

2 Peter 1:1-4

Hope in the Fight

Having What It Takes!



~I think that everyone wonders if they have what it takes! As a child, a neighbor kid dares you to climb a tall apple tree, and you stand there looking up at that particular apple he or she wants, and you hesitate, **wondering if you have what it takes** - of courage and athleticism - to climb up there and get that apple down, without breaking your neck!

~Or the football coach calls your number on an important play, and **you wonder if you have what it takes** to catch the ball and get that important first down or maybe score your first touchdown! If you do you will be the hero, and if you drop the ball, you will be the goat – and I don't mean “**greatest of all time**”

~Or if you have a test sitting on the desk before you, and you have studied hard, but you know it will be a very hard test. You couldn't sleep the night before because you couldn't get rid of your doubts, **wondering if you really have what it takes** to remember everything you studied and then be able to put it down right - like you know the material.

~Or, you are slumped in your chair in the doctors office because you have just heard that you have cancer, and not only is there the fear of the dreaded disease eating you up on the inside, but you will also have to face a run or two of the dreaded chemo-therapy, or maybe radiation therapy, to see if that will destroy the cancer and give you a fighting chance to survive! Despair hits you like a ton of bricks and you **wonder if you have what it takes** to get through it!

Certainly, when it comes to Christianity, we know that we are to be like Jesus. That is what could be described as a very tall order - as in very, very tall order! This is a real problem for people! I have known people that wanted to give their life to Christ, but were so honest with themselves, that they walked away sadly because they knew right there at the starting line that they could never be like Jesus. If we all haven't experience that moment, we by rights **should have** been given pause because the perfectly lived life **should** intimidate us! We should have the common sense to know that we simply can't do it! **We don't have what it takes!** That is as obvious as the nose on our face! Yet,.. we are still called by God to become Christ-followers! The apostles were still calling people to come to Jesus – to believe in Him, to trust Him, to put Him in charge of us. They, too, knew perfection was impossible (see Rom. 7)! ²



You see, the life of Christ is not possible for any single one of us. We don't have what it takes in ourselves. No one can discipline themselves to that extent - not one of us. To say that it can be done is pure fantasy and self-blindness. Our human nature is not strongly self-disciplined enough to never do anything wrong. We will react wrongly at some point, overreacting or underreacting. Our emotions will get the best of us and we will act impulsively and do wrong. It is imbedded in our human nature. If we could be perfectly controlled and in charge of everything we say, do, think,.. well then we could be perfect, but even *with* the Spirit of God indwelling us, our impulses are not always perfectly under control and perfectly balanced! So, no, ***we do not have what it takes!*** Yet,.. ***we also have what it takes!*** God does not expect perfection from us. In my whole life I never met a person who was perfect! But I have met people that thought they were. I found them to be self-blind and self-deluded. I am not saying that they were not self-disciplined. They often were quite self-disciplined – to the point of harshness with themselves. * I was reading about the life of John Calvin a while back. He ate very sparingly, refused luxuries, or physical pleasures, deprived himself of sleep, or rest, to the point that he took years off of his life. His self-discipline was legendary. Like many Christian men of his era and before, self-mortification was a sign of great spirituality and devotion. Yet, while he despised the personal accumulation of money, and deprived himself of the normal human comforts, ***he loved the accumulation of power and control over others!*** It is like,.. depravity so long suppressed in some areas, had to break out of him somewhere else! When he finally settled in Geneva, he consolidated his power there, and when he had absolute power over the city government, and its citizens, he adopted the practice of silencing his enemies - those who questioned, much less disagreed with his theologies - through imprisonment, torture, or through execution – following his mentor Augustine's prescription of ***burning*** as a means of execution. Burning for "heretics" was based very, very loosely on an interpretation of scripture using the word "***compel***". Calvin was a very self-disciplined man, he did many good things for many people, he had a giant intellect and wrote volumes of material on a great many spiritual matters, and wrote quite eloquently. But he was not a good man by any stretch of the imagination! The evil he did is the cicada-sized fly in his soup. In a fair assessment of Calvin's life and ministry, this cannot be ignored! A man as disciplined as it gets did not have what it takes to follow Jesus by the force of his own will!



You see, even the most disciplined among us is not up to the job of becoming like Jesus! I could come up with countless stories similar that which point to human failure and inability despite our greatest attempts to overcome our own nature. We do not have what it takes! Yet we are called to follow Jesus! It is impossible, yet, ***it is possible!*** Peter, here, indicates that we have been given what we need, and what we need is a powerful outside source to provide that extra that we need to really follow Jesus consistently! It is not a little bit of extra that we need, but a whole lot of it! So Peter here says that God Himself has given us “***everything we need for life and godliness***”. We begin by gathering what we need through correct and true knowledge of God. We must know who God is and what He has done to save us, and what He wants from us, and we must get it right.



Any form of corruption, any error in our knowledge will often work like a virus released into a computer. It will gum up all the rest of the information in that computer! That is why we stick to the apostle’s teaching! They received their information directly from the source – from the Word of God who was born in Bethlehem and became Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world! They walked with Him for three years and on the way He taught them well. Then, just as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit took over after He had ascended to heaven and the Spirit completed their grasp of what Jesus had taught them. So we stick to the scriptures that they wrote! Peter, Paul, James, Mathew, Mark, Luke, John. We gain our knowledge of God in Christ from their writings. But to gain this knowledge you have to read it! There is no way around this means of getting the knowledge of God into our heads and hearts! This knowledge doesn’t get transferred over to our brain naturally or supernaturally by magical osmosis. Our intuition won’t do it, or our powers of deductive reasoning. Our feelings will not show us the way – in fact – quite the contrary. They will mislead! So we simply use the brains that God gave us to read and study and learn! It is our interest in learning the things of God that drives such a quest! Some Christians can’t get enough! They have their nose in the book constantly! Others don’t have that kind of drive, but they discipline themselves to read regularly, usually as part of a daily routine! Others do research – reading the conclusions of learned men along with the scriptures. Sometimes that is good and sometimes it is terribly misleading! Why? Because people are prone to error! The “experts” in history, the theological “experts” in particular, wear the crown jewels of error!

Yet, with all that, God says that “***His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...***”. That takes this whole thing out of the realm of something **human-powered** into the realm of something quite different – into the ***divinely powered!*** So God gave us all the means to salvation, planned for and provided in His Son, Jesus! But He is not done there. He gives us the means to live the life of God, a life that would otherwise be impossible. And just like there is one means to salvation with all its many facets which have been provided by our Creator/God, there is one means of living the life of God that He has designed and provided for His people. We cannot take the credit for our own salvation, and we surely cannot take the credit for living the life of Christ – in other words – consistently applying the fruit of the Spirit to our everyday lives, nor courageously pursuing the purpose of God to win the world to Himself! He gets to have that credit! It belongs to Him by rights and He will have it no other way! The Old Testament, believe or not, is actually filled with visual examples of this biblical theme. Most Christians do not realize that God was constantly making a New Testament point in the great miracles of the Old Testament! *The Children of Israel are fleeing Egypt, and they come to the shores of the Red Sea. They have hit a dead end there. There is no where to go, no place to hide, and Pharaoh’s army is closing in on them fast! Helpless! But then God springs into action and the waters of the Red Sea open up with a wall of water on their right and a wall of water on their left as they cross over on the sea bottom in-between the walls of water! It’s message is unmistakable - only the Creator/God could do that impossible thing and save them! *The fortress of Jericho was the first real challenge as the Children of Israel finally enter the land of Canaan to possess it for themselves and to wreak God’s judgment upon its utterly depraved inhabitants! It is an impossible fortress to break into! It’s walls are high and they are ridiculously thick! So God tells them to march their army around the city once, for 6 days, carrying the ark of the covenant. Then, on the seventh day, all of Israel is to walk around it 7 times and then blow trumpets and shout at the top of their lungs! As they do this, those mighty walls tremble and collapse and Israel has it’s first major victory of the campaign!



I could give you Old Testament examples of this all day. All the major O.T. miracles were object lessons of our dependence upon God! In ourselves, we are a corrupted shell of what we once were when God created us! Our independence and hostility toward our Creator/God has made us this way! We do not have what it takes – not even one of us – *ever*! The only perfect human was Jesus, but He had the advantage of also being God! But we too have been united with God, connected with Him, when we placed our faith in Jesus. He then gives us the advantages and benefits of having the Spirit of God reside inside of us, powering our lives, so that whatever success we have in obeying Christ and serving Him can be traced back to the power of God and not our own!! When we give Him total control, He gives us what it takes! He loves to do that!



So that I am not giving the wrong impression - Christ-followers are expected to engage their self-discipline also. The Holy Spirit does not exert Himself on our behalf, against our will. And He does not work alone! He expects us to partner with Him in His efforts to make a new creature out of us. Even King Jehoshaphat's undermanned and under-weaponized army was to go out to the battlefield, even though they were told to do nothing once they got there - [2 Chron. 20]. They were to show up and just watch what God was going to do, so that is exactly what they did! They showed up, stood there, and saw, to their astonishment, that God had already won an astounding victory for them against overwhelming numbers!

In the same way, if in our weakness we will daily depend upon Him, He will win against the overwhelming odds that are against us in overcoming our own nature! We will still never be perfect, but our nature will be changed, our **inclinations**, and our **instincts** and our **impulses** will be brought under the authority of Jesus our Lord! We will be motivated by love, not law! And when we fail, (and we will fail), we **repent**, and unlike most people, we learn from our mistakes so that we will not fail again in the same way! But if we do, we are forgiven in Jesus, and when we apologize we are given a new start. That is the motivational power of God's forgiveness and **grace!** 6