

## **“Peter Puts It All Together”**

“A disaster” is the best way to describe my first attempt to make a pie. It was one of those times where we step out of any area of past experience.

Cooking was not a new challenge, that bridge had been crossed many years before around a camp fire. Cherry cobbler in a Dutch oven using bisquick dough, however, is very different than making pie dough from scratch.

That’s what recipes are for, right? The recipe was followed to the letter. The dough rolled out and placed in the pan with the filling, and then the top crust. Even a fancy rose for the top with little leaves was produced exactly as directed. Everything was topped off with a glaze applied to the crust to create a beautiful sheen.

It required the practicing of patience to wait until the proper time and then out from the oven came one of the prettiest pies ever seen. At least that was my assessment.

It was hard to keep from calling my friends to have them come over and look at this work of culinary art. There was only one mistake made. It happened when the pie was cut. The actual cutting was just fine, but that’s when the word disaster came to mind.

The dough was thick and not done in the center. The crust that was done tasted like over cooked paste. My discovery was we can take all of the ingredients for a pie, put them together in a reasonable manner and still not come out with anything worth eating.

How can one be so sure of this? It’s bad when even the dog won’t eat it. She just gave me this look like she had insulted by placing the pie in front of her.

Perhaps much the same thing occurs in some people's spiritual life. They know the right ingredients, but somehow they aren't put together right and the end result is not what they had in mind. Have you ever felt that way about your journey with God in this world?

Many different pieces concerning growth in Christ have been shared in the preceding chapters, and it's important that we spend some time trying to put those pieces together. Peter helps us significantly through his writings in Second Peter, chapter one, verses two through seven. Take a moment and read through these verses below. Verses nine through eleven are included to provide more context for your consideration.

<sup>2</sup>Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; <sup>3</sup>seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup>For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. <sup>5</sup>Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup>and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, <sup>7</sup>and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup>For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup>for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (NASB)

We begin by getting to know God: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord;..." (II Peter 1:2) There is no better place to begin. In fact, there is no other place you can begin!

Only through Jesus can we truly know God. The word knowledge does not mean knowing about God, rather knowing Him in a very close and personal way. This begins through our forgiveness, new birth, and by receiving Jesus as our Lord. By this we are given a saving knowledge in Jesus Christ. (Read John 3:1-18)



(To Know God)

This knowledge is an event which gives to us “everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him,...” (II Peter 1:3) Peter’s words agree with John who wrote that the Holy Spirit would “guide us into all the truth;” (John 16:13).

God will never withhold anything from us that we need in order to grow in Christ according to His will for our life. As we grow in our true knowledge of God the Holy Spirit is able to help us better understand Jesus, Who now dwells within us.

Why does He give us these wonderful gifts? “In order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” (II Peter 1:4) Let’s divide this into a couple of pieces.

First, there is this business about us becoming “partakers of the divine nature,” how does this happen? As before, the answer is “through Jesus Christ.” But it goes beyond your initial “introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:2), and extends into every facet of our daily lives.

Our actions begin to comply with the will of God as we get to know God better and better. Thus, our partaking of this new divine nature given to us by Jesus is a process of living-out the Life of Christ given to us during the event of our salvation in Jesus.

The second part deals with our escape from the corruption which is “in the world by lust.” (Take a moment and re-read James 1:13-15). Again, this does not just address the spiritual justification of our new life before God.

It also refers to the application of our “freedom” in Christ within each day that we live on this earth. As we follow God’s will for us we gain a victory over sin by not yielding to our own lusts. “I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” (I John 2:14)

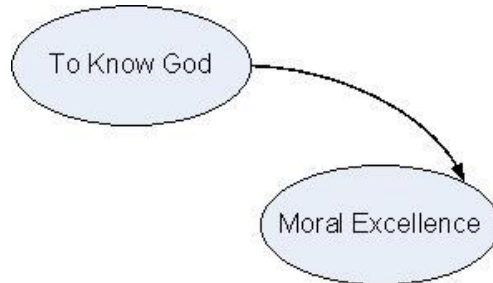
Since all of the above is true, Peter says that we are to apply all “diligence” in our “faith”. We are supposed to work at growing in Christ in partnership with the Holy Spirit Who will guide us into all the Truth.

This is the practice of faith. Why? Because we trust in God and act upon that trust. With “all diligence” means that we are going to put forth all our efforts into this opportunity in Christ.

Now, how is this done? Here the Spiral begins its path of growth by us supplying “moral excellence” through our faith in Christ (Verse 5).

The moral difference within our Life in Christ is considered an expected result from salvation in Christ. “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

This moral difference is the natural result of living-out the Life of Jesus that's now within us. It comes from being obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He was freely given to us, and now we can freely be obedient to His guidance.



(Moral Excellence)

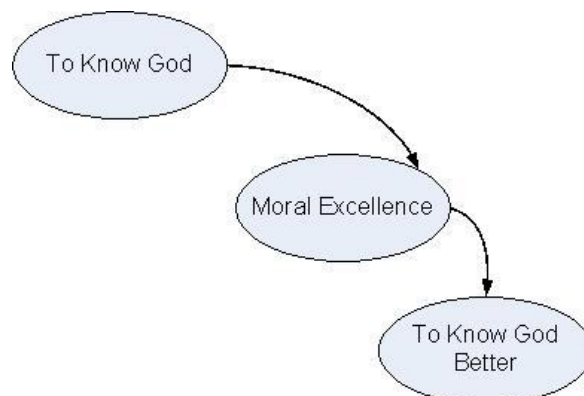
“But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)  
“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) This is something that we may want to ignore because it hits us where we live.

We feel the subtle, but consistent pressure of the need to change through obedience. Most of us don't like someone else placing restrictions on our activities, because we want to run our own life.

With “all diligence, in your faith” we are to be morally excellent. It is hard to get away from that one! The “problem” that we want to run away from is change, because we believe that we will be happier doing what is wrong than by doing what God says is right.

We believe that we know what is best for us, more so than God does. As we have considered prior to this, what we believe to be true shapes our actions.

Trust in God, and act upon that trust. Obey the leadership of the Spirit as He tries to guide us into moral excellence. Next, we need to get to know God better, “and in your moral excellence,” add “knowledge.” This is the third step in the Spiral.



(To Know God Better)

In each Spiral we have see this word “knowledge.” It is not referring to an intellectually based pursuit of God. Peter is not saying we need to learn more about God.

Again, this is about us knowing God in a deep and personal way in Christ, through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Such knowing is connected with moral excellence because it has to do with knowing God’s will.

Obviously, it is hard to follow God’s will if we don’t know what it is. We learn to know God’s will by knowing God.

When two people first get married they may know each other fairly well, but as the years pass, if they spend “quality time” together they will get to know one another much better. They will learn the desires of the other’s mind and heart.

Sometimes in conversations we may find that we know what the other person’s going to say before they say it. In a given situation we may know what the other person wants us to do. Why? Because we know their will. We know what they would want us to do.

Yes, it takes time to know God’s will in a deep and intimate manner. We may find ourselves with a decision to make and suddenly we are struggling to know God’s will. Our frustrations increase due to our lack of clarity about what God wants us to do. This most always happens because we have not taken the time to get to know God better and better.

God will not be treated like a servant. Whenever we need help we call on Him, and the rest of the time He can stay in the background of our living unnoticed.

He must is the Lord of our life, and He must be treated as our Lord. Why? Well, yes, because that’s Who He really is whether we recognized that or not. Jesus is Lord over all; everyone and everything.

Equally important is so He can show us what is best for our living on a daily basis. By letting Him lead us we are doing nothing more than acknowledging what is true; what is reality. We are also doing the very best and wisest thing for ourselves and those around us.

Since it does take time to know God as a mature follower of Christ, we face a problem because circumstances do not wait to send trials in our direction. What can we do? Of course we can pray, read scripture, seek help from other followers of Christ whom we trust, and listen to the thoughts inspired by the Holy Spirit in the quietness of our heart as we wait upon the Lord.

The point here, however, is that whatever we do it should be a part of our actions to get to know Who God really is, what He is like, and how He thinks. Also, remember a part of seeking God's will is to trust Him to show it to us in such a way that we will be able to recognize it.

Part of the problem we may have in our search is that in our mind we have already decided what the right thing is that God should lead us to do. In order to seek God first, we can't consider what we would do first, or what seems like the right thing to do given the circumstances.

We must go to God first and let Him show us how we should think, and what we should do. This is not about knowing God so well that we don't need to ask Him. Not asking Him means we are relying on ourselves, and not on God.

"What do you mean? We know God doesn't want us to lie. So, it should be obvious that when we are tempted to lie, we know not to do so without needing to ask God." That's an interesting question, and assumption.

God is not more interested in us learning what He thinks, than getting to know Him and how He thinks. Let's try stepping out of our intellectual pursuits, and live within Christ as we exist with God in our eternal relationship with Him.

Let's try to remember that knowing not to tell a lie is not the critical point. Sure, we need to know that, but that's not the answer to living within the Truth.

We seek God first so He can show us Who He is and what to say, more importantly than what not to say. It's interesting to note how we often adopt a negative perspective about obeying God.

We focus on "thou shall not lie", rather than "now we can tell the Truth". It's not the key point to say we must not sin. The primary point is that in Christ we don't have to sin, because we are set free of the power of Sin!

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2)

"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:10-14)

Another problem that some may have is that we want to know all the answers to all our questions before we follow the leading of God. It is like we need to check out His plan and make sure He knows what He is doing. We want to know the “end game” before we take the first step.

If we have faith in God then we will trust that He knows what is best and follow His leading as soon as we are aware of it. It is somewhat like following a guide into the mountain wilderness.

If we stand there to try and decide if you like the path the guide is taking, we will be left behind. When the guide says “go” we go, and when the guide says “rest” we rest.

Once we have been over a path then we have a better idea of which way to travel in that part of the wilderness. That’s not so we can take off on our own. It’s so we improve our ability to walk with the Lord in partnership with Him. We are foolish to ever ignore the Lord, go left when the direction given to us is “go right”, or to ever stop asking for guidance before we start walking.

In another way following God’s will is like walking in a dense jungle. There we stand not being able to see two feet beyond our present position, only able to see the path directly under our feet.

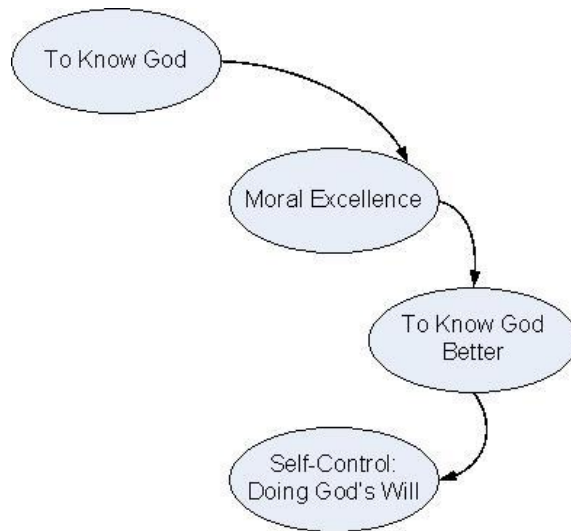
Search as we may, we can not find the direction we should go. Then we sense the leadership of God to step directly ahead. It is not until we step forward, irretrievably shifting our weight that our leg pushes back the brush and we see that there is solid ground before us. It’s the path we needed all along. (Read Joshua 3:14-17)

By continuing to know and do God’s will the next part of the Spiral is added to our growth in Christ: self-control. Here is where we learn to let God have His way with us.

As we live from day to day it is so easy to assume that we have the answers to life’s questions. This is not to say that we do not have the capability to know how to survive in the world. We might be thinking, “after all God did give us a brain and the ability to use it.”

The question is not whether we “can” live in the world without surrendering every part of our life to Him, but are we going to surrender our life to Him because we want to? The question is not, “Can we figure out a path for ourselves without God’s leading?” Instead it’s whether or not we are living a life of celebration as we rely on God to always lead us in the best path to take, and how to walk it?

Self-control within Christ, means the surrender of our life to the leadership of God. We ask God’s direction in all things because we want to please Him in everything. Nothing that is a part of our life is irrelevant to our relationship with God.



(Self-control: Doing God's Will)

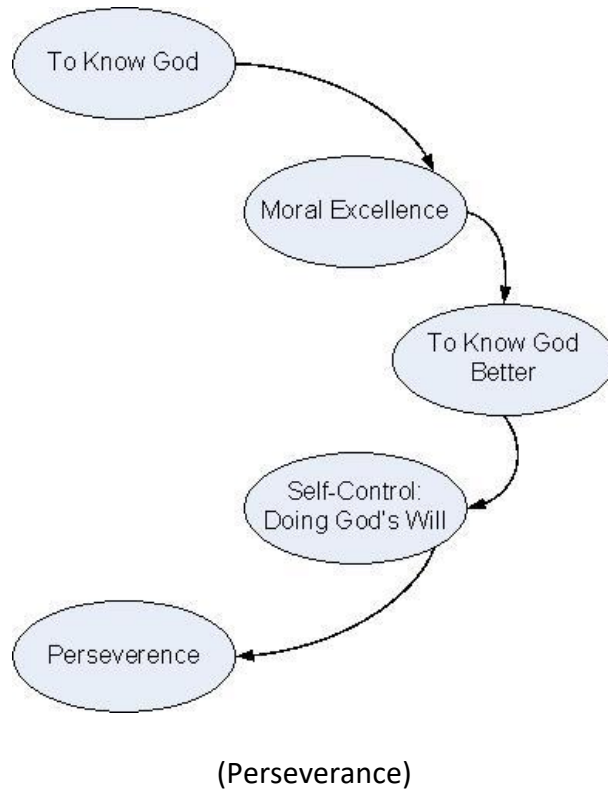
What we are controlling is the desire of our “self” to be the boss of our lives. This is necessary in every phase of our growth in Christ.

Because we have gotten to know God better, we are better enabled to surrender our lives to His control. Why? The answer is easy, because following God will result in us trusting God more and more.

This doesn't mean being able to trust God to do what we want or think is right. Instead, it's about trusting God to do what He knows is best for us and all those who are involved in a set of circumstances.

The result is our faith in God helps us to proceed around the Spiral to perseverance. (We may recall that we dealt with this part of our growth in Christ within the chapter “transformation through truth”, so reference that chapter if a review is needed.)





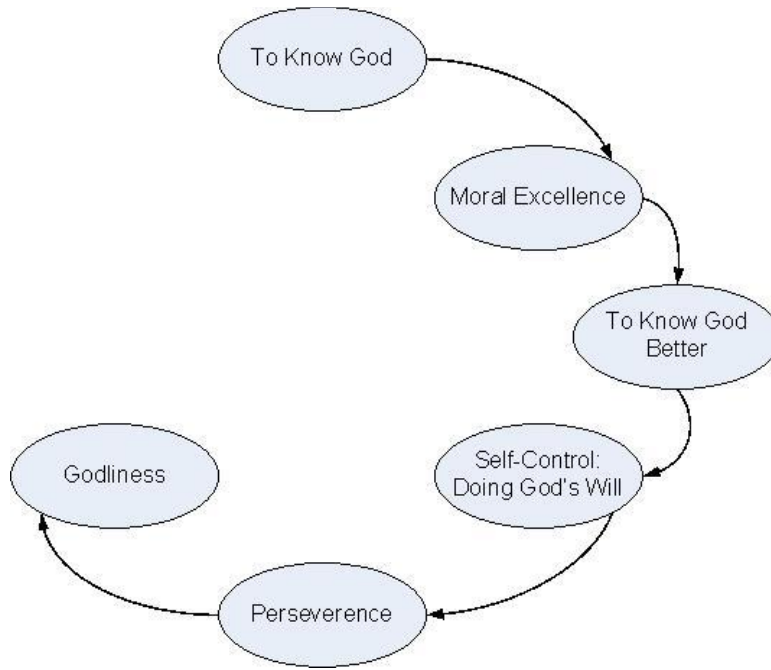
It is, however, important to emphasize that as followers of Christ we so need to persevere. James writes, “blessed is the man who perseveres under trial;...” (James 1:12) Only by remaining faithful will we learn the important lessons that the Holy Spirit is seeking to teach us concerning the Truth.

As we learn these lessons from the Spirit of God we will take on the next quality of growth in Christ, which is “godliness.” (Verse 6) Here we find our willingness to do what is pleasing to God coming from a reverence for God which is centered in love.

This is a result of the transformation process. Through a depth of knowledge of God in Christ, moral excellence, self-control, and perseverance, we begin to long to do God’s will.

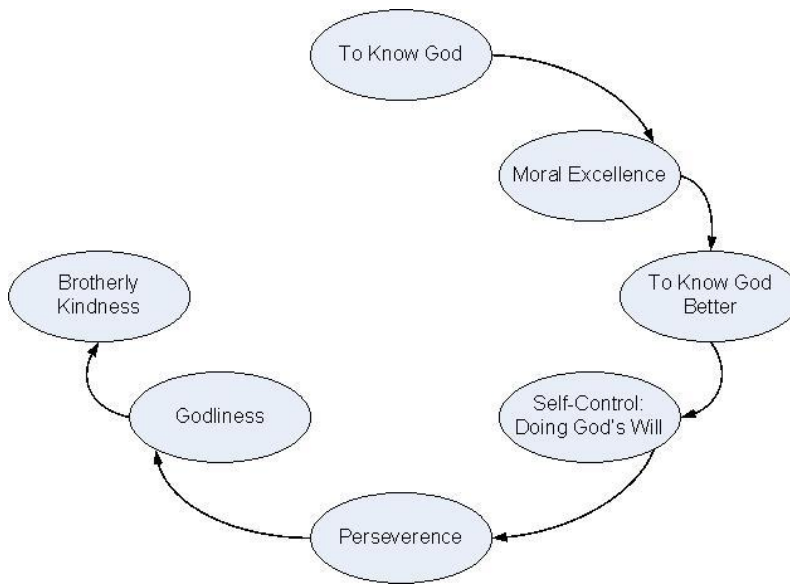
Our old-nature patterns of thought and behavior are replaced by patterns that are created by the Holy Spirit from our new-nature in Christ. This change increases as our love for God grows.

The change within us causes changes in how we interact with others and the world around us. Such changes that flow from Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit reveal Who God is, and that we truly love Him. Our increase of God-likeness in our behavior is known as godliness.



(Godliness)

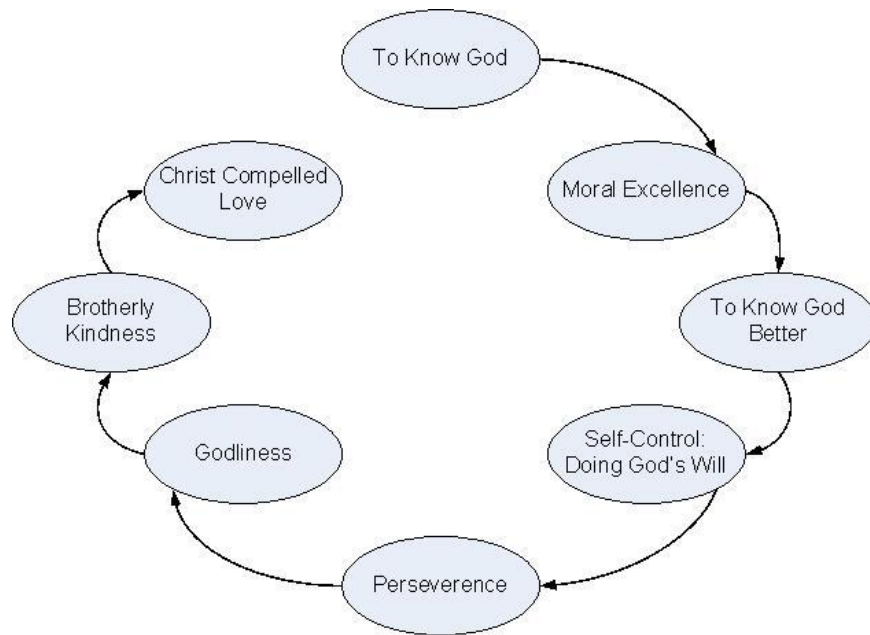
This growth in godliness will accompanied by growth in “brotherly kindness.” (Verse 7) One cannot exist without the other. Our love for people is part of what distinguishes us as children of God. “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God who he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)



(Brotherly Kindness)

This gift of love must grow as we allow God to lead us into a deeper love. Brotherly kindness calls us to follow the Lord as He meets the needs of others through us. “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” (Romans 15:1,2)

As each part of this Spiral continues to build upon one another we are lifted-up into the power, and maturity of God’s gift of Christ-compelled-love. (Verse 7)

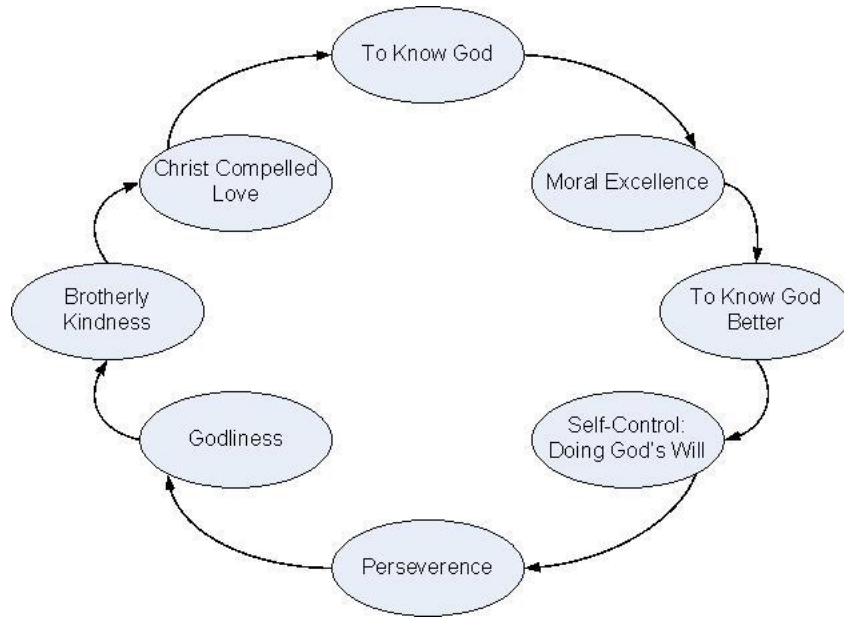


(Christian Love)

This happens when we are surrendered to God’s love so deeply that we are compelled to love others because of the love of God within us. This love is a result of our deep love for God as we ensure God is first in our thoughts, words, and actions.

It is this unity in love that proves to the world that Jesus is the son of God. “And the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as thou didst love Me.” (John 17:22, 23)

This Christ-centered love will begin to fill each aspect of our living as we surrender to the will of God, in Christ, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. As this depth of love reaches into our minds and hearts new insights into the fullness of the life we have in Christ will bring a more complete knowledge of the of God, in Christ, and our growth continues.

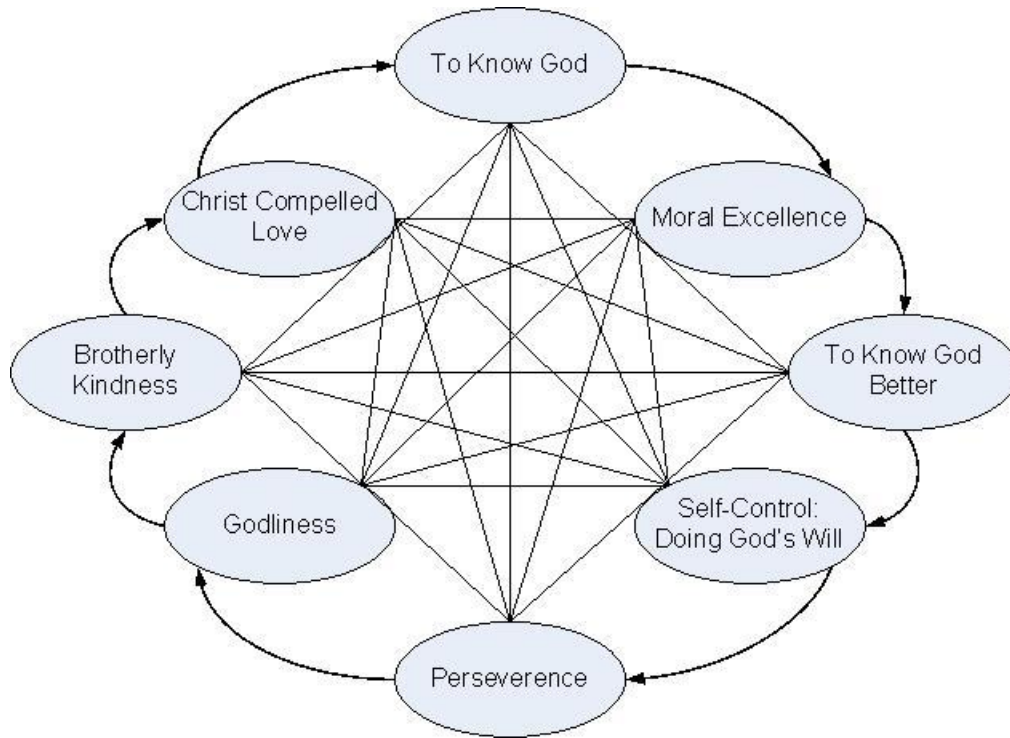


(Completes the Spiral)

God gives all of this to us in Christ so we might know the truth and be set free into the abundant life that He has for us. It is a gift. We can not earn it, but we must work hard if we are to experience its intended potential in our lives.

The gift of life in Christ always causes growth in our love of God. As we grow in knowledge of Him we are transformed by His truth, and grow continue to grow even in the midst of our tribulations.

The work of God is revealed in and through our life in Christ by moral excellence, self-control, perseverance, and godliness resulting in brotherly love; which in turn works together to increase our love for God so He can love others through us with Christ-like love. Each Spiral inter-works with the others to bring forth the fruit of God's work in our life. Just as each element of the various growth Spirals interact to cause cumulative growth within a given Spiral of Life in Christ.



(Interactive and Iterative Growth)

My hope is for all that has been shared in these chapters will help of us in your growth in Christ. These Spirals are not intended to tell us the only way growth occurs in Christ.

They are meant to help us understand more clearly how growth can occur in Christ. If we understand what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in us then perhaps we can follow His leadership more easily and completely.

There is one last area to share with all who read these chapters . My intent is to suggest how we might begin to put some of these concepts to work. Of course, whether they work or not will be determined by the Holy Spirit, and our willingness to be taught by Him. My purpose is to provide what the Lord has given to me. So, let's look at some ways of getting started using these Spirals of growth.