

Speaker: Rev. Wong Siow Hwee

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Title: In and Through

2 Peter 1: Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

做耶稣基督仆人和使徒的西门彼得，写信给那因我们的神和救主耶稣基督之义，与我们同得一样宝贵信心的人。²愿恩惠、平安因你们认识神和我们主耶稣多多地加给你们！

³神的神能已将一切关乎生命和虔敬的事赐给我们，皆因我们认识那用自己荣耀和美德召我们的主。⁴因此，他已将又宝贵又极大的应许赐给我们，叫我们既脱离世上从情欲来的败坏，就得与神的性情有份。

I've entitled today's sermon "In and Through", because I thought it would be quite interesting to understand today's message using these 2 key prepositions that both occur multiple times in today's sermon passage. First and foremost, Peter described his church members as those who had "escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires". In the original Greek phrasing, the preposition IN actually occurs twice. Literally speaking, they were formerly IN the world and also IN evil desires. That's the root and source of their earlier corruption 败坏.ⁱ

I want to start our reflection by talking about this corruption. This corruption that comes about from being IN the world and IN evil desires. What is the nature of this corruption? In the context, it's rather multi-faceted. This corruption is both internal in the sense of originating from our personal human desires and lust, as well as external in the sense of being influenced by the decadent part of the world we live in. This result of this corruption is both secular in the sense of bad morals, as well as spiritual in the sense of leading towards death. This corruption essentially describes humanity as being in a state where we are moving towards self-destruction. Just to be clear, I'm not trying to deliver a typical Christian doom and gloom message here, whereby the only thing to look forward to is life after death in heaven. No, that's not my point. But I do want to begin by taking an honest look at humanity, and challenging any humanistic optimism that we're near any form of utopian enlightenment. And honestly, we are far from it. Technology and knowledge wise, we certainly have advanced by leaps and bounds. A first century person teleported into this world, in this day and age, would think that he is living on a totally different planet. But despite all these, I would argue that the core of human nature remains unchanged despite our best efforts. We continue to see human strife through all forms of violence, and conflicts stemming from the human ego. We can develop tools and drugs of every kind, but has our sanity and sanctity improved? Maybe it's the other way round. The more stuff we have, the crazier and messier we become. In the end, all these remain useless defenses in the face of corruption. Until we change we who are, we are helpless before sin and death.

Let's have a moment to ponder: as fellow human beings, what should we do? How do we deal with this corruption that haunts us? What would you do? Some have chosen Escapism.ⁱⁱ Monks, Christian or otherwise, excluded themselves from society, hoping that their physical separation would distance them from this corruption. Perhaps, if you purify your lifestyle and your minds, you might purify your soul too. This is not just solely a religious mindset, as you might have heard of some people who intentionally retreat into the woods, like ancient Chinese poets, hoping to find peace in simplicity. Poet 常建 wrote this after his meditations in a temple 题破山寺后禅院. Last line: 万籁此俱寂，惟余钟磬音。 Maybe peace could be found if you could really empty your mind of everything. I also think that our yearning for heaven could also be a subtle form of escapism from this-worldly corruption.

For some others, maybe the solution is Assimilation. If you can't beat them, join them. After a while, you might not see them as corruption anymore. I read this article online from a former Christian: "Religion puts many layers of guilt on us for things which are perfectly natural, and the resulting manipulation is powerful. But I'm done with that now. The self-loathing and guilt my religion taught me was in retrospect incredibly unhealthy. It takes time to unlearn the negative self-talk. But once you've made some progress in letting that go, you can become a much happier person."ⁱⁱⁱ After reading this, I wondered, maybe that's how it felt to be slowly assimilated into the world. Stop feeling guilty and just follow what is natural. As 阿斗 would say, 乐不思蜀. It doesn't matter who you are or who you should be, as long as you feel happy.

As humans, left to our own devices, we might have chosen Escapism or Assimilation to deal with this corruption. But in God's plans, it is not so. Tom Wright says, "The big picture is what God wants *for* his people. All too often, people think that 'religion', or even 'Christian faith', is about what God wants *from* us – good behavior, renunciation of things we like, a gritted-teeth morality of forcing ourselves to behave unnaturally. That is a total caricature."^{iv} I agree with Tom Wright. The big picture is what God wants *for* his people. And thankfully his plans can be found summarized in these opening verses of 2 Peter. To uncover the plans, we need to do some work.

These are the days of the school examinations. You can tell because the school children look pale and tired, but the parents are the ones that look truly horrible and haggard. In keeping with this festive season, I thought it would be interesting to share the fun with some English Comprehension. This assignment is part of a process to uncover God's plans *for* his people in our passage today.

To those who **IN** the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption **IN** the world caused **IN** evil desires.

In the passage (shown in the powerpoint slide, found also in the PDF file), I've highlighted the key prepositions IN and THROUGH, which both occur 4 times in the original Greek. I think these prepositions are especially critical in this passage because they indicate relationships of causation or agency between the different terms and clauses. Either IN "A", "B" can happen, or THROUGH "A", "B" can happen. Using IN and THROUGH, Peter indicated to us that A leads to B. Our comprehension assignment this morning is to determine which is A and which is B. Fun, right? I can see all your faces of excitement.

Like any good teacher would do, I've solved part of the problem to show you an example. The phrase "corruption IN the world caused IN evil desires" has been discussed earlier. In both cases, both the world and the evil desires are causes of the corruption, so the world and evil desires are A and the corruption is B. Let's put A in yellow and B in the darker shade of orange to indicate the relationship.

To those who **IN** the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours abundantly **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped **the corruption IN the world** caused **IN** **evil desires**.

Now it's your turn. Let's start with verse 1, the very first IN. There are two clauses related to this IN, "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ", and "receiving a faith as precious as ours". Which is A, and which is B? Remember that A should lead to B. Let's say the answer for A together (countdown 3,2,1): the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Good. Let's put in the colors.

To those who **IN** **the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ** **have received a faith as precious as ours**: 2 Grace and peace be yours abundantly **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped **the corruption IN the world** caused **IN** **evil desires**.

Verse 2 now, the second IN. Once again, the two clauses are Grace and peace be yours abundantly, and the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. A leads to B. Which is which? Let's identify A together: the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. But you might have observed that this knowledge is related to earlier clause "the faith that we receive", so let me put them in the same shade, and put grace and peace in an even darker shade of red.

To those who **IN** **the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ** **have received a faith as precious as ours**: 2 **Grace and peace be yours abundantly** **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped **the corruption IN the world** caused **IN** **evil desires**.

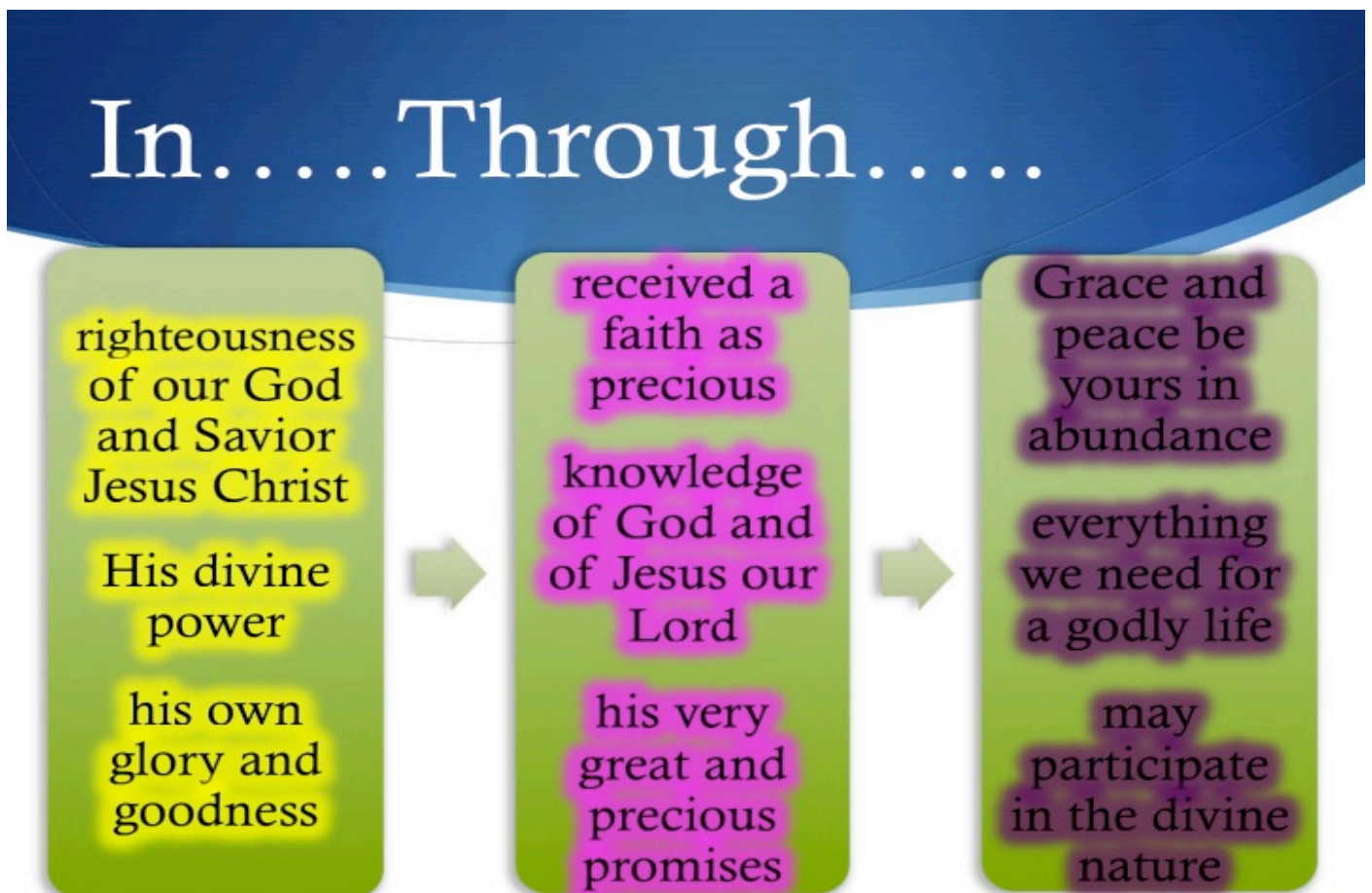
Going into the first half of verse 3. We deal with the first THROUGH. Everything we need for a godly life, and our knowledge of him. Which is A and which is B? A is: our knowledge of him. How about the second THROUGH, relating the 2 clauses “call us”, and “his own glory and goodness”? A is: his own glory and goodness. Let me put in the corresponding colours.

To those who **IN** the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours abundantly **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption **IN** the world caused **IN** evil desires.

Lastly, we tackle the first half verse 4. In the third THROUGH, “these” refers to the earlier clause “his own glory and goodness”. The other clause is “giving us his very great and precious promises”. Which one is A? A is: these. Second part, “them” refers to those “very great and precious promises”, and the other clause refers to “participate in the divine nature”. A is: them.

To those who **IN** the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours abundantly **IN** the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life **THROUGH** our knowledge of him who called us **THROUGH** his own glory and goodness. 4 **THROUGH** these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **THROUGH** them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption **IN** the world caused **IN** evil desires.

We have finished the assignment! Was it fun? If you enjoyed that, you can consider becoming a full time pastor. From analyzing all the IN and THROUGH, we may capture a glimpse of how God’s plan unfolds for us. Let me group them together to make the picture even clearer.



God’s plan initiates entirely from him. It proceeds “through his own glory and goodness”. It begins “in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”. “There is indeed quite a lot in this letter about the moral effort we have to make. (We have heard many of these in our sermons on 1 Peter, and also discuss them during our cell group discussions.) But Peter is quite clear. It *all* comes from God in the first place.” It is executed through his

divine power, and done for the sake of who he is. In a way, his goodness and righteousness is exactly antithetical to all the evil in the world and human desires.

Because of who God is and how he is, we then see what was accomplished in him and through him. To summarize it, it is simply to know God. But the biblical understanding of knowledge is not exactly the same as purely a cognitive process of knowing a bunch of facts and data. "In the Bible, 'knowing' is a very personal activity. The Old Testament writers use the word to describe intimate relations between one person and another, including sexual relations. 'Knowing God' does mean having a warm intimate relationship with our Creator; but it also means understanding who he is, with all its implications. Christians must not only have a 'warm and fuzzy' feeling toward God; they also need to know specific things about him, what he has done, and what he demands of us."^{vi} This is why knowledge of God is grouped together (in the same colors) with his promises. We need proper understanding of how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises. This is also why such knowledge is a faith that is to be received. Peter is giving the full assurance to his readers, that their knowledge of God and Jesus is equally precious as the Apostles' own knowledge.

This is how the plan unfolds. God acts because of who he is. In his act, he called us and reveals who he is so that we may relate and trust in him. And this is the final portion of the plan. It is IN this knowledge and THROUGH this knowledge, that we may live a life overcoming the corruption. Peter describes it beautifully. This knowledge is "everything we need for a godly life". When we live out such a life, we are "participating in the divine nature". When we live out such a life, we experience "grace and peace abundantly". You might think that is not possible. How can we actually share in God's very being or nature? But think about this. "If we say that the holy spirit is fully divine, and if we say that the holy spirit comes to live within us and transform us from within, what is that but to say that the divine nature is already dwelling within us, leading us forward until we are suffused with God's own presence and power?"^{vii} When that happens, you now see why our lives can overflow with grace and peace.

In a way, God's plan is rather straight forward. To combat all the corruption we face, God's plan is simply to get close to us. And there is nothing closer or fuller, than the revelation through Jesus Christ. In Christ and through Christ, our lives transform according to him to become godly and divine. How does that work? I was very young when I first heard of the Chinese phrase 近朱者赤, 近墨者黑. The second part was easy to understand. If you are near the ink, you'll get black. But without looking at the actual words, for the longest time I thought it was 近猪者吃, which kind of makes similar sense. If you are near the pigs, you might feel hungry during their feeding, and eat a lot more often. After reading the actual words, I then misunderstood the word 赤 which also has the meaning of naked, as in 赤裸. I kept wondering what is this 朱 that makes people naked. Now I know it refers to 朱砂 Vermilion, which is a brilliant red or scarlet pigment originally made from the powdered mineral cinnabar. And 赤 refers to red. The phrase means one takes on the color of his company. If you are near red paint you get red, if you are near ink, you turn black. So, brothers and sisters, what is the color of your company?

If you feel that your life is tainted with the corruption of the world, the corruption of your evil desires, dear friends, the solution isn't escapism, nor is it assimilation. You need God's plan. I call it the Christian Immersion Program. God has acted, and his act is his revelation through Jesus Christ. You have to know him, both relationally and cognitively. So, immerse yourself in him. Let the goodness of God move you, and let his glory shine through. Any transformation is never easy in the beginning. We are not used to the ways of God after all the years of our old company. But slowly and surely, as you get close to God, your colors will change. And it is a force to be reckoned with. It is a force victorious over all corruption. That's the precious faith of Jesus Christ. If you have been hesitant, if you have strayed away, then I invite you to draw close to God once again. Let's pray.

ⁱ And just in case you thought that this escape is a permanent change of state, if you think that after escaping it, you are saved and it's all over and in the past, Peter warned later in 2 Peter 2: 20 "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning." The escape is not a permanent one because you can get entangled back in it again and be overcome.

ⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escapism>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/godlessindixie/2014/09/14/what-leaving-my-religion-did-for-me/>

^{iv} Tom Wright, *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, p 102

^v *Ibid.* p 102

^{vi} Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter, Jude* (The NIV Application Commentary), p 38,39

^{vii} Wright, p 102,103