

September 1, 2019

“Living in Light of the End”  
1 Peter 4:7-11

FCF: Our struggle with priorities

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) With the end at hand,  
(magnet) We must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

NFL football is near. So sportswriters are asking how dominant Tom Brady and the New England Patriots will be this year. Brady has played in nine Super Bowls and won six of them. How do you explain that? Here’s a headline: “Football Is Tom Brady’s Religion.” (READ quote) “What’s really at the epicenter of it is this devotional love for the game...It is his vocation - it’s what gives his life meaning and purpose.” This drives his focus, determination, and priorities.

Our text this morning speaks to our priorities. What are they? I should add that this message is the first of four on spiritual gifts. I’ll explain that as we move through the passage.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** 1 Peter 4:7-11**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

We have a couple of obstacles to clear before we can get into this passage. The first has to do with taking seriously “the last days.” Yes, much time has gone by since the New Testament era. But such phrases do not mean that such things were coming right away. They mean that all the major events in God’s plan of salvation have already occurred. So the way is clear for Jesus’ return. It’s at hand. It can come at any time. So that’s not really an obstacle to worry about.

The second concern has to do with the idea that this world could end. Or that God can intervene in a cosmic causal way. But let’s stop and think for a moment. Where did the cosmos come from? The One who created can recreate. And the Christ who came once can come again.

So “the end is at hand.” And Peter wants his readers to reckon with that and to wrestle with its ramifications. With the end at hand, we must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.

What would be the ramifications of this astonishing claim? What would such essentials be? There are three in our text. First, the priority of prayer. Second, sacrificial love. And, third, the stewarding of gifts. With the end in view, those would be the essentials of life and ministry.

**I. PRIORITY OF PRAYER**

The first of these essentials Peter sets out is the priority of prayer (READ 1 Peter 4:7).

*A) The Call to a Disciplined Life*

## 1. The commands

Peter begins with the call to a disciplined life - being sensible, reasonable, sober, and restrained.

## 2. The rationale

The rationale? These are recent converts to the faith. Their loyalty and lifestyles are new. With that has come a social cost - insults, abuse, rejection, even loss of property. So there was a pull to discouragement and, with that, the temptation to lose their heads and numb their hearts.

*B) Intimacy with God at Risk*

Thus the call to a disciplined life. But why? Because intimacy with God was at risk.

1. Meaning

Prayer can be defined as simply “a believer’s communication with God.” There are three parts to this. First, there is the believer. Then his or her communication. And then God Himself.

2. Rationale

God never changes. But our turning from Him can disrupt that link. It can create a felt absence.

Hence, the call to a disciplined life is actually about the vital priority of prayer.

*Application:*

The application? It’s obvious. We must be people of prayer. Which means we must ask, “What in my life is disrupting that? In what ways do I distract myself from time in prayer?”

With the end at hand, we must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.

## **II. SACRIFICIAL LOVE**

The priority of prayer. That then takes us to the second essential - sacrificial love.

*A) An Abiding Priority*

1. Not backing off

This is an abiding priority (**READ 1 Peter 4:7-8**). This is love without ceasing, not backing off.

2. But pressing in

But pressing in. Relationships are messy. If they are real and to last, that will mean forgiveness. And forgiveness is costly. It means absorbing a debt owed to us - just as Jesus did for us.

*B) A Practical Example*

Relationships are messy. Peter knows that and gives an example (**READ 1 Peter 4:8-9**).

1. Historical context

For Peter’s readers, hospitality did not mean entertaining. It meant giving food and lodging to travelers - especially fellow Christians. Inns of the day were few and of questionable reputation.

2. Mercy embodied

This was mercy embodied. But it was not always convenient. So there was a cost here as well. A life of hospitality meant a glad sharing of what we have - again, just as Jesus has done for us.

Such sacrificial love is called for at all times, and most especially when times are hard.

*Application:*

And such practical demonstrations of love can still be inconvenient. Mercy embodied is not always easy, whether with forgiveness or any form of opening our lives to each other. All of this is impossible without a context of relationships and community. So, at a practical level, let me again urge you to sign up for a community group. And to fill out the resource bank survey.

With the end at hand, we must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.

## **III. STEWARDING OF GIFTS**

Which brings us to the third essential, the stewarding of gifts ([READ 1 Peter 4:10-11](#)).

*A) Definition*

1. Negatively

Let's start with some definitions. What is a spiritual gift? It's not the gift of the Holy Spirit or the gift of salvation. It's not the fruit of the Spirit. Not are they our natural talents or abilities.

2. Positively

Those are important but are not spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are ([READ quote](#)) "special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God's grace to serve the body of Christ."

*B) Observations*

Let's unpack that definition and how it becomes all the more clear in what Peter says.

1. The inclusiveness of the gifts

First, there is an inclusiveness to the gifts. No one is excluded. Everyone has at least one gift.

2. The purpose of the gifts

Then there is the purpose of the gifts. They are not to lie dormant but to be used. They are to be put to work in the service of others. Our gifts are not for ourselves but for those around us. As with our material goods, they are not ours. They are given to us by God. We are to be stewards.

3. The types of gifts

The gifts are also of varying kinds. Speaking and serving - two broad categories given here.

4. The means of stewarding

In speaking, we are not to convey our grand ideas but God's Word. In serving, we are not to do so in our strength but His. Why? Because this all has to do with the glory of God through Jesus.

Such stewardship is called for at all times, and most especially when times are hard.

*Application:*

There are many ways to go with this but, again, let me be very practical. As I said earlier, this is the first of four messages on this topic. It's a new emphasis at CPC and we're going to be talking about it all this month. And so we are making available a "Gift Assessment Inventory" that we are strongly encouraging everyone here to fill out. It will be on our Facebook page and the web site. It's thorough. It will take you some time to work through it. But it's quite helpful.

You might ask, "Why should I take the time to fill this out?" Two reasons. First, so you would have greater insight into how you are wired and how you can best serve. And, second, so that we can know how best to encourage you and plug you into the ministries here at CPC. I cannot encourage you strongly enough - each of you - to take the time to fill out that inventory.

With the end at hand, we must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.

**CONCLUSION:**

Oliver Wendell Holmes served as a justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1902-1932. He is quoted as saying ([READ quote](#)), "Some people are so heavenly minded

that they are no earthly good.” That can be true in some unfortunate cases. Of course, it might help to define your terms. C. S. Lewis pushed back on this in *Mere Christianity* ([READ quote](#)):

A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.

There’s little question that Peter would have agreed with this. As he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “the end of all things is at hand.” We must then focus on the essentials of life and ministry. Meaning the priority of prayer, sacrificial love, and the stewarding of gifts.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) With the end at hand,  
(magnet) We must focus on the essentials of life and ministry.