

Sermon Series: P.E.A.C.E. – the goal of godly care

#3 Spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity 1 Peter 4:7-11

Intro

The End is Near! I bet some of those who were seated early at the coronation service were looking for this sign yesterday! Those who saw the recent Avatar movie the same! But when these familiar doomsday signboards pop up in our cities, as they still do, most people walk by unconvinced about warnings of an apocalypse or final day for planet earth. So, is there any relevance to such a statement in the Bible? Does it have anything to say to our lives as Christians?

In the light of Jesus' resurrection, the Apostle Peter wrote in *1 Peter 4:7*, "The end of everything has come." I like this translation, and another that says, "The end is at hand". Peter is *not* pointing to an abrupt termination of the universe, but to a **transformational work of God** in the future which will end suffering and bring about a **new creation**.¹ Such is the Easter hope we have. And his call about the end of days is a call to live in the light of the new future ahead of us.

When something ends and a new thing begins in life we know what happens. For example, if you've ever landed a new and better job, in the last days of your old job, your commitment to the old changes. Anything irrelevant to the new job is of little interest. Only things pertaining to the new job energize you.

This is how Peter pictures new life for Christians. He calls them to live in a way that **befits the new future** God assures them of. His readers were tempted, due to hardship, to return to their **old self-centred ways of living**.² So in verses 7-11 he says "...be serious, and discipline your lives for the sake of your prayers... love each other... share what you have..." and "serve one another with what God gifts you with..." He calls them to **spiritually maturity** and the result is a more **caring community**. Let's break these actions in 1 Pet. 4:7-11 down:

- **Pray (vs.7)** – Peter wrote in vs.7: "...be self-controlled and clearheaded so you can pray." Peter links regular devotional prayer and clarity of vision and discipline in life. Peter believed prayer was an important defence against distractions and temptations that lead people back to old selfish

¹ That's how he begins this Epistle, "a new and living hope"

² His first readers wondered if Christ would return as promised. The persecution they suffered (1 Pet. 4:12-14) tempted them to return to their former lives (1 Pet. 4:3,4).

patterns. Praying to God regularly keeps our minds outwardly focussed, just as Jesus' love is focussed on others (see also Col. 3:1-2).

Our recent devotions and prayers in the season of Lent, with regular times of reading, reflecting, and praying, offers us a good model the whole **year round**. Devotional prayer leads to a more caring community.

- **Love (v.8)** – In vs. 8 Peter then calls them to sincere and sacrificial love: “Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins.” The original Greek means **keep on loving** and not half-heartedly (e.g. Eph. 3:17-19). And note that this love includes a readiness to be **quick to forgive**, instead of holding grudges or seeking revenge.³

The media likes to remind us with their focus on Prince Harry at the coronation how hard it is to love even in a family, let alone loving strangers in a church. But spiritually mature love as God gives doesn't seek revenge or gain. It seeks wholeness and peace (1 Jn 4:7-11).

- **Share (v.9)** – The third action that befits the future God has for us is hospitality. In vs.9 he says, “Open your homes to each other without complaining.” Meal-table hospitality was a feature of Hebrew culture, but **only with your “own” people**.⁴ Those who became Christians in Peter's time faced great social challenges. They were suddenly expected to be **generous** towards those they had treated as **outcasts**, even **enemies**.⁵ Yet, to follow Christ is to **belong to a radical new community**.⁶ The church is a **foretaste** of a truly diverse and inclusive collective wherein Christ's love and grace welcomes and unites people who may normally prefer to stay apart.

Christian hospitality embraces anyone drawn to Jesus' message and Jesus' love. People should not be excluded or demeaned because of their differences, nor should generosity toward them be held back (See too Heb. 13:2). The first paid ministry job I worked in was in an area of low socio-economic conditions. Many who joined our church had low

³ Such an attitude doesn't discount the need for justice, not does it necessitate submitting to injustices without seeking fairness. Instead, it calls Christians to stop judging or seeking to punish others as a goal or right.

⁴ E.g. Many Jews did not associate with Gentiles and would not even share a glass of water with Samaritans.

⁵ E.g. Paul deals with enmity between Christian Gentiles and Christian Jews (Gal. 2:11-14)

⁶ E.g. see Ephesians chapter 2

incomes or no income and were from diverse backgrounds. Hospitality was extremely practical – ride sharing, loaning equipment, giving out hampers of food, keeping a spare room for homeless teenagers - these were common actions of parishioners in that fast-growing church. Spiritually mature hospitality looks very practical and generous. As Galatians 6 urges: we should “...work for the good of all whenever we have the opportunity, and especially in the family of faith.”

- **Serve (vv.10-11)** – Lastly, Peter sees serving with our God-given **spiritual gifts** befits the caring community God is making us to be. In verse 10-11 he says: “...serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God’s diverse gifts. Whoever speaks should do so as those who speak God’s word. Whoever serves should do so from the strength that God furnishes.”

The New Testament **does not** give much detail about **spiritual-gifts** or **grace-gifts** to the Church. Here Peter simply breaks them into **speaking** and **serving** gifts. In lists elsewhere we get titles, roles, and outcomes that describe powers God gives to strengthen faith and witness. None of the lists⁷ in the New Testament is exhaustive. No-one should claim ownership to God’s gifts for, as Paul teaches, the Holy Spirit distributes them as suits God’s purposes.⁸ Some people, as shown in the Bible, had more than one gift. Some changed their gifted roles over time.⁹ Yet, Peter assumes that **each Christian** has received a spiritual gift of one sort or another to help them take up their part in ministry to serve and help others. Therefore, he calls us to be good stewards of God’s gift. Like a **managing director**, we are to do what’s best with what God has invested in us.¹⁰ Be sure to use today’s sermon handout to do some discerning of the gifts God has bestowed on you for ministry.

The end of my sermon is near!

Peter’s teaching helps advance our understanding of care for one another and fostering the peace promised by God. You and I can choose to engage in:

⁷ See also, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and Romans 12.

⁸ 1 Cor. 12:11

⁹ E.g. Philip is a serving deacon in Acts 6 and a preacher and evangelist in Acts 8.

¹⁰ See the associated sermon handout for ways to discern God’s gifts and serve with them

- Sincere and regular **prayer**,
- Sacrificial **love** for others,
- **Sharing** what we have generously to meet needs, and
- Serving others with the grace-**gifts** God gives.

When we care for each other in such spiritually mature ways, faith and peace will break out more and more.

As Author Kenneth C Haugk puts it, “A heightened consciousness of God’s presence cultivates in you, the caregiver, and in the care receivers, a [greater] trust in God.”¹¹

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¹¹ From his book, *Christian Caregiving*