

occurred to me of enlisting my daughters to help me collate my class notes into sets. In this way I hoped to cut down the amount of time I spent collating, and at the same time help my daughters (who were quite young at the time) earn a little spending money.

At first I paid them on the basis of the time it took to complete each set of notes. But after a while I noticed that sometimes they would take a break and rest, or go get a long drink of water, or get into conversations with each other. And I found that there was a correlation between tongue movement and hand movement – the faster their tongues went, the slower their hands moved! As a result, their productivity declined noticeably!

And so I changed the basis of payment from time to the size of the job! Now if they wanted to take breaks, tell funny stories, or rest on the couch, they could relax and not worry about the clock. In fact, they started to hold contests to see which could complete her job first! And after awhile they became very efficient and very fast, and their productivity shot way up! They became really good at collating. They were productive!

Now of course Peter was not speaking about becoming productive in collating! That raises the question: what is the Lord desirous of producing in and through us? What kind of fruit should we be producing abundantly?

The Bible speaks a good deal about fruit in the lives of those whom God touches with His grace. In Luke 8, the parable of the sower speaks of bearing fruit. In John 4 our Lord speaks of gathering fruit for life eternal, presumably people who are brought to Christ. In John 15 Jesus speaks of branches bearing much fruit. In Galatians 5 Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, which are the good qualities He produces in us. In Colossians 1 Paul speaks of believers bearing fruit in every good work. In Ephesians 2 Paul tells us that we have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. And in 1 Timothy 6 Paul tells Timothy to instruct those who are rich to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share. The fruit mentioned in these verses includes good character qualities and good actions.

How does exerting ourselves toward spiritual maturity assure us that we will not be unproductive in the Christian life? As we lay hold of God's provisions for life and godliness, and add godly qualities to our faith, we will be producing the fruit of good character qualities, and we will be expressing these good qualities outwardly in good actions. And thus we will be productive in the Christian life!

B. But there is a second assurance. Peter says that exertion toward spiritual maturity assures us of God's preservation for as long as we live.