

2 Peter 1:5-11

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Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0 : 0 0] Peter. We are still in the first chapter of 2 Peter. We have made it down to verse 5. So we will be in 2 Peter 1, verse 5, and we will be reading in our text down to verse 11.

So 2 Peter 1, verses 5-11. If you are physically able and desire to do so, would you join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God? 2 Peter 1, verses 5-11. The Word of God says, Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith, supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 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. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 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. For in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. You may be seated. 2 Peter 1, verses 5-11.

Peter opens this letter with a reminder of who we are in Christ. He opens it in the very first verse referring to himself as a bondservant and an apostle. That is, he is the slave and the sent out one of Jesus Christ, his Lord and Savior. We looked at that reality several weeks ago that we cannot be sent from one we do not belong to. That in Christ, we are both his slaves and his sent out ones. We do not hold to the apostolic office, but we are those who are sent from his presence to be representatives in the world around us. And then starting in verse 2 and following, he speaks of the grace and the peace that is multiplied to us in the understanding of how we have become such vessels. How then are we the slaves of Christ? And how then are we those who are sent forth from him? It is not because of our works nor our efforts, but rather it is all of him. Just by way of reminder, he tells us there that everything we have is due to the true knowledge or the full knowledge of Jesus Christ. There is a repetition of words found in verses 2-11. That repetition of phraseology is the full knowledge or the true knowledge of Christ. It is also the repetition of being diligent and being active in it. We are first told that the true knowledge of Jesus Christ is not a result of our seeking nor our searching nor our longing for the natural heart of every man is desperately wicked. For we are all sinners, desperately wicked to the core of our being, the word of God tells us. But then how do we have the true knowledge of Jesus Christ? The word of God is clear. There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who seeks after godliness. You say, oh, well I know Jesus Christ because I sought for him and I found him. Well friend, the good news is, is before you were searching for him, he was calling you.

The good news is, as Peter says here, that he has done everything necessary for calling you and choosing you. He says it in 1 Peter, in the very first verses of 1 Peter, that little letter there, that this is a continuation of. So if you want to read it in context, that he has called you and chosen you in Jesus Christ. And that is a principle that we hold on to. That salvation is not a result of our work. Salvation is not a result of our effort. But salvation is a direct result of the work and the finished work of Jesus Christ. That is why it is declared, it is finished, paid in full, complete, absolutely done. Nothing that we have to do to earn it, to gain it, nor to find it. For it is revealed to us in scripture. It is his calling and his choosing. But I love what brother Ivan shared with us this morning about freedom. And I love how he declared that we are set free from something to something. And I love equally how the Lord of the church, the head of the body, can so move the minds of the minds of individuals. That the same thing will be said by multiple people, though they do not coordinate nor plan it. I'm not that well in administration and organization, by the way.

And I love the reality that, as he said, we are set free from something in order to do something. Peter says in 1 Peter that we are called and chosen in Christ for, there's that word for, obedience to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And it is that same transition that Peter is making here in his second letter. That there are matters that take place because of the glorious work done by Jesus Christ. Something changes in your life. And I will tell you that people who come, and I can almost mark it to a T, people that will come to me and say, Pastor, I have a problem with these words choosing and calling. Pastor, I have a problem with these words saying that Christ knew me before the foundation of the world was laid. Pastor, I have a problem with this word election, even though it's found in scripture. Pastor, I have a problem with this word predestined, even though it's found in scripture. Pastor, I have an issue with all these. And the issue is this, because if that is the case, and so be it, I'm throwing up my hands, I'm not going to do anything. Well, friend, you're cutting one of the wings off the dove of D.L. Moody once said, and without both wings, you fly in a circle. [6:14] For every time you find those, you find the for, or because of, or therefore, or as our scripture says, for this very reason. How do we know? How do we know that it is authentic, true salvation?

How do we know that someone's not saying, oh, well, I'm one of the elect, I'm one of the chosen, so I'm just going to live however I want to. Friend, the reality is, is if he has called you, and if he has chosen you, even if it was before the foundation of the world was laid, and you say, oh, pastor, I can't believe that, then you're calling the word of God a liar.

If that is what he has done, and you've responded in faith to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and if you genuinely know him, friend, listen to me, if it is his work, his work changes things. In the beginning, what does it say? In the beginning, God said, let there be light. What does it say? And there was light. When God says it, when God declares it, something changes.

I find nothing and nowhere in scripture when God does something, when he calls something, and nothing changes. I find nowhere. I mean, there's absolutely nowhere in scripture.

[7:24] Moses, take your shoes off your feet, for where you're standing is holy ground. He took his shoes off his feet and bowed down, for he was standing on holy ground. Every time God says something, something happens.

Something changes. Something dramatic. So the moment he calls us to salvation, there is a glorious change. I want you to see this morning the character of the called.

The character of the called. That if we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, while it might not be a result of our works, it will definitely, truly influence our works.

There will be character attributes that begin to show up. There are matters that begin to be prevalent in the individual's life. There are things that are there that are not only a testimony to the world, but a testimony to themselves.

It would be the very things in which Paul says we cannot use grace as a crutch. We cannot say, oh, my God is a loving God, a forgiving God, therefore I can do whatever I want to, and he'll forgive me.

[8:31] Paul says, don't do that. Don't be such an affront to the holy God to use grace as a crutch. It would be as the book of James says, that faith without works is dead, being useless.

It all says the same story. Not that you are earning your salvation, but the reality is that salvation does something in the believer's life. The character, the for, is always there.

The Word of God, after telling us here, let's go back just a little bit to verse 3 in our first chapter there. In verse 3 it says, So what has done it?

His divine power. That is the power of Jesus Christ. 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 you are called by your works, by your worthiness? No, by his own glory and excellence. 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.

[9:40] Now look at what it says. For this very reason. For this very reason. Because God has done a grand work in salvation.

Character is built and developed upon the foundation of his provisions. We develop our character upon the provisions of the Almighty.

The Word of God says, For this very reason. That is because he has done everything that is necessary. Because all that is needed has been provided.

It tells us very clearly in the Word of God, that all that is needed for life and godliness has been provided. If you say, Pastor, I cannot be godly.

Oh, I'm struggling and I'm wrestling and I just can't overcome that. Oh, Pastor, I can't do it. Then you're telling Christ that what he has given you is insufficient. That he hasn't done enough.

[10:40] You're trying to move forward in your own ability. We do not build character upon our own efforts. If that was all that we could do, then we could turn to the Old Testament and we can see that after this meeting at Mount Sinai, where I'm looking at it right now, the writing of the Ten Commandments, and we could see those stone tablets being brought down and they'd say, Well, this is all you have to do to be people of character.

Only ten great sayings. The ten great sayings. The ten commandments. Fulfill these ten and you'll be great and grand people. Friend, they couldn't keep ten, let alone keep them all.

It wasn't on our abilities. It wasn't on our effort. It wasn't on all of our anxieties. It wasn't on all the threat of punishment. Sure, we can't do it on our own.

But we can on what he's provided. All that is needed for life in godliness, it says, has been granted to us by his divine power. You dare not try to develop character upon your own foundation, but rather we develop it upon what has been provided to us.

That is why Peter says, For this very reason. Because God has provided all that we need, because we are partakers of the divine nature.

[11:56] I love this, and we've said it before, too many times when we talk to other people around us, you say, Well, I'm not a saint. I'm just a sinner saved by grace. Friend, I want to tell you something.

The word of God calls the greatest sinner, saved by the grandest grace, saints. He says, I'm just a poor sinner saved by grace. Yes, you are, which means positionally, you are a saint.

You say, Well, don't call me a saint. He says, Joe, you don't know me. Well, I know the church at Corinth. I know the man that took his father's wife while his dad was still alive. I know all the debauchery that's going on there in the church at Corinth, and I know that in 1 Corinthians, Paul says, To the saints that are at Corinth.

To the saints. He reminds them of who they are. Why? Because in Christ, we are partakers of the divine nature. Too many of us, I believe, give too much credit to our human nature.

Well, that's just who I am. Not in Christ. It's not. You are a new creation. You're a new creature.

That heart of stone has been ripped out and the heart of flesh has been placed in. This is just what I do.

[13:06] That's what the old man did. That's why Paul said, I die daily. I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives inside of me. Galatians 2.20.

And a crucified man has no nature. A dead man is just dead, and it's Christ who lives inside of me. Therefore, I am a partaker of the divine nature.

And I develop my character. I develop my habits upon the provision of who he is, not a possession of who I am. Too often, we try to make ourselves better, and that's an impossibility.

For this very reason, since we are partakers of the divine nature, since we have been given all that we need in Christ Jesus, he says, provide all diligence. This word diligence means we're laboring.

Oh, how quick we are as the people of God to give up. And I put myself in that position. Well, I just can't help it. That's just what I do, and I give up. Oh, I can't.

[14:05] I've tried, Lord. I've tried. I've prayed about this thing so many times, and I've asked you to take it away. And Father, I've just asked that I wouldn't do that any longer. And so I just forget it. I give up, and I lean on your mercy.

You know what the author of the book of Hebrews says, right? Hebrews chapter 11 is the heroes of faith chapter. We love Hebrews chapter 11, but then there's another chapter that follows that, Hebrews chapter 12.

We don't like it so much because it speaks about God's discipline and reproof of us and correcting us and all those things. But Hebrews chapter 12, verse 4 says this, You have not resisted yet to the point of shedding blood in your resisting sin.

The author says you have not come to the point of resisting sin, that it's hurting, that you're shedding blood over it.

But yet you are the possessors of the divine nature of Christ. We're not doing it to earn the salvation. We're doing it because we are the redeemed, because that's who we are.

[15 : 12] That's who has called us. He said you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. And we think just because we make ourselves inconvenient for a moment is an excuse to continue to fail.

He says whatever you have to do, you remember the extremities, right? If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your right causes you to sin, pluck it out. I'm not telling you to go out there and cut it off and pluck it out, but I am telling you we ought to be willing to take such extreme measures to be different.

Why? Because Christ is in us. We don't have to be who we used to be, for we are called to be different. We develop this upon the provisions he has given us.

But just in case we boast and we get too comfortable and we get too confident, friend, listen to me, we are completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to do this. It's not our abilities.

This is why we need to understand we are partakers of the divine nature. One of the grandest truths we find there in the Gospel of John, it is when Jesus says, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I go away the paraclete or the helpmate will come and he will dwell within you, that we will have the Holy Spirit within us.

[16 : 30] And then he says, and the Father and I will come and make our abode with you. So we have the fullness of God dwelling within us, not beside us, not outside of us, not in a tabernacle around us. It's actually the same word tabernacle is used for the indwelling presence of God in the believer.

And Jesus says, this is to your advantage. Why? Because then we can develop these character attributes. He says, for this very reason, applying all diligence, which means it's a work we're going to have to do.

We're going to have to strive it. It doesn't just happen naturally. In your faith, supply moral excellence. Now, how many of you would be willing to stand up and say, as far as I know, I am morally excellent.

I'm perfect. I would be the first one to sit down, for I know that I am not morally perfect. This has been in your faith, supply moral excellence.

And in your moral excellence, knowledge. And in your knowledge, self-control. And in your self-control, perseverance. And your perseverance, godliness. And your godliness, brotherly kindness. And your brotherly kindness, love.

[17 : 34] I don't know if you noticed it or not, but these are the fruits of the Spirit. This is the outworking of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. How do we develop a godly character for the calling that we possess?

We depend upon the Holy Spirit to bring these matters to a reality. Too often, we read the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And we want to pick which one that we want in our life.

God, give me patience. And some of you, don't pray for patience. You'll be like Job. But we say, maybe at this moment, I need patience. I want to pray for patience. That's not what Paul is saying. Paul says, the fruits of the Spirit are. And all of these things ought to be in your life.

Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Because that's what the Holy Spirit is. You say, Pastor, you're so great at remembering all those.

You know why I'm so good at remembering those? It's because every night I pray that God gives me those. I have to ask Him again, and again, and again, and again, because I'm reminded each day that I have failed somewhere.

[18 : 40] Usually that prayer is right after I didn't display patience, or right after I didn't have such a good job at self-control, and right after all the love really wasn't prevalent in my life. So I say, Father, I need these to be in my life and growing and flourishing.

And it is a constant reminder that we dare not depend upon our own abilities, for our abilities do not bring us to Christ, and our abilities do not make us like Christ. But we are dependent upon the divine nature that has been implanted to us, and we call that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And we need that. We depend upon Him. We cry out. This is what He wants to do. So what He's longing for, by the way, there are two different words for love there in Scripture, in the New American Standard, it calls them brotherly kindness.

That's Philadelphia, phileo. You ought to have a phileo love. Just like when you leave here today, I can say, I love you. I love you. And I can love everybody that I come into contact with and say, man, I have such a love, a Philadelphia love, city of brotherly love, right?

I can love you as a brother or love you as a sister and I can have that. But then He extends it just a little bit more. That last word, love, there is agape love. That is a self-sacrificing love that says, I'm going to love you so much that I do something, even if you're unlovable.

[19 : 54] For God so loved the world that while we were yet sinners, that is agape. That while we didn't deserve it and while we were being an affront to a holy God, God actively loved us enough to send His Son to die for us on the cross.

God took the action when we were not deserving of it. That is agape love. And so what Peter is saying here is that we ought to have a brotherly love and a lot of us want to stop for that.

Say, man, I love you. And that love word becomes so light, right? And we can love each other like a brother and sister and that's good every now and then. But then Peter says, but also the Spirit ought to bring about this agape love.

That what if that person is not being very lovable at that moment, but they need you to do something? Can you love like that? Even if it costs you, will you love like that?

And that's the love that only the Spirit can produce in life because by the way, that is not natural to us. So we are desperately dependent upon the Spirit to bring these character attributes to our life.

[21 : 01] Why are they important? Why does it matter who we are in Christ? If in Christ we are saved and redeemed, if in Christ glory is waiting for us, if the goal of salvation was glory in His presence alone, that's the reward of salvation.

But if that was the goal of salvation, and I know I've said this before and sometimes I get in trouble because I say it, because it is misunderstood and misheard and I don't want you to mishear this. If heaven is all that salvation is about, then God did a great injustice by leaving us here once we came to know Him as our Savior.

That may be the reward, but if it's only about heaven, if it's about escaping hell, then wouldn't a gracious, loving Father, the moment I accept Jesus Christ, get me out of the place where all the miserable and suffering and pain happens?

Wouldn't He instantly change me and transform me to an eternal glorious being so that no longer do I wake up going, man, I am sore and things hurt and the world is going downhill quick?

And wouldn't it be the most gracious thing He could ever do is call us to His side? If that's all it's about, but too often that's what we think, we perceive.

[22 : 21] We don't worry about character because we've got heaven because see, in heaven, in glory, in eternity, we are all made new completely.

We will see Him face to face. We will be perfect. I'll be able to sing loudly and good. Maybe I can play an instrument or something.

I don't know. Maybe we can all draw and carve. I doubt it, but I don't know. But we'll be perfect.

Your character in heaven is not your concern for you will be like Christ, instantly transformed.

Character doesn't matter there because there's no unrighteousness, no wickedness, no desperation. Character matters here.

It matters here. Why? We need to be concerned about character because heaven is not the end. It's not the reward, but it's not the only goal.

[23 : 29] Our character determines our effectiveness now. It is the determining factor of our effectiveness today. How many of you know and you've seen it and you've heard it?

sometimes the greatest hindrance to people coming to Christ, I probably don't even have to finish it, are Christians.

Sometimes the greatest hindrance of people attending church are the very members of that church. That's a character issue.

That's a concern for each and every one of us. And look at what Peter says. Verse 8, For if these qualities, by the way, he doesn't say if one of these or if some of these, if these qualities, they are a building, are yours and our and are increasing.

So it's not just enough to go, whoo, okay, I got a little patience. No, he says, are yours and our increasing. That is, it is a sure sign of maturity and spiritual growth. We don't put a check mark and say, okay, I finally reached that knowledge.

[24 : 43] I finally reached that. I finally reached that. I finally, 20 years, it has been my daily habit for 20 years to study the Word of God. I've looked back at some of my outlines from 20 years ago and I would like to say I have a little bit more knowledge today than I had 20 years ago.

Even now, I am in conversation with other people to try to go a little further in my study. Why? Because it is to your benefit that I increase in knowledge.

You don't want me to be stagnant. Stagnation is the same as death. In our own lives, we don't want to reach a point of contentment and say, okay, I think I've got enough self-control.

I know enough about Jesus. I've got this love thing kind of covered. No, are yours and are increasing. That is the daily dependence. Look at what it says.

They render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sobering thought but it is a biblical reality that there are those who truly know Jesus Christ, truly know Him, but they are useless and unfruitful in this season of life.

[26 : 08] We know them. People whose testimony is they have surrendered their life to Christ.

Somewhere along the line they quit falling in love with Him more and more every day. They quit pursuing Him. And if we really adhere to the biblical reality of perseverance of the saints, it's a better way of knowing once saved, always saved.

I believe that. I believe the book of Romans says that when you're in the hand of Christ that nothing can take you out of His hand. Neither death nor life nor powers nor principalities are there nor spiritual forces of darkness.

Nothing can take you out of the hand of the Father. People have told me, they say, well, I can jump out of His hand. Friend, if Satan cannot snatch you out of His hand, you can't jump out of His hand. Nothing can take you out of the hand of the Father.

Nothing. I believe in the eternal security of the saints. I do not believe in the eternal security of the prayer repeaters or the eternal security of the hand raisers. I believe in the eternal security of the saints, those who truly know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

[27 : 12] And I know for a fact that Satan cannot, cannot take you out of there for the Word of God says they can't. So his desire is to render you useless while you're there. If he can make us unfruitful or useless, he may not can touch you, but he sure can limit your impact and he does it through our character.

Through our character. How many ministries have fallen because of the moral failure of the pastor? How many churches have crumbled because of the moral failure of the character of the members? Am I saying those pastors are lost and going to a crisis of eternity called hell? No. But how much harm was done? For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

I want to ask you, friend, how fruitful is your knowledge of Jesus Christ? Your character and my character determines our effectiveness.

It is not our knowledge. It is not what we know. It is not how much we understand. It is not how many books we have read.

[28 : 38] Some of the greatest scholars. I stood recently on a university campus. I stood with a grand believer. He was a great believer, strong believer. Thankfully, he was there in the school of theology in this university campus.

And I was in the library of theology. We actually went down to the school of theology building, the instructional building where all they teach is theology. That's the study of God. And this strong believer told me, he said, the sad reality is is that the multitude, most of the professors in this school of theology do not even believe in Jesus Christ.

but they know they're Greek and they know they're Hebrew and they know the Bible better than I ever will. But they don't believe.

What renders us useless is our character. We do not find usefulness and effectiveness in knowledge. But you find me a simple individual who may not know the book but they live like the book.

Oh, what a light that is in the world around them. Jesus says, by this, all people will know that you know me by your love for one another. It doesn't take a grand education to love one another.

[29 : 55] It takes the work of the Holy Spirit producing love. This determines our effectiveness. Finally, the reality we need, it displays a reality.

It brings confidence to ourselves. Look at what the Word of God says. For he who lacks these things, what if I've lacked these things? What if these things are not present and increasing in my life?

Now, Peter does not swing the axe and say, well, then you're lost. No, he says, you've forgotten. And this is what he's doing. Peter's writing this letter to stir up the reminder of a reality in the life of the individuals.

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. The only reason we quit living according to the character we've been called to, and I include myself in that, is because we have forgotten, we have been set free from that already. Essentially, it's saying, we forgot, we don't have to do it anymore. In Christ, we're free. You may want to do it, you may desire to do it, but you don't have to do it.

[31 : 12] You've been set free from that when you are before Christ, when you are a slave to sin. You cannot help it, that's who you are. You have to do it.

You're going to act like a sinner. I always say, don't be surprised when sinners act like sinners. That's what we are. But it is surprising when saints act like sinners, because that's not even who we are anymore.

We're choosing to. We have forgotten. We've been set free. This isn't legalistic. This is just reminding ourselves, I don't have to do that anymore.

It's a choice. It doesn't tell them they've lost their salvation. It says, you've just forgotten about it. And then he says in verse 10, and this is where most of the struggle happens.

The majority of believers are not very effective in our faith. They're very bold in our witness, and I would say the grandest reason behind that is our own character, what we know about ourselves that nobody else knows.

[32 : 15] And it is who we are to the core of our being that we know. He says, therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you. It doesn't mean that you're working for it.

You're reminding yourself of it. He says, to 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.

He said, if you're called and you're chosen, live like it. Let that spiritual reality become a practical truth in your life that everybody can see it. that you can make certain about it because the spirit of Christ inside of you is enabling you.

For in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. That doesn't mean the door is getting wider for he is the door. That just means you're getting a more confident life in it.

When you have nothing to hide, it's a lot easier to walk forth boldly in your faith. When the character and the fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident in your life, it is abundant. You can continue to walk with your head held up and your chest out and you can know who you are in Christ because it's not you, it's him.

[33 : 34] And your character begins to outflow in your life because it gives you confidence, not self-confidence. We have no confidence in self. But it gives you confidence in who you are in Christ and it becomes a testimony to the people around you.

It becomes a witness to those people around you. witness to those people around you. It becomes a witness to those people around you. We never really know how much our character testifies to those around us.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to meet with, he came by our house, he was a former church member. As a matter of fact, it was the only no vote I had in the pastor search committee of the first church I pastored.

And even after the church called me, he told me. So, I mean, I know people here might have voted no for me, but he did a little bit better. He walked up to me and told me he was the no. And then he told me why he was the no.

He said, you're not experienced enough to be our pastor. And I said, well, you're right, I'm not. And I knew him, I loved him dearly. I'd been a deacon with him. We'd been on the deacon body together. So he always, he's just a man.

[34 : 45] I loved him because he would tell me exactly what he thought and tell me where he thought and he'd tell me why he thought it. And really, I loved him. Some of you know him well, and I'm not going to bring his name up, but I still love him dearly.

But he had a son-in-law that did not know Christ. We prayed constantly for his son-in-law. We were always lifting him up. His daughter was there, but we're always praying for his son-in-law. His son-in-law passed away a couple years ago, having received Christ shortly before his death, and we rejoice in that. But I always wondered why that particular man would never leave the church.

There were times he'd tell me, he'd say, I'm gone, I'm out of here. And he would walk out and he left so many, he quit more times than most people quit ballgames, okay? So just about every Sunday he would quit, but then he'd come right back.

And then, on this particular occasion, he and his son-in-law, who was really in the last month of his life, were at our house, and his son-in-law got to talk to him, he said, you know, my father-in-law was telling me about the sacrifices you made to go into the ministry.

[35 : 51] I said, what do you mean? And see, his father-in-law was the very man that got me on in my prior job, the job, the dream job. He was the gentleman who opened the door for me to have the job I had that was providing for us.

And so, I was a telephone man, I was a lineman, and he had opened the door for me and his father-in-law knew that they were asking me to be a supervisor, they were asking me to do all these things and he knew kind of where I was at, but I didn't know, he never said this to me, but he told his son-in-law, I said, no, Billy Joe was, you don't understand, he said, he was about to get it handed to him and he walked away from it.

And he walked away from it to serve the church. And it hit me then that the little decisions I started making in my life, and this isn't boasting, I knew God was calling me.

Because I can go back and tell you, I look back and go, whoa, that was, sometimes I was in my youthful vigor and that was really bold and I'm not so sure God just had a lot of grace and mercy on us, you know, so it's not great, but I realized the testimony in that man's life every time he would get frustrated, and he told me later on, he said, every time I wanted to quit, I said, doggone it, Billy Joe, you were just there.

You were there. Something bad would happen in my life, you were there. And you just wouldn't quit. Now that's not me, I didn't know anything else to do, I didn't have the right things to say, and that's why he'd get mad all the time, and I didn't have the right knowledge, and he was absolutely right.

[37 : 24] At 25, I wasn't old enough nor experienced enough to be a pastor. But the character God began to put in me at that time in my life was the only thing that would keep that brother in Christ together.

People are watching a lot more than we know. And I praise God because, just to be honest, that church endured 10 years of my pastoring, and they probably should have only put up for about 18 months and told me I need to go on somewhere because I was not ready.

But that church loved me and matured me and stayed with me, and that deacon is one of the reasons I stayed and would not give up and helped form me and fashion me to become a pastor, not just a preacher.

I love to preach. I always thought revivalists would be great because I could come in and jump on your toes and go somewhere else. That's the pastor's problem. But God called me to pastor.

But it wasn't because I knew everything. It's because God says, let me work on your character and I'll put the people around you to work in your life.

[38 : 40] Our character matters because who we are in Christ. Are we going to fail? Sure. We're going to fail. But there is the character of the called that ought to be displayed each and every day in our life.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much. Father, we praise you for this day. We praise you for the opportunity of gathering together and we pray that you would continue to speak to our hearts and minds even as we come to a place of closure.

We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to testify to us. Father, forgive us for we fail, each and every one of us. I fail often. I'm so desperately in need of a Savior and in need of the indwelling presence of the Spirit in my life.

May we lean upon you not our own abilities or our own efforts. May our absolute dependence be on you and you alone. And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.