

Keep Participating in Jesus *The Second Letter of Peter*

Into the Divine Nature, the Family Who God Is *2 Peter 1:1 – 4*

Introduction: Erica's Family

Let me tell you a story of how I started to understand God. The summer after my freshman year, I went home for the summer. My friend Erica and I wanted to record a song that we had written. I wrote the poem; she added the music. Because her family was a very musical family, she had some basic recording equipment at her house. During one of the times that we were there, her parents ordered pizza and I sat down with the whole family. It was Erica's mom and dad and two sisters. Now they are a Chinese American family. One of the things I noticed was that her mom and dad held hands. I had never seen Asian parents who held hands! I had to stop myself from staring. Then the conversation was really fun. They made jokes about each other. They shared about their day, and their lives. They invited me to share about myself. They asked me more questions. It was the best family conversation I had ever seen. It fed my soul. And the whole time, out of the corner of my eye, I was just amazed that the mom and dad held hands. After dinner, when everyone did their own thing, the mom and dad went over to the couch, and talked, and they still held hands! My own parents' marriage had never looked like that, and they were arguing about getting a divorce. So I was inspired. I wanted to ask, 'Can you adopt me?' Don't we all want to be part of a family like that? Where love is directed at you, yes – of course we want to be loved. But also, where love is not directed just at you. You're not at the center. Instead the love overflows from a relationship that exists before you, which is larger than you, and sets the tone and context for you. So when you encounter that love, it's like a river flowing from a huge spring. It has a shape and direction that calls you to drink from it and go with its flow.

Relevance:

We're going to jump into the short letter called 2 Peter to experience God this way. Second Peter is one of those semi-neglected books of the Bible, but it is awesome. Peter talks about in short form what John's Gospel talks about in long form: God as a true family, a real family. We are being called into this family through the voice of Jesus. And we are being adjusted to the culture of this family by the power of his Spirit. We are entering into God – God, who exists as a family, a community called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are entering into their inner relationships. In fact, Simon Peter, is going to reflect on the day that Jesus shone with glorious light – called the transfiguration – partly because that event demonstrated not just the Son, but the Father, and the Holy Spirit, too. It showed what God was aiming for all along.

Passages like this are important for us to remember because we tend to approach Jesus according to problems that we face. So if we face trauma, we expect that Jesus will help us with trauma. And he does. Jesus is a healer. I'm not taking away from that. If we face guilt and shame and spiritual oppression, we expect Jesus to be a deliverer. And he does. Jesus is a deliverer. I'm not taking away from that. If we are raising kids, we expect Jesus to be a coach to us, a guide to us, and a teacher to us. And of course, he is. But what if the larger goal that God has for you and for me is not just to solve the urgent problems, but to solve the important problem? The big picture problem? Which is, we need to belong to God's family. Which means, we need to be within the God who is a family. And that will help us with every other problem we face. But underneath all that, and on top of all that, and through all that, we will know God.

Text

We're going to glance at one of the big themes in 2 Peter. It comes in the introduction, in 1:4, that 'you may become partakers of the divine nature.' And by that, as we'll see, he means that we participate in God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is as far as we can go into defining 'the divine nature.'

Simon Peter and Jesus: v.1

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Who is telling us this? And how does he know this amazing fact? In 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.'

Simon Peter is case study number 1 of the transforming power of becoming part of God's family and God The Family. Let's do a little bit of background here. Who is Simon Peter? From what we can tell in the stories of the four Gospels, like in John 1 and Luke 4 – 5 especially, we get the sense that he was hungry and thirsty for God. He was very deeply Jewish. Then Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law. That's got to make an impression! 'Grandma helped out with the kids! Thank you Jesus! What would we do without her?!?' So when Jesus shows up, doing these miracles of healing and teaching up a storm, Simon Peter says, 'This is the guy we've been waiting for! This is the one who will become king of Israel.' He was also a bit on the simple side: He was a fisherman, like his father before him, probably like his father before him.

One of the striking things is how he introduces himself. How does he do that? Does he play himself up and say, 'I'm the man, I made my parents proud, I'm like the first Pope, people.' No. Does he play himself down and say, 'Awww shucks, I'm just a regular guy. And I just want to relate to you.' No. He doesn't do that either. He says he is a 'bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.'

This guy has been changed by Jesus. And right away, he is showing us something he wants us to take to heart. Who are we? We find our identity in relation to Jesus. Look at how he sees and defines himself. He is first a bond-servant. And second, he is a 'sent one,' which is what the term 'apostle' means.

Whose servant are you? You're always a servant to something or someone. The word 'bond-servant' comes from the Old Testament. If you wanted to voluntarily become a servant in another person's house – and I know that sounds weird to us but that would have made sense in that culture for different reasons – you and the head of the household would stand next to the door. They would pierce your ear against the doorpost. Your ear is the organ of listening, and it symbolizes that your ear is at the service of this new family. And into your pierced ear, they would put a ring to identify you. And every time you went in and out that door, you'd see that spot. The little bit of blood that got onto the door reminds you of the Passover and Exodus, where Israel once went out a door from Egypt marked with the blood of the Passover Lamb, and into a new identity in God. You were enacting a mini-recreation of that event to remind yourself that you go through the doorway into a new identity as a servant in this new household. You were part of a new family. Simon Peter and the other writers of the New Testament identified themselves first and foremost as bond-servants of Jesus. 'Jesus, we are reporting for duty.'

Simon Peter was even willing to die for Jesus. In the letter, there are signs that he is thinking about his death, and also about the return of Jesus with purifying fire, and therefore about what's really worth doing in the here and now. Probably Simon Peter was writing in the mid 60's AD, because he refers to Paul's letters as Scripture, and Paul died in Rome in 64 AD. He was beheaded by Emperor Nero. Sometime around 68 AD, Simon Peter died, also at the hands of Emperor Nero, but Simon Peter was crucified upside down. More Christian leaders were dying for the faith. The tension was heating up. And Simon Peter knew that as a bond-servant of Jesus, that his allegiance would be put to the test soon. That's what a bond-servant of Jesus does. He stays loyal to Jesus no matter what. But why? Who is this Jesus, that you'd want to serve him voluntarily?

Because Jesus saw something in him, just like he sees something in you and me. His name reflects an experience with Jesus. He was not named 'Peter' when he was born. His parents gave him the name 'Simon.' But when Jesus met him, Jesus gave him the name 'Peter.' That is a little unusual. Of course, you could get affectionate nicknames for just you and them. But only someone with authority could change the way you permanently introduced yourself to everyone. Jesus saw something in this fisherman. The name 'Peter' means 'stone,' or 'rock.' Jesus saw who he would become someone stable, which is what Simon had always wanted to be. And also someone who could be a stone to build something larger with, kind of like how we use cinder blocks to build things today. Simon would be a part of the 'new temple' community that the Old Testament prophesied. Peter would be a stone in that temple community, the people of God holding the presence of God.

But he's not a closet Christian. He's also a public announcer. That's the basic meaning of the second term, 'apostle.' Now I know that in our day and age, some ministers give themselves the title 'Apostle.' There's even a movie with Robert Duvall called *The Apostle*, where this preacher baptizes himself in a river and calls himself 'Apostle.' Ming and I watched it on our honeymoon vacation, and it drove me crazy. What 'apostle' meant back then came from the Classical Greek word for 'one who is sent away' by someone else, in this case, Jesus. It means messenger. And again, you're always carrying a message for someone or something. Whether you go door to door

selling something, or whether you make it your business to know who's having a sale, you are carrying messages. Most of the time, we carry messages from our own selfishness. This is what I want; thank you very much!

But Jesus' apostles carry messages for him, not themselves. So Simon Peter was committed to preaching. He wasn't going to hide in some cave, and stay loyal as a bond-servant if he was discovered. He was going out. He was going to be an apostle and announce that he was loyal to Jesus, and that everyone else ought to be, too! For Simon Peter, there is no other identity for him. It's all about Jesus.

Why is he this committed to this Jesus? What did Jesus do for him that made this guy's life revolve around him? Well, he starts to tell us in v.1. He says, 'To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.'

What Jesus did for Simon Peter was to show him 'righteousness.' Real 'righteousness.' What does that mean? The best explanations come from the Jewish background. The Psalms and Romans say that 'righteousness' is faithfulness to the covenant God made with Israel (e.g. Romans 3:1 – 8). It was like God adopted Israel as sons and daughters, and asked them to bear His image again by being faithful to that covenant. God told them to welcome other people so long as they agreed to be His partners, too. And what God wanted was for them to fight against the corruption of sin within each of us. In fact, they were supposed to overcome it, and give their human nature back to God constantly, so He could cleanse them and heal them. That's what God wants for all of us. But none of them did. They documented their health records, and diagnosed the problem, and that's the Old Testament.

But that is why the Jewish people also cried out for God to step in and do it Himself for them. NO ONE could vanquish the enemy within, the problem within, the weakness and the disease that we all carry. So they cried out, 'God, we can't be perfectly righteous! So you need to be righteous for us, on the human side of this spiritual marriage covenant.' And when He did that, God would also be 'righteous' on His side of the covenant as God, and 'righteous' on Israel's side of the covenant as a human being. God had to be 'righteous' for all of us! And He was in the person of Jesus. Jesus fulfilled the human side and the divine side, Israel's side and God's side. He saved human nature from sinking into sin. No one has the power to do that but God.

Illus: Back in 2002, Denzel Washington starred in a movie called John Q. Denzel played John Quincy Archibald, the father of a young son, Michael. Michael had a defective heart. He needed cardiac surgery, urgently, to have a heart replacement. The health care system had failed Michael. The doctors didn't run the right tests on Michael and didn't detect the heart failure. John's health insurance policy will not cover the surgery. So John gets desperate. He grabs his gun and takes the Emergency Room hostage, along with the ER doctors and staff. He says, 'The hospital's under new management now.' But John doesn't behave like the typical hostage taker. Along the way, he takes care of people in the hospital. Right from the jump, he says, 'From now on, free health care for everybody. How's that?' Of course this is covered by the news. John brings the entire city to the edge of its seat. He releases some hostages. He says he wants his son delivered to the Emergency Room, too, because Michael is sick, and needs help. It seems like John is going to force the doctors to perform heart surgery on Mike. But John actually becomes friends with his hostages. He even gives advice to some of them. It's quite touching, and sometimes funny. Towards the end, Mike is wheeled into the operating room. John then reveals that in his gun is only ONE bullet. He brought only ONE bullet. He never intended to hurt anyone. This whole time, his plan was ultimately built around taking only one life: his own. He wanted the surgeons to take his heart and put it in Mike.

Now in the movie, there is a plot twist. At the very last minute, a helicopter flies in the body of a woman who had been killed in a car accident. She was a match for little Mike. John doesn't have to kill himself, to our great relief. But in the biblical story, there was no plot twist that let Jesus off the hook. God, the Father-Son-Spirit God, loved us into existence. He made us to be His children. But we damaged our own hearts, to various degrees. Our life was draining away. A resistance to God set in. And we needed a heart replacement.

Can you imagine God, the Father-Son-Spirit whose very being is love, watch us get sick by Adam and Eve's own choosing? Watch us become dying beings. Watch us sin against each other and lead each other into sin. The Father-Son-Spirit God gathered a people called Israel, who tried to be His children, but they messed up. So the watchful Father sent the eternally mature Son into our human flesh, by the power of the Spirit. And as Jesus matured his humanity, he was cutting the disease away from his heart. He was filling the weak heart in his chest with one full of God's love. Until finally, Jesus showed that he only brought one bullet, so to speak. He came to

give himself up. But, unlike John Q, Jesus' heart-donation didn't happen through his dead body. His heart donation was through his risen body. Jesus perfected the heart we need by killing the thing that has been killing us, and then rising from the dead as a God-drenched, God-soaked human being. So Jesus shares his new humanity with us by his Spirit, by coming into us. That's great for us! Because we do not want to be stuck with our old, defective hearts! We need Jesus' new heart, by his Spirit living in us, pouring his life and love out through us.

Only God Himself could personally save human hearts, human nature, and everything else that is truly human. That's why Jesus is our God and Savior. If you needed a place to show that the New Testament really did think Jesus is God, here it is, in the introduction of 2 Peter: 'Our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.' Jesus is God. Jesus is Savior. He did what only God could do: He saved human nature and infused it with God; He joined it perfectly to God. So what he did in himself, he does in us when we have faith in him. Jesus joins us to his humanity by his Spirit, because by the Spirit, he joined his humanity perfectly to God. An Egyptian Christian leader named Athanasius said, 'He shared in our diseased human nature, so we might share in his healed human nature.' And by coming into Jesus spiritually, we also become a partaker in the divine nature. That we could be IN GOD by being IN the Son of God.

So this is why we share this faith in Jesus with Simon Peter. Simon Peter met Jesus in the flesh, two thousand years ago. We never did. He was one of hundreds to see Jesus risen from the dead. We never did. He was one of three to go up a mountain with Jesus and see him shine with light. We never did. He was the only one to walk on water with Jesus. We never did. But somehow, we share in the same faith. We can have the same relationship with Jesus now that Simon Peter did when he wrote this. That's incredible!

Knowledge and Power of God: v.2 - 3

How is this possible? Because being drawn up into God's divine nature give us knowledge and power. Notice how he refers to knowledge twice in v.2 - 3, and how power flows from that knowledge. 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 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.

So here's the guy who used to be a simple fisherman, saying, 'We know God. We have knowledge of God.' Now that sounds great! We want to personally know anyone we love, especially God. But how? What do we know, exactly? There are some Jewish and Muslim traditions that say we don't know God because we can't know God. 'God is too far away. He doesn't want to come near us. We are too tainted and corrupted. So we might know things like God's commands.' But we don't know God. That's what they say. Why does Jesus give us real knowledge of God? Because in the person of Jesus, God has come to be touched, smelled, heard, and most importantly, understood. The Son shows us the Father, by the power of the Spirit.

And through that 'true knowledge' of who God is, Peter says, we have 'His divine power [which has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.] Now that might surprise you. Every time I read that, I had to stop and ask myself, 'Do I believe that?' We have enough power for everything in life and godliness?!? How's that?

The Divine Nature: v.4

Verse 4 gives us an explanation. 'For by these [i.e. His glory and excellence] He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises,¹ so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.'

Illus: There's a recent book called *The Shack* that tries to help us understand what the relationship between Jesus and his Father is like, as well as the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son. There's a guy named Mack who is a husband and father of five children. He loses his youngest daughter in a tragic kidnapping and

¹ For the sake of time, I'll save explaining this for 1:20 – 21. Where are those promises of God? I know sometimes we like to look for Bible verses that are God's promises to us. So if you want to do that, you can look at when God promises that He would put His Spirit in us, like in Isaiah 59:21 and Ezekiel 11:18 and 36 – 37. So yes, there are those Bible verses. But really, God has always promised to come into us and to draw us into Himself. In Genesis 2, God said, 'Eat from the Tree of Life!' God put His own eternal life somehow into the Tree of Life, so it could have been that simple. We could have just eaten from the Tree, and had even more of God's life in us. So if God was in us that way, and we were in the obedience of God that way, then we would have been drawn up into God and received what God had promised all along.

murder in a shack in an Oregon forest. Years later, though the great sadness is still there, one day he gets a letter from God asking him to meet him in that shack. So he goes. And God the Father appears at first like a large black woman. Surprising, but what do you expect? An old white man with a beard? Is that any more true? Jesus is a Middle Eastern man. And the Holy Spirit appears as an Asian woman with blurry edges. Part of the point is that God in His love suffers at the hands of the world like all the oppressed minorities. What Mack is struck by immediately is how the three of them relate to each other, talking and laughing. No one dominates the conversation. No one hides anything. They affirm each other. They listen to each other as if they were old friends and yet as if each word was new, appreciating each other as if they were seeing each other truly for the first time. There is a joy within God, between the Father, Son, and Spirit and in the three relationships there. And the fact that God is fundamentally a Trinity and not a Singularity means that the Christian God is love, radically other-centered love, in Himself. That is unlike every other concept of God there is.

And because of the corruption that is in the world by lust for all kinds of things, in v.4, God has to adjust us to being in Him. That's why, in v.2, we have 'His divine power [for our] life and godliness.' Knowing God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit actually fuels us, nourishes us.

Illus: Here's an example of how that matters. A few years ago, a young man who named Michael came up to me. He was recovering from a basketball injury when, all of a sudden, he felt like Jesus spoke to him. A couple of weeks after he decided Jesus is real, he met with me. One of his questions was, 'Why does God want me to abstain from sex?' He had a girlfriend, and she actually broke up with him because he wanted to be abstinent. So this new relationship with Jesus was having an impact on him, and her response to the changes happening in him was to break up with him. My response was, 'Because God wants us to bear His image and be like Him. And on a spiritual level, God shares Himself with us and becomes one with us in a union. He doesn't just flirt with us. He doesn't use us for His pleasure and then break up with us. Why? Because everything God does outside Himself flows out from who God is within Himself. God is a union of Father and Son in the Spirit. Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10), and, 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in me' (John 14). That's why God is faithful to us, and calls us to imitate Him. So marriage - and sex within marriage - is a physical representation of two persons in one spirit of love, just like God is two persons (Father and Son) in one Spirit of love. And if we are to be like Him, then every aspect of our lives is to be patterned after Him. That made sense to Michael and gave him power. Because she broke up with him when he told her that he didn't want to have sex with her anymore. God gave him both the knowledge and the power. Why? To escape the corruption of the world that is there because of lust.

Illus: Here's another example for our life and godliness. Why must we work hard at friendship and reconciliation? Because there is a unity in God. The Father is always with the Son and the Spirit, and they don't compete for attention. They are unified. So if we are in God, we have to work towards being unified. He's one! How can we divide Him? So we have Jesus' teaching on reconciliation and loving others. We follow it. Why? To escape the corruption of the world that is there because of lust. Lust for prestige or lust for self-assurance or lust to stay immature.

Illus: Here's another example: Why do we work at having integrity and being transparent? Because the Father, Son, and Spirit are transparent to one another. Does Jesus the Son hide anything from the Spirit who is in him, or the Father who loves him? No.

Now each one of us have been invited into this family, which is God as Father and Son in one Spirit. And for those of us who have said yes to Jesus, we have entered into Jesus by his Spirit, so we have entered into God. The more you look at who God is in the knowledge Jesus shares with us, a few things will happen. First, I think you'll fall more and more in love with God. Second, I think you'll be inspired to live in a godly way. Third, I think you'll be disappointed with other people. I want to dwell on that because that's probably not what you expected me to say. But when you're exposed to a good family, you start to wish other families - maybe including your own - were more full of that goodness. When you're exposed to good friendship, you start to wish other friendships, including your own, were more full of that goodness. The more you get to know God, through Jesus, the more you will feel hurt by others. But God's response to us is to say, 'I know. I know. I see you. Look at what I've done in Jesus, enduring what I've endured. Look at what I do in the Spirit, praying for the prayerless. Know Me. Participate more and more in Me. I am the only way anyone gets healed, most of all, you. So be my bond-servant and be my public messenger, whom I send.'