



SESSION 2

LIFE IN THE CHURCH

▶ ***The Point***

I love and serve Christ when I love and serve His body, the church.

▶ ***The Passage***

1 Peter 4:7-11

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

It was like standing at a fork in the road, except the road went in a dozen directions. I was preparing to graduate from college and was terrified because I had no idea what to do for the rest of my life. And that was because I had no real idea about who I was up to that point in my life. Throughout my 16-year educational journey, I had learned a lot of things about other people, but almost nothing about myself.

All that changed when I found my identity in Christ. When I came to Christ, I came to His body, the church. My identity in Christ is wrapped up in my identity with other believers. That's true of all who follow Christ. We find who we are in Christ, and we live out that identity through our involvement with other Christians.

As you explore an important passage from 1 Peter 4 in this session, you'll see that to love and serve the body of Christ is to love and serve the Head of that body: Christ Himself.

▶ ***The Setting***

Peter was one of Jesus' twelve apostles (see Mark 3:16). He became a leader in the early church and eventually was martyred under the Roman emperor Nero about A.D. 64. While ministering in Rome, Peter wrote the letter we call 1 Peter to a group of churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). He encouraged them to stand strong and to realize the hope they had in Jesus Christ, even as they faced persecution and suffering.

What does the Bible say?

The end of all things (v. 7)—The New Testament writers described the times following Jesus' resurrection and ascension as the "last days," anticipating Jesus' return.

Hospitality (v. 9)—Hospitalable people provided food, shelter, and protection for their guests. For the early Christians, practicing hospitality was a natural extension of the practice of brotherly love (see Heb. 13:1-2).

Gift (v. 10)—God-given empowerment for ministry. Many different gifts exist (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11). All believers are so gifted and should use their gifts to bless others.

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 89 of the PSG: **“What do you like best about the church?”**

Note: Group members can share what they like about their church, specifically, or the universal church, generally.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Take your group on a walking tour of your church while discussing Question #1, above.

Encourage people to share memories and specific ministries they appreciate as you

visit different places within the church campus itself. Be intentional about visiting areas that contain information about your church’s different ministries, such as missionary maps, ministry sign-up sheets, promotions for camps or Bible schools, and so on.

Note: If your group doesn’t meet at your church campus, consider bringing several photos of different areas that you can pass around the group while discussing Question #1.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 90 of the PSG. Introduce the topic of the church by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 10, “Connected,” to help group members connect with the theme of the study in a visual way.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 90 of the PSG: **“I love and serve Christ when I love and serve His body, the church.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by thanking God for the privilege of gathering as a church to worship Him and study His Word each week. Pray that God would give courage and endurance to Christians around the world who lack the same privilege.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Peter 4:7

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

READ: 1 Peter 4:7 on page 91 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Use the first two paragraphs on page 115 of this Leader Guide to help explain Peter's declaration that "the end of all things is near."

RECAP: Call attention to the importance of prayer by reading aloud the final two paragraphs on page 91 of the PSG:

Jesus didn't save us so that each of us could be an only child. He called us to love both Him and His family. If we love the church—the family of God—we will pray for her members. By praying for the church, we're serving other believers. Prayer is dependence on God, and when we take the lives of others before God's throne of grace, we're laying their needs before the One who loves, cares, and can fully meet their needs.

Part of discovering who we are is discovering that God made us to be prayer warriors. All believers have a direct connection to God because of our faith in Jesus. Let's use that connection to bless the church with prayer.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 91 of the PSG: "**When have you seen prayer make an impact in the lives of others?**"

Note: If group members are hesitant to answer, consider broadening the scope of the question by asking, "When have you heard about prayer making an impact in the lives of others?"

TRANSITION: Peter started his practical instructions by asking church members to pray for one another. As we move to verses 8-9, we'll find additional ways to love and serve each other as the church.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What steps can you take to be more disciplined in your prayer life?

1 Peter 4:7 Commentary

Serve one another through prayer.

[Verse 7] Peter's declaration **the end of all things is near** may sound strange to modern readers, since Peter wrote this letter almost 2,000 years ago. Two ideas require mention. First, in his next letter, Peter would remind his readers the Lord's time table differed from theirs. As he said, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). When we understand that God reigns from eternity to eternity (see Ps. 90:2), we better understand Peter's mindset.

Second, the New Testament writers saw the resurrection and ascension of Christ as the beginning of the last days. On the day of Pentecost, Peter so informed his listeners (see Acts 2:17). The coming of the Holy Spirit comprised the last major step in God's plan before He would send His Son to return and fulfill His kingdom. Other New Testament writers used similar words to express this concept (see 1 Cor. 10:11; 1 John 2:18). The Lord Jesus was coming soon, and every day was one day closer!

In light of the coming end of the age, Peter encouraged his readers to **be alert**. Indeed, life was serious business, because eternity was coming! People's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ—or their lack thereof—meant the difference between an eternity with God and an eternity without God. The stakes were too high to waste their lives. Rather, they needed to use them for God's purpose.

Peter also challenged his readers to be **of sober mind**. The word contains the notion of intentionality. We cannot accomplish God's purpose for our lives by accident or merely by living each day one at a time. Rather, we must consider how we will invest our lives in light of eternity. Peter was not saying life had no room for spontaneity or fun, but he was challenging his hearers to live their lives with eternity in view.

The word translated **pray** literally is "prayers," but the basic meaning is the same. The Greek structure stresses that Peter desired prayer to result from people's serious and disciplined lifestyles. As they considered both the importance and relative brevity of life, they would realize they must pray to God regularly. He could intervene and accomplish great things in situations way beyond His children's ability (see Isa. 55:8-9).

When God's children pray, they are recognizing their utter dependence on Him. They also are confirming His power to handle their situations. What challenge or trial do you need to soberly take to the Lord in a disciplined manner today?

The apostle Paul elsewhere encouraged us to pray without ceasing (see 1 Thess. 5:17). However, these verses suggest a more intentional, planned pursuit of prayer in the course of our daily routine. In light of Peter's words, believers should consider how to make prayer a more intentional and significant part of their walks with God.

1 Peter 4:8-9 Commentary

Serve one another with love and hospitality.

[Verse 8] Peter commanded his readers to **love each other deeply**. The word translated “love” is *agape* (a-GAH-pay). It designates a decision of the will rather than emotion. Today’s world often defines love in terms of feelings or emotions, and love can include those things. However, at its core, biblical love is characterized by self-denying commitment. The apostle Paul affirmed this same truth in 1 Corinthians 13. The Corinthian church had many questions about spiritual gifts, and Paul affirmed their importance (see 1 Cor. 12:4-26). Nonetheless, he highlighted that love surpassed all the gifts (see 13:1-3). In fact, he affirmed that one day, all the gifts would pass away, but love would go on forever. Love unifies the church in a way gifts never can.

The word translated “constant” (CSB), “deeply” (NIV), “earnestly” (ESV), and “fervent” (KJV) further stressed the depth of love Peter sought from his readers. Such an attitude is important because **love covers over a multitude of sins**. Most interpreters believe Peter was alluding to Proverbs 10:12: “Hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers over all wrongs.” James used similar language when he encouraged believers to restore sinners from their errant ways (see Jas. 5:20). Again, he stressed the power of love to bring peace to people’s lives.

Love is able to cover “a multitude of sins” because a believer’s attitude of self-denying commitment and readiness to forgive others will be evident to those who see it. Anger and hatred only make difficult situations worse. However, love can break down walls of hostility and bring reconciliation. The apostle Paul said that without love, we are nothing; whatever else we do is of little account. Peter likewise placed love as our highest command because he recognized its supreme importance.

[Verse 9] Showing **hospitality** meant something different in Peter’s context than it does today. In the ancient world, cities and towns did not typically have quality hotels for travelers to use. Rather, people counted on the gracious hospitality of local residents to take them in and provide their basic needs. The Greek word comes from two words that together mean “to show love toward a foreigner.” Hospitality did not merely extend to foreigners, of course.

The word **grumbling** also can be rendered “complaining.” It occurs in Acts 6:1 (“complained”), where it describes concern over the unequal treatment of widows, and in Philippians 2:14 (“grumbling”), where Paul instructed believers to do all things without grumbling. Hospitality definitely required a significant commitment on the part of the host family. They needed to see to the needs of their guests and to accommodate them with food, drink, and shelter. They also took a certain level of responsibility for their protection (see Gen. 19:6-8). A host might grumble because of the time and effort needed to care for others’ needs. Peter’s perspective, however, was that showing hospitality to strangers was a wonderful way to demonstrate Christ’s love. As they put aside their own needs and agendas to show kindness to strangers, they demonstrated the kind of self-denying commitment Jesus displayed and encouraged them to display (see John 13:34-35). Unbelieving strangers also might see their example and turn to the Lord.

1 Peter 4:10-11 Commentary

Serve one another through your spiritual gifts.

[Verse 10] Peter turned his attention to spiritual gifts and their exercise in the church for the common good. Peter urged that his hearers use their gifts **whatever gift you have received**. (See a more detailed listing of spiritual gifts in Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12.) Peter wanted his readers to be **faithful stewards** of the spiritual gift or gifts they had received. In this case, Peter focused on the spiritual gifts that were operative in the body of Christ. Believers had nothing to offer God that they had not received from Him (see 1 Cor. 4:7). They were managers, not owners, and God expected them to use what He had given them **to serve others** for His glory.

God's grace in its various forms does not describe God's grace in salvation. Rather, Peter was describing God's wider purpose in extending to the church many different types of spiritual gifts, each different and unique. God works in the same saving way in all believers to bring them to faith, but once they follow Him, He leads them along different paths as He uses them for His purpose.

[Verse 11] The word **if** occurs twice in this verse. Usually the word expresses a hypothetical condition, but the Greek construction is stronger than that. We should understand **if anyone speaks** as stating a condition assumed to be true—"if anyone speaks, and he will."

Peter designated the person's speech as **words of God**. Those who spoke should recognize they were presenting God's words, and should never present their own opinions instead. Those who received the words would recognize them as from the Lord.

The word translated **serves** could also be translated "minister" (KJV) and is related to our word "deacon." Another word similar to this word is often translated "ministry." We have pastors and others who lead us in the worship of God and in our Christian walks. Many others serve as God's ministers in the marketplace through various occupations. Wherever we serve, whether as professional ministers or as ministering professionals, we should serve with the knowledge we are part of the grand story God is writing. How will we serve others to draw them closer to Jesus?

Peter said that the service people offered should be based on **the strength God provides**. Believers were to recognize that only what they did in the power of Jesus' name and by the Holy Spirit's enabling would make an eternal difference. Peter's words thus issue a warning and an encouragement to believers today. We cannot accomplish God's purpose from human strength, but only from His.

Peter then highlighted the purpose of our speaking God's words and serving in His Name: **so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ**. Those who spoke words as from God should recognize that the goal was God's glory. Those who served were not to do so to bring glory to themselves but to honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by grace through faith is to be our all-consuming relationship. All our other relationships and priorities flow from that one.

