

SESSION 3

GRACIOUS HOSPITALITY

▶ **The Point**

Ground your service and love in hospitality.

▶ **The Passage**

1 Peter 4:7-11

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

The world's largest hotel chain owns exactly zero square feet in hotel room space. Airbnb® was launched in 2007 when two roommates could not afford to pay their rent in San Francisco. In order to make a little extra money to cover their expenses, they had the idea of putting an air mattress in their living room and charging people to stay there. For many, the idea was laughable. Who would pay to sleep in the home of a perfect stranger? But a decade or so later, Airbnb has three million lodging listings in 65,000 cities and 191 countries. These are real people opening up their homes to strangers and inviting them in. Clearly, the thought of staying in a real home resonates with a lot of folks in a lot of cultures.

Gracious hospitality is nothing new. Being hospitable is, in fact, a very spiritual characteristic. Hospitality is a command and one Christians must embrace if we want to live in a welcoming posture to those coming into the faith. Our graciousness and hospitality to individuals outside our circle of friends attracts people to the gospel we profess.

▶ **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 AD 64. Probably a few years earlier, Peter wrote the letter we call 1 Peter to a group of churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Peter 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. 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 have at least one gift and should use their gifts to bless others.

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 29 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “What’s the most interesting place you’ve stayed on a trip?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 30 of the PSG. Emphasize that hospitality is a command we are to obey. Then read or summarize the text—or encourage group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 30 of the PSG: “Ground your service and love in hospitality.”


LEADER PACK: Make copies and distribute **Pack Item 3**, the “Hospitality” handout, to help group members understand the significance of hospitality in the Bible.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us develop true hearts toward hospitality so that more people in our spheres of influence might be reached with the gospel.

HOSPITALITY

- HOSPITALITY—NEW TESTAMENT**
Greek: *philoxenos*, “love of the stranger.” Hospitality is defined as “entertainment of a stranger as a guest,” or “the act of friendship shown a visitor.” The idea was the process of receiving outsiders and moving them from being strangers to welcomed guests.
- HOSPITALITY—OLD TESTAMENT**
Hebrew: *ger* (translated in various ways)
• “resident alien” (Lev 19:34; Num 15)
• “foreigner” (Lev 19)
• “stranger” (Num 15:13)
• “stranger” (Lev 19:34)
• Translation: one between a temporary guest (someone passing through, a signor, newcomer or tourist) to someone who is a foreigner who resides within the community (whether short or long term, not a citizen with rights or privileges, dependent upon the local rulers for protection).
• “You must not exploit a resident alien or oppress him, since you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21).

The biblical response is the same, no matter how the term is translated. The stranger was to be treated with kindness. The people of Israel were to identify with the plight of the stranger because they were once in the same position. Kindness was how they decided to be treated.



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STUDY THE BIBLE

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1 Peter 4:7

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:7 on page 31 of the PSG.

RECAP: Hospitality played a key role in the spread of the gospel in the days when the church was just beginning to flourish. When traveling to a new area, people were at the mercy of those who lived in that city. Therefore, Christians took hospitality seriously, and fellow believers who had been displaced were welcomed into the homes and lives of others. This graciousness helped the gospel to spread and take root in these communities.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 31 of the PSG: **“When has your perspective of others been changed because of prayer?”**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how prayer is an urgent need for the church.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 32 of the PSG. So what should we pray for in order to foster an attitude of hospitality?

- ▶ **Pray that God would help us see ourselves as stewards.** Everything we have has been given to us by God to use for the sake of His kingdom. *Everything.*
- ▶ **Pray that God would help us confront our greed.** Hospitality is one of the ways God actually breaks us of this mindset.
- ▶ **Pray that God would bring us opportunities.** When we start praying for opportunities to show hospitality, we’ll soon be surprised at how many we’ll find.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that constant love leads to a lifestyle of hospitality.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What’s the connection between the end of all things and being hospitable?

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1 Peter 4:7 Commentary

[Verse 7] Prayer lays the groundwork for our love and hospitality. In the immediately preceding verses, Peter had encouraged his readers to align themselves with Christ's mission and purpose (see 1 Pet. 4:1), doing God's will rather than pursuing evil deeds as they did before they became Jesus' followers. (See vv. 2-3.) They were to identify with their new life in Christ rather than with their former lives, for all would one day give account to God. (See vv. 4-5.) In verses 7-11, Peter provided practical application to his words.

Peter's declaration, **the end of all things is at hand**, may sound strange to modern readers, since Peter wrote this letter almost two thousand years ago. Two ideas require mention. First, in his next letter, Peter would remind his readers the Lord's timetable differed from theirs. As he said, "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one 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.) 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 self-controlled**. Indeed, life was serious business, because eternity was coming! People's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, or 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 **sober-minded**. The words contain the notion of intentionality. We can't accomplish God's purpose for our lives by accident or merely by living one day 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.

Peter desired **prayers** to result from people's serious and disciplined lifestyles. As they considered both the importance and relative brevity of life, people would realize they must pray to God regularly. He could intervene and accomplish great things in situations way beyond His children's abilities. (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.

The apostle Paul elsewhere encouraged us to pray constantly. (See 1 Thess. 5:17.) However, Peter's words suggest a more intentional, planned pursuit of prayer in the course of our daily routines. In light of these words, believers should consider how to make prayer a more intentional and significant part of their walks with God.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Peter 4:8-9

⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:8-9 on page 32 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how constant love leads to a lifestyle of hospitality.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 32 of the PSG: **“How can our hospitality demonstrate the gospel for others?”**

RECAP: For the Christian, hospitality is not just an act to be performed; it is a lifestyle to be assumed. To understand why that is so, we first need to understand what hospitality is. The word for hospitality used in this passage comes from the combination of two words: “love” and “stranger.” Literally, then, hospitality is the love of strangers.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What obstacles can prevent us from demonstrating hospitality?

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “Posturing Through Prayer,” on page 33 of the PSG to help them ready themselves for hospitality through prayer. Ask them to answer the questions:



What gifts and abilities has God given you that you could use to serve others with?

Do a quick survey of your community and schedule. What other opportunities for hospitality exist now that you are aware of?

Write a brief prayer to God that expresses your heart for hospitality and that recognizes the urgency that is needed.

My Prayer:

TRANSITION: The next verses show us how God enables us to love and serve others.

1 Peter 4:8-9 Commentary

[Verse 8] Constant love leads to a lifestyle of hospitality. Peter commanded his readers to **keep loving one another earnestly**. The word translated **loving** designates a decision of the will rather than emotion. Biblical love is characterized by self-denying commitment. Paul affirmed this truth in 1 Corinthians 13. The Corinthian church had many questions about spiritual gifts. (See 1 Cor. 12.) Paul highlighted that love surpassed all the gifts. (See 13:1-3.) He affirmed that one day all the gifts would pass away, but love would go on forever. Love unifies the church in a way spiritual gifts never can.

Earnestly further stressed the depth of love Peter sought from his readers. This attitude was important because **love covers a multitude of sins**. Most interpreters believe Peter was alluding to Proverbs 10:12. James used similar language when he encouraged believers to restore sinners from their errant ways. (See Jas. 5:20.) He stressed the power of love to bring peace to people's lives.

Love is able to cover a multitude of sins. A believer's attitude of self-denying commitment and readiness to forgive others will be evident to those who see it. 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. (See 1 Cor. 13:1-3.) Peter likewise placed love as our highest command because he recognized its supreme importance.

[Verse 9] In the ancient world, cities and towns did not typically have quality hotels for travelers to use. People counted on the gracious hospitality of local residents to take them in and provide their basic needs. The Greek term for **hospitality** comes from two words that together mean "to show love toward a foreigner." Hospitality did not merely extend to foreigners, of course.

Examples of hospitality abound in the Bible. Lot, Abraham's nephew, showed hospitality to the two messengers who came to Sodom. (See Gen. 19:1-3.) Rebekah's brother, Laban, showed hospitality to Abraham's servant, who came to Haran seeking a wife for his master, Isaac, Abraham's son. (See 24:31-33.) In many such circumstances, a traveler would likely attempt to compensate his host, but the host could not necessarily count on this.

The word **grumbling** also can be rendered "complaining." It occurs in Acts 6:1 ("complaint"), where it describes the concern over the unequal treatment of widows. In Philippians 2:14, 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 on a certain level of responsibility for their protection. (See Gen. 19:6-8.) A host might grumble because of the time and effort he needed to expend 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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:10-11 on page 34 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 35 of the PSG: **“When has someone else’s hospitality encouraged you in your walk with Christ?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 35 of the PSG.

Our willingness to be used by God to serve other people implicitly communicates important things we believe to be true:

- ▶ **We are speaking about our provision.**
- ▶ **We are speaking about our contentment.**
- ▶ **We are speaking about our future.**

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 35 of the PSG: **“How can the truths of these verses help our group be more welcoming?”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Write the word “HOSPITALITY” on the board. Provide several sticky notes and a pen to each group member. Instruct members to think for a couple of minutes about any applications for biblical hospitality in our context. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to generate as many ideas as possible. Encourage group members to write down ideas, one per sticky note, and then attach his or her notes to the board. After everyone has participated, review the ideas. Lead the group to select two or three ideas to begin to put into action. Call for volunteers to take ownership of each idea and be responsible for leading the group to get it done.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How has God equipped our group to love and serve others?

1 Peter 4:10-11 Commentary

[Verse 10] God enables us to love and serve others. Peter wanted his readers to be **good stewards** of the spiritual gifts they had each received. A steward manages the concerns of another. In this case, Peter focused on the spiritual gifts that were operative in the body of Christ. The believers had nothing to offer God that they had not received from Him as a gift. They were managers, not owners, and God expected them to use what He had given them **to serve one another** for His glory.

The expression **God's varied grace** describes God's wide purpose in extending to the church many different types of spiritual gifts. All of them come through His **grace**, but each one is different and unique.

[Verse 11] Peter gave two specific examples of ministry for the sake of the church. He gave instructions on the manner in which someone in the church should speak. Peter designated the person's speech as **oracles of God**. Those who spoke were to recognize they were presenting God's words, and should never have presented their own opinions instead. Those who received the words were to recognize them as from the Lord.

The word translated **serves** could also be translated "minister" (KJV) and is related to the word *deacon*. Another word similar to this term is often translated "ministry." In the church today, 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, we should serve with the knowledge that we are part of the grand story God is writing.

Peter said that the service people offered should be **by the strength that God supplies**. 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.

The purpose of our speaking God's words and serving in His Name is **in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ**. Those who spoke words as from God should recognize that the goal was God's glory. Those who served were to honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul commanded believers to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Col. 3:23.) Indeed, our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is to be our all-consuming relationship. All our other relationships and priorities flow from that one.

Peter ended with a doxology, a brief ascription of praise to God. The words **to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever** remind us that everything begins and ends with God. It is His glorior that brought the world into existence, and it is His glorious power that will bring human history, as we know it to an end.

The word **amen** comes from a Hebrew word that means, "to be reliable, confirmed, or established." By closing his statement with this word, Peter drove home his conviction that what he had just spoken was indeed the truth.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications.



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Greet.** Arrive at church a few minutes early this week. Spend extra time in the area outside the worship room to make sure you say hello and meet people you don't know.
- ▶ **Host a group.** Look for an opportunity to host a small group in your home or to be a greeter in your Bible study group.
- ▶ **Share a meal.** Dedicate one Sunday each month to be a day when you will invite someone into your home for lunch. Make this a regular rhythm in your life.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 36 of the PSG:

Regardless of whether our natural personality is welcoming or not, we are compelled by how God has welcomed us to extend the same welcome to others.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for the way He has welcomed us into His family. Ask Him for the wisdom and insight to welcome others in the same way.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog.**

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry