here’s where it comes from. Verse 4: *he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that [here comes the purpose] through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

Now, what does that mean, to *become partakers of the divine nature*? Does that mean we become divine like God is, that we become little gods? No.

This is a restatement of what Peter said God has granted to us in verse 3. There he said that God’s *divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*. And then verse 4 tells us that God has *granted* us promises so that *...we may become partakers of the divine nature*. These are just two statements of the same thing. To *partake of the divine nature* is to experience *divine power for life and godliness*. Divine power brings the believer in Christ into an experience of God’s own *life and godliness* (if we can speak that way). It is a transformed life that originates from and is empowered by and sustained by God.

Which is why Scripture uses language like this to describe it: new birth, regeneration, transformation, renewal, sanctification. And of course, being conformed to the image of Christ, who is the perfect man who embodies the life of God in himself.

The promises of God are promises so that we may share in the very life of God himself like vine and branches; to be transformed from dead in our trespasses and sins to alive to God and growing in godliness, becoming like Christ himself in our character and our desires.

Which is why the text says that *partakers of the divine nature* have *escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*. The original language is unclear as to whether the escape has already happened or happens as a result of the promises. But it’s really both. In Christ believers are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6). We have escaped. And yet we are still putting to death sin in our lives (Romans 8). We are escaping sin’s corruption more and more through the promises of God, as we partake of his very life more and more.

Here's an implication of this truth. It means that God's promises are intended for the life of faith not for a life of selfish pursuits.

God doesn't promise "*I will never forsake you*" as an encouragement to just do whatever you want, because "Don't worry, he'll always bail you out. Go ahead and ignore his word, go ahead and pursue your career, your family, your entertainment, because he won't let you fall." No, that's not what the promises are for. They are for the life of faith; they are for growing in holiness; they are promises that as you follow Jesus and obey his commands, even when they are hard, he will be there for you, he will give you everything you need for the journey of walking with God in this world.

So do you need courage to tell someone about the gospel? God has a promise for that. *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses* (Acts 1:8). God promises power for witness.

Do you need hope that you can escape the corruption of pornography, or of pride, or fear of man; that you can really be free from these things? God has a promise for that. *Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16).

Do you need wisdom on what to do next in parenting, in counseling someone, in making a life decision? God has a promise for that. *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him* (James 1:5).

Are you afraid of taking a step of faith but you're afraid it might fail miserably? God has a promise for that. *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28).

You see, God's promises are fuel for the life of faith in following Christ. He wants you to experience the full measure of the new birth and the power of the Spirit. He wants you to partake of his very life working in you. That's what the promises are for. And there isn't anything better than that. Jesus said he came to give us abundant life. He came to give us joy. He came to give us peace. He came to bring us to God. This is what rest looks like. And it comes to us by way of God's precious and very great promises.

So here's the last question.

Q: HOW DO I EXPERIENCE THIS LIFE OF GOD?

ANSWER: BY TRUSTING GOD'S PROMISES

Peter says it is *through* the promises of God that you partake of the divine nature. And I think we can read that as through trusting those promises, that is through knowing them, believing them and then acting on those promises; living like you believe them to be true.

So picture a chair in front of you. You can look at a chair and say, "I think that chair will hold me up." But that's just knowledge. Trust is when you go and sit on that chair. The promise of God is like the chair. It will hold you up. God says it will. It won't fail you. But you need to go sit in it if you want to experience the power of that promise. That's trust.

To go back to the checkbook illustration at the beginning, the promise of God is the check, but the act of trust is the cashing of that check. If you just leave it on the wall in a beautiful case and never actually cash it by trusting it and acting on it, you won't experience the blessing that God intends.

Now, I'll qualify that by saying that some of God's promises are unconditional and don't depend on anything we do. Jesus' promise to return with the holy angels to gather his elect at the end of the age is unconditional. It's going to happen whether you believe it or not. But many promises are conditional in that God requires you to act in faith in order to receive the promised blessing.

Listen to what Charles Spurgeon said about this. He wrote a little book called *Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, which begins with this preface.

"A promise from God may very instructively be compared to a check payable to order. It is given to the believer with the view of bestowing upon him some good thing. ...Some fail to place the endorsement of faith upon the check, and so they get nothing; and others are slack in presenting it, and these also receive nothing. This is not the fault of the promise, but of those who do not act with it in a common-sense, business-like manner."

In other words the blessing comes when we actually trust and act on those promises.

There's an Old Testament story that illustrates this reality I think. The nation of Israel was on their way to the Promised Land, but the Jordan River was in their way. So Joshua, hearing from the Lord, said this in Joshua 3:13, "*when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.*" Notice the sequence of events. God would stop the Jordan River so they could walk across on dry land, but not until the priests first set foot in the water. First you act, and then God will meet you in that act with his divine power.

And so will it be in your life. *Divine power for life and godliness* comes in the act of trust, it doesn't come before your trust. It comes in the exercise of faith. It meets us in the moment of moving forward, trusting in a promise of God.

I've experienced this myself. Fifteen years ago God called me into vocational pastoral ministry. To respond to the call I would have to leave my very secure job, go to the Pastors

College with my wife and 4 kids (at the time), spend all our savings to do it, and come back to my church without a guarantee of a paid position. That's what it was going to take.

From a human standpoint it was a real gamble. There was no plan B, no safety net if this turned out wrong. We could end up broke, lose the house, etc. But God made me a promise, the same one he makes to all believers, in Matthew 6:33. *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* He promised, I'm going to provide for your needs if you do this. Trust me on this.

And he has been faithful to his promise. He provided. And he is still providing. And he will provide. And I have partaken of the divine nature. The Lord has revealed himself to me in ways I wouldn't have known had we not taken that step of faith and acted on that promise.

And so it will be with you. There are so many promises he has for us, so many breakthroughs in your life and for the sake of the gospel that are like uncashed checks just waiting for us to cash them by trusting them and acting.

So let me close with a note of application, with a practical way to grow in trusting the promises of God. Years ago I got a little card from John Piper's church that had an acronym on the cover. The acronym was APTAT. And it describes a pathway for practicing trust in God.

So I want to share it with you briefly. You can go on the Desiring God website and get the full explanation. But here's the short version.

APTAT: AN ACRONYM TO HELP US PRACTICE TRUST

A - Admit that without Christ, you can do nothing of abiding fruitfulness.

So some decision or trial or task is in front of you, and you start with a recognition of your inability to rise to the challenge in your own strength. And you should recognize that because Jesus said in John 15:5 "*Apart from me you can do nothing,*" nothing that will be fruitful for God's glory at least. We start with humility.

P - pray for God's help.

The help you need might be strength for a task or wisdom for a decision or for some intervention of God on your behalf. But you call out to him for help. And God himself invites us to do that in Psalm 50:15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.*

T - trust in a promise of God suited to your need.

This is where the promises of God come in. Typically our habit is that after we pray about something we just go straight to doing, to acting which is the next A in the acronym. But

when we do that, we can still operate with a lot of uncertainty as to whether or not we're on the right course. It can still seem like we're just walking forward in the dark, hoping that this is something God will help us with, but we're not sure.

So how do you get confidence that you are on the right track, that God is in this? You trust in a particular promise of God suited to that situation.

For me, when I went to the Pastors College, I pleaded that Matthew 6 passage that God would provide for us when we stepped out in faith. I said, "Lord, I need this to be true because if you don't do it I'm in big trouble." It was a specific promise. You need to ground your course of action in a promise of God, and that gives you confidence to move forward.

So you can see that it will be really important for you to actually know what promises God has made to you. You're going to need to know your Bibles for this. I recommend that you memorize the promises that really speak to you and your situation, the ones you're going to need over and over again.

For me Isaiah 41:10 is my go-to promise for everyday life. "*Do not fear for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" To me that's the Swiss Army knife promise for just about every situation. It's a promise of God's help. But you'll want to know many more.

So T is for trust a promise suited to your need. And after that, another A...

A - act with humble confidence in God's help.

You actually do something that requires trust in God's promise. As Spurgeon would say, "You act with it in a common-sense, business-like manner." You make that decision, you take that step, you leave something in God's hands; you move forward. That's how you cash in the check of God's promise and turn a written promise into an experienced reality. And then you do one last thing:

T - thank God for the good that comes.

We forget that part sometimes. But to thank God for what happens reinforces the fact that God did this, not you, not coincidence, not that it was going to happen anyway. God was faithful, and the remembrance of it encourages us to trust him again. Journaling is a good way to capture these moments. It's a way to remember God's faithfulness to you personally.

APTAT. I commend this process to practice trust in God's promises. And who knows if the breakthrough you want in your holiness or ministry or parenting or fruitfulness is not just around the corner as you trust the promises of God.

May we all partake more and more of *the divine nature* through trusting God's *precious and very great promises*, and see what only God can do.

PRAY