

Thought For The Week

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Peter's Recipe for Christian Growth

From Jim's morning and evening sermons, August 30, 2026. Morning readings by John (2 Peter 1:1-4) and Roger (2 Peter 1:5-11, NASB). Evening reading by Mike (2 Peter 3:17-18).

Jim came to the pulpit after a short night and an earlier morning spent finishing the lesson. In the haste he had left behind the bowl of heart medicines that regulate a dangerous heartbeat. He warned the congregation, joking with Kevin, that if he suddenly “freaked out” it would be the defibrillator, and they should not touch him. Then he named his subject: Peter's recipe for Christian growth, drawn from the man Jim calls his favorite character in Scripture.

He loves Peter because he believes there is a little of Peter in all of us. Peter was greatly flawed, as Jim considers himself greatly flawed, and God still used him to do great things. That gives hope that God can use ordinary, flawed people in His ministry. More than that, Peter was a perseverer. He tried, failed, suffered, and tried again. He overcame personality flaws and bad decisions and became the leader in the fledgling church that Jesus wanted him to be.

Peter loved that church. He could see that the times were dangerous and growing more evil. As both apostle and elder he felt an urgency to feed the church the Word of God, instill the basic knowledge of Christ, and warn of dangers from outside and from false brethren inside. The letter is only three chapters long, Jim said, and it is worthy of reading.

The Hour in Which He Wrote

The setting was grim. Roman Emperor Claudius had persecuted the Jews heavily and expelled them from Rome in 50 AD. His successor Nero, after what Jim called his “fiddle lessons,” turned on Christians after the fire of 64 AD. That fire burned nine days in July and destroyed much of a city built of wood packed tight together. Today people would blame El Niño. Then it was blamed on El Nero. The story that Nero played a fiddle while Rome burned is a myth; fiddles had not been invented. Perhaps he played a recorder. The danger ran through the empire.

As 67 AD approached—the year commonly assigned to Peter's martyrdom—he may have sensed that his time was nearly up and remembered Jesus' words on the shore of Galilee: “Feed my sheep.” Those words, Jim suggested, helped inspire this last letter.

Strike the Shepherd

The path to that shoreline began with prophecy. Zechariah 13:7 had said, “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.” Jesus was struck, went to the cross, and died. After His arrest the disciples scattered, just as He had predicted. John and Peter then followed Him to the high priest's house. John, who apparently knew the staff—Jim guessed he had sold them fish—went in with Jesus. Peter waited in the courtyard by a fire. There his love and devotion were tested.

After the resurrection Jesus showed Himself to many as proof that He lived. As the good shepherd He sought His scattered sheep. On His third appearance to the disciples He found seven of them, including Peter, at Capernaum, Peter's home base. They had fished the Sea of Galilee through most of the day and all night and caught nothing. At dawn a voice from shore asked, "Children, haven't you any fish?" They said no. He told them to cast on the right side. They enclosed 153 large fish. John recognized a second version of an earlier miracle and said, "It's the Lord."

Jim added a fisherman's note. The three main species in that lake are carp, barbel (called thyme), and tilapia (called mushk). Carp and barbel there average about fifteen pounds. One hundred fifty-three large fish at that weight is more than a ton, over two thousand pounds. When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he jumped in, seized the net, and dragged it onto the sand. Jim contrasted that with the trouble he and Wally once had landing a fifty-pound salmon in Johnson Creek. Peter was a strong man.

Jesus already had a fire and fresh bread. They cooked fish and ate breakfast. No one had to ask who it was. Then Jesus turned to unfinished business with Peter.

Agape, Phileo, and a Public Reckoning

After the meal Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you agape-love me more than these?"—probably meaning the other disciples. Peter answered that he phileo-loved Him. Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." A second time Jesus asked whether Peter agape-loved Him. Peter again offered phileo, and Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." A third time Jesus used Peter's word: "Do you phileo-love me?" Peter was deeply hurt and said the Lord knows all things and knows that he phileo-loves Him. Jesus said again, "Feed my sheep."

Agape, as Steve had said in class that morning, is godly, God-like love, not a mere affectionate feeling. It can be commanded, as Jesus commanded the disciples in the upper room to love one another. First Corinthians 13 is the textbook: love is patient and kind; it does not envy, boast, or act proudly; it is not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth; it always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres; love never fails. Phileo is affection, being fond of someone. Jim would not degrade it, but he insisted on the difference.

What Jesus was measuring, Jim said, was whether Peter was humble after what had happened only days before. In the upper room Jesus announced betrayal and then said they would all be offended, fall away, and abandon Him. He quoted Zechariah 13. Peter, in his usual boast, claimed loyalty even to prison and death, and worse, dishonored the others by saying that even if all failed, he never would. Pride precedes the fall. After throwing his brothers "under the bus," that arrogance is what Jim believes Jesus was probing with the three questions.

Jim does not read the shoreline as the moment of restoration. He reads it as a public apology to the other disciples. The restoring, in his view, had already happened when Jesus appeared to Peter alone, as Paul infers in 1 Corinthians 15:5. Like a shepherd binding a wounded sheep and carrying it home, Jesus first healed the emotional damage of the denial. Peter had been despondent and had run to the point that he could be said to have fallen away, just as Jesus and Zechariah had said. The intensity of the denial matched the intensity of the earlier boast.

After about an hour in the courtyard someone insisted Peter was one of them; his Galilean accent

gave him away. He cursed and swore that he did not know the man. The rooster crowed, and as it crowed Christ turned and looked at him. Peter remembered the word, went out, and wept bitterly. It takes a great deal to make a man weep that way. Peter was broken.

Jesus had already prayed that Peter's faith would not fail, and that when he returned he would strengthen his brethren. Peter would be fragile, but he had an advocate. He would be integral to the Lord's work. On Pentecost he would preach the church's first public sermon. The three questions in front of the others were the potter checking whether the clay had been shaped into the leader He wanted, with the right attitude.

Then Jesus spoke of Peter's death. When he was young he dressed himself and went where he wished; when old he would stretch out his hands, and another would dress him and carry him where he did not want to go. John says this signified the death by which Peter would glorify God. Then Jesus said, "Follow me." The meaning was crucifixion: stretched out and bound to lumber, a slow martyr's death. No one wants that. Jesus Himself, in Gethsemane, fell face down and asked that the cup pass, yet not as He willed but as the Father willed. He accepted death to remove sin and the guilt of breaking God's law. Peter would face martyrdom after a life spent serving the church. Seeing that day approach is what most likely produced 2 Peter. He was sober-minded and fixed on what mattered.

Milk, Meat, and No Autopilot

Peter was an apostle with care for the whole church and an elder of a home congregation somewhere in Asia Minor, a shepherd with a flock of his own. Jesus had told him to feed lambs and sheep. In the first charges the verb is **bosko**—not chocolate syrup in milk, Jim joked, but fodder, the hay given to an animal in one's care. The elder puts food before the flock: the Word, milk for lambs and meat for sheep. He must know what they can take. The young are not helped by types and antitypes; they need the elementary teachings of Christ.

In the third charge the verb is **poimaino**. The noun for shepherd or pastor is **poimen**. **Poimaino** means to tend as an elder: to rule, watch, feed, and guide. That was Peter's work, and it is any elder's work.

He balanced milk and meat in both letters, as he likely did in his own assembly. The elementary teachings are those of Hebrews 6:1-2: repentance from acts that lead to death, faith in God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. The writer of Hebrews had to rebuke people who had stalled and become bench warmers. He wanted to teach Melchizedek, but they needed milk again. After forty years in the Lord's church, Jim said, he still finds new nuggets of gold. They are there for anyone who will look.

A person can read a text a hundred times, and on the hundred and first the light clicks. The Spirit says to compare this with that, and application follows. Throughout 2 Peter 1 everything is tied to knowledge. Grace and peace are tied to knowledge gained from the Word. New Christians need the basics; by Peter's own words the mature need them regularly as well.

In 1:12-15 Peter says he will always remind them of these things even though they know them and are established in the truth. He is speaking to people who can eat meat. Even sheep need the basics repeated so they do not stagnate. Those who know faith and baptism "like the palm of their hand" should suffer through the reminder and humble themselves. A light may still go on. Peter thought it

right to refresh their memory as long as he lived in the tent of this body, because he would soon put it aside, as the Lord had made clear, so that after his departure they would remember. There is no cruise control and no autopilot in Christianity, least of all in the pursuit of knowledge. God wants His people to dig as for treasure, find the pearl in the field, buy the field, and make it their own. That is how faith becomes personal.

Knowledge must then be practiced. God blesses that effort with more grace and peace because practice will be tested. He will permit things that challenge faith. The response is not a hissy fit about how cruel life is. It is to recognize the test and ask what Jesus would do—and do it. “Christian” means little Christ. The name began as mockery. They took it as a badge of honor in the first century. At least then the light is showing, and Christ is seen in the face.

The Recipe in the Letter

That method is written in 2 Peter 1. Divine power has already given everything needed for life and godliness through knowledge of the One who called them by glory and goodness. Through those things He has given precious promises so that believers may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption caused by evil desires. One purpose of Scripture is to know the mind of God, discern His will, and gain a new standard of truth. It also shows what must be done to be with God in eternity. As people study, He grants what they need. His providence, protection, and preservation help them survive. Matthew 6:25-34 already said God knows the need for food, shelter, water, and clothing, and that if He feeds the creatures of nature He will much more provide for His own. When the Word is practiced, the Spirit transforms people into the Son’s image.

Peter chose **epignosis** rather than **gnosis**. **Gnosis** is gathering facts. **Epignosis** is possessing them fully and using them. Study without doing is not the recipe. Work at it with the diligence of a job. Paul told Timothy to study to show himself approved, a workman unashamed who handles the word correctly, and to watch life and doctrine closely, because perseverance in both saves the teacher and the hearers. That is spiritually a matter of life and death.

A principle sits in the greeting: grace and peace are multiplied through the knowledge of God and of Jesus the Lord. The more that knowledge grows, the more grace and peace God supplies. Then the list: to faith add goodness; to goodness, knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; to brotherly kindness, love. Possessed in increasing measure, these keep a person from being useless and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Anyone who lacks them is short-sighted and has forgotten purification from former sins. Those who practice them will never stumble, and entrance into the eternal kingdom will be abundantly supplied.

The virtues overlap the fruit of the Spirit. Added to faith and put to use, they form the image of Christ, bear fruit, and bring God glory. Knowledge then increases again. Growth is a circular upward spiral: study, practice, likeness; more grace, peace, and provision; more study, more practice, deeper likeness. The Lord multiplies peace against anxiety when trust and godly practice hold, as in Philippians 4:4-13. He multiplies grace because faith will be tried. Tests show whether a person understands what is being practiced and whether the faith is serious. There will be failures and sins. Yet those who walk in the light as He is in the light have fellowship with God, and the blood of Jesus purifies them from all ungodliness. That blood also lifts guilt so the conscience can serve. Confession may be private—a closet, a prayer, a purged soul—and it defuses Satan’s charge

that the believer is unworthy and should quit. God is quick to forgive. He removes sin as far as east from west. When Jesus makes someone free, that person is free indeed.

More knowledge makes a person more useful. The life is not to be boxed: Christian in the assembly, something else at work. The light is to shine wherever the person stands. But knowledge puffs up; love builds up. No one who has walked farther may look down on those whose Christianity once could have fit in a bottle cap. Agape requires patience, kindness, and gentleness. Children of God still owe it to themselves to pick up the Bible, read, meditate, study with the saints, and practice what they learn.

Chapter 2 warns of false teachers and the end of the ungodly who will not repent. Chapter 3 opens the day of the Lord, when heavens and earth are destroyed. Continued learning then guards against error that can carry people away. “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

That is the recipe. God has already given everything required for life and godliness. The church’s work is to know Him with a knowledge that is used, to feed lambs milk and sheep meat, to refuse stagnation and autopilot, to add the virtues in increasing measure, to walk in the light when tested, and to keep growing until the welcome into the kingdom. Peter’s last gift to the family he loved was not a novelty. It was a method that could outlast Nero, and that still holds for anyone who will work it until they see the Lord.

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Grow in Grace: Peter's Recipe for Maturity

A short summary of the longer article "Peter's Recipe for Christian Growth," drawn from Jim's morning and evening sermons on August 30, 2026.

Peter wrote his second letter as a flawed man whom God had remade. Jim calls him a favorite biblical character for that reason: there is a little of Peter in all of us. He boasted in the upper room, denied Jesus with curses in the courtyard, and wept bitterly when the rooster crowed and the Lord looked at him. Jesus had already prayed that his faith would not fail. Jim holds that a private appearance restored Peter; the three questions on the Galilee shore were a public reckoning and a test of humility—**agape** versus **phileo**—before the charge to feed lambs and sheep.

That charge shaped the letter. Peter was apostle and elder. He fed milk to the young and meat to the mature, and he refused spiritual autopilot. As martyrdom neared—traditionally around 67 AD, under the shadow of Nero after the fire of 64—he left the church a method, not a mood.

God's divine power has already given everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of Christ. Peter's word is **epignosis**: knowledge possessed and practiced, not merely collected. Grace and peace multiply as that knowledge grows. To faith add goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Possessed in increasing measure, these keep a believer from being useless in the knowledge of Christ.

Growth is an upward spiral: study, practice, likeness; then more grace, more peace, more study. Trials will come. Walk in the light; the blood of Jesus cleanses and lifts guilt. Beware pride—knowledge puffs up; love builds up—and beware false teachers. Peter's last word is still the church's work: grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For the full account of Peter's fall and restoration, **bosko** and **poimaino**, the elementary teachings of Hebrews 6, and the complete recipe in 2 Peter 1–3, see the longer article, "Peter's Recipe for Christian Growth."

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