

It's not hard to see what was behind the decisions Herod made. He put John in prison because he wanted to **please his wife** (Mark 6:17-18). He made a foolish oath ("whatever you ask me...up to half the kingdom"—Mark 6:23), because he wanted to **please His step-daughter**, who had pleased him with her dancing. Never in his wildest dreams did he think she would ask for the head of John the Baptist. But, even at this point, Herod still could have done the right thing. He could have recanted this foolish oath, but he didn't, because he wanted to **please "those who sat with him"** (Mark 6:26)—those important people he invited to his birthday feast (Mark 6:21). No way he's going to look weak in front of these important people, so "immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother" (Mark 6:27-28).

Do you see the difference in the two men? Both Herod and John knew the will of the Lord (albeit in varying degrees), but only John stood for it. And John stood for it, because he had a single-minded desire to please the Lord—to magnify Him and not himself ("He must increase, but I must decrease"—John 3:30). Herod, on the other hand, was "tossed to and fro" (Ephesians 4:14), like a reed shaken by the wind, because he "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43). Both men lost their head—just in different ways.

Written by: Brian Gibson (Plain Words from God's Word - FB Group)

## Marietta church of Christ

8150 Driggers St.  
Jacksonville, FL 32220

### Times of Worship

Sunday:

9 am - Bible Study / 10 am - Worship / 5 pm - Worship

Wednesday:

7 pm - Bible Study/Worship

Evangelist: Devin Barber

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### If These Be Yours And Abound

In 2 Peter 1:5-11 we read about the Christian Virtues. This is a list of quality virtues and character traits that befit a Christian on his or her spiritual walk. They include diligence, faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. These traits are quite similar to the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. Returning to 2 Peter, notice verse 8. If these things are yours and abound, you will not be barren or unfruitful in your Christian walk. This is obviously a conditional statement, and we can know that the opposite is also true. If these things are not yours, you WILL be barren and unfruitful in your Christian walk. Indeed, how can one be a devout Christian if they lack faith? We know that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). If one lacks knowledge, he will be destroyed (Hosea 4:6). Obviously then, one should desire to gain all these traits in abundance. So how do you do it? Faith, prayer, study, and practice. Let us examine each of these.

The primary way to gain faith is by studying your Bible daily, according to Romans 10:17. Note however that I wrote "study", not "read". If you are just passively reading or skimming over the Word without diligent focus, you will never get anywhere with it. Some people in the world would have you believe that the Bible is too complex to be understood, and that only a "trained professional" is able to dispense the Word to you. That is an incorrect statement. ...

We have no need of a “professional clergy” to extoll the Word to us, and in fact every single Christian is a priest or priestess, and more than capable of understanding the Bible for themself. Understanding the Bible does take time and practice however, and like any other skill it must be trained. And there’s no way to understand the Bible without opening it and reading it. Would anybody expect to become a rocket scientist, a mathematician, an engineer or a mechanic with only half-hearted effort of skimming through the instructional books? To ask is to answer.

The next way to increase the Christian virtues is prayer. If God desires you to be a faithful Christian, and if these traits are conducive to that goal, then logically He would grant you these traits if asked. In James 1:5, we read that God will liberally grant wisdom to anyone who asks for it, which is another desirable trait for a Christian. Would he not grant other traits if asked? Even the apostles, paragons of faith that they were, directly asked the Lord to increase their faith in Luke 17:5. A similar example is found in Mark 9:24. Jesus is about to heal a man’s demon-possessed son, and the father asks Jesus to help his unbelief. If that’s not a direct request to Jesus to help his faith, I don’t know what is.

We covered study above, so we will move on to practice. This is the hard part, because it’s when the rubber hits the road. Studying to increase your faith and prayer are important parts, but as the old saying goes “There’s no substitute for experience”. All the heroes of faith in the Bible had to increase their own virtues, whether faith, knowledge, self-control or any of the others. And we have plenty of examples of the heroes of faith failing at certain points in their journey. We cannot get discouraged when this happens. Being a Christian is not simply a check-list of do’s and don’t’s. It’s a way of life, and as such it’s something you get better at over time. On this Earth, we will never reach a level of holiness where we no longer need to improve, or to try harder. There will always be an improvement we can make. ...

Returning to 2 Peter 1, look at verse 9. If one lacks these traits, Peter says they are blind and has forgotten they were cleansed from old sins. Obviously nobody would desire to be in that condition. I am reminded of the other old saying “If you don’t use it, you’ll lose it.” If a professional athlete suddenly stopped exercising and training, they would grow out of shape and out of practice, and no longer be able to play their sport. The same is true of a Christian. If you cease practicing and improving, you will eventually start to lose these traits, and Peter makes clear what happens if you lose them. Indeed, there are no shortcuts. If you wish to be a devout Christian, you must build these traits and become ever more skillful in God’s Word. and that is a life-long goal if ever there was one.

Written by: Daniel Young

### **A Reed Shaken by the Wind?**

Jesus posed this question to the multitudes concerning John the Baptist: “What did you go out to see? A reed shaken by the wind?” (Matthew 11:7). Truth be told, he was anything but. A reed shaken by the wind? Not this man who came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17), and of whom Jesus said, “Among those born of women there has not risen one greater...” (Matthew 11:11). John knew the will of the Lord; he wasn’t afraid to speak it (Luke 3:7-14, 19-20; Mark 6:18); and what others thought about him, said to him, or did to him was not going to shake him in the least.

Ironically, the man who killed John the Baptist (ordered his execution—Mark 6:27) was just the opposite. If there was ever a reed shaken by the wind, it was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1). When Herod first imprisoned John, he was afraid to do him any further harm, because he knew “he was a just and holy man” (Mark 6:20). That, and the fact “he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet” (Matthew 14:5). Herod even enjoyed listening to John teach (Mark 6:20), despite the fact John rebuked him “for all the evils” he had done, including his unlawful marriage to Herodias (Luke 3:19-20; Mark 6:18).

So why would a man with such strong feelings for John end up killing him, something for which he was “exceedingly sorry”? (Mark 6:26). He did it, because unlike John, Herod had no real conviction. Pleasing the people around him (especially his family), saving face, maintaining his image—all that meant more to him than doing the right thing.

**Continued on back...**