

2025 Gift Series

USE YOUR GIFT TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:1-11

Key Verses: 10-11, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 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.”

1 Peter is a beautiful and powerful letter in the Bible. In fact we have heard three messages this year in our church from this letter—one about the living hope we have in Jesus Christ (1Pe 1:1-9, “A Living Hope,” by P.Ron Ward), another message about being shepherds of God's flock until the Chief Shepherd appears (1Pe 5:1-4, “When the Chief Shepherd Appears,” by P.Mark Vucekovich), and most recently at our MSBC, a message about craving pure spiritual milk (1Pe 1:13-2:5, “Crave Pure Spiritual Milk,” by S.Dylan Burke).

As we know well, Peter was an uneducated fisherman and a disciple of Jesus. We all know that he boasted he could lay down his life for Jesus, but on the night of Jesus' arrest and trial, Peter caved in to fear and denied even knowing Jesus three times. That Peter is quite different from the Peter who wrote this letter. He was completely changed by the powerful word of God and work of the Holy Spirit.

Today's message is a part of our Spiritual Gifts series we are going through this year. In this passage, Apostle Peter has a few things to say, especially in verses 10 and 11, about our spiritual gifts as Christians. After reading the letter a few times, I found it helpful to review a few key points of the letter before we dive into chapter 4. May God speak to us through his word.

First, let's review a few things Peter says about our identity as Christians. How does Peter address his Christian audience? He says they are “elect exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1). This means that the Christians had been scattered all over the place, due to persecutions. Christians are persecuted by the world. Peter mentions this several times in this letter. Why are Christians persecuted? Verses 3-4 in today's passage give one of the reasons: Christians don't indulge in an immoral, party lifestyle. And when Christians don't participate in drunkenness and immorality, they are insulted and regarded as strange people, who are no fun. Christians are persecuted because they pursue a holy life in Jesus Christ.

Peter also says that Christians have been born again into a living hope in Jesus Christ (1:3-4). Christians are new creations in Christ, the old has gone, the new has come. Yesterday, we witnessed the baptisms of five of our church children ages 11-14. They committed themselves at a young age to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. May God bless their pledges and appeals to God for a good conscience (3:21). Have you been born again? Have you pledged your life to God through Jesus Christ? Hopefully, that is why we worship, and pray, and read the Bible, and teach the Bible, and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

Though we have not seen Jesus physically, we believe in him and love him, and we rejoice with joy (1:8). Peter also says that we Christians are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God’s people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy” (2:9-10).

Peter closes his letter saying, “Peace to all of you who are in Christ” (5:14). Christians are those who are in Christ. Apostle Paul used this expression many times in his letters. In Adam, we are all sinners. But through faith in Jesus, we repented of our lives of sin, and entered into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have the assurance of salvation, the forgiveness of all our sins, and the promise of eternal life. In Christ, we have meaning and purpose to live in, through and for Christ. This is the identity of every Christian.

Second, let’s review our call as Christians to suffer for Christ. Suffering is a major theme in this letter. We don’t like the word “suffering.” Who does? Does anyone want to sign up for suffering? But Apostle Peter makes it clear in this letter that we all must choose our suffering. We can either suffer for sin or for righteousness. He says in 4:14-16, “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” Suffering for sin leaves many regrets and shame. But suffering for Christ is an honor and glory. Apostle Paul says suffering produces endurance, character and hope (Ro 5:3-4).

Peter talks about the kinds of sufferings we can expect as Christians. We are grieved by various trials (1:6). We are spoken against as evildoers (2:12). We are called to follow in the steps of Christ, who suffered for us, as an example (2:21). We are blessed to suffer for righteousness’ sake (3:14). We are slandered and reviled for good behavior in Christ (3:16). Fiery trials come to us to test us (4:12). We share Christ’s sufferings (4:13). We

are insulted for the name of Christ (4:14). We experience the same kinds of sufferings as fellow Christians throughout the world (5:9). Yet Peter says that in all these sufferings for Christ there is great rejoicing, glory and blessing. And he promises in 5:10, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Peter knows. He saw it in Christ, and he experienced it in Christ.

Now that we have reviewed our identity in Christ and our call to suffer for Christ, let’s look at chapter 4 verses 7-11 more carefully.

Peter says in verse 7, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” It’s been almost 2000 years since Peter wrote these words: “The end of all things is at hand.” Yet it is still true. The end of all things is at hand. Moreover, the end of our lives is very near. I’m now 60 years old. But somehow I live in the delusion that I have a lot of time left. Yet tomorrow is not promised to me or to you. We fool ourselves thinking, “I’ll do it tomorrow.” There is a saying, “Live each day as if it is your last one.” That seems to agree with Peter’s words: “be self-controlled and sober-minded.” And he admonishes that we keep a spirit of prayer.

Now look at verse 8. “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” Peter repeats this command to “love one another.” He got this command from Jesus. Jesus called it “a new command.” Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35). Peter says, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly...” Peter repeated and emphasized this because he got this command from Jesus. Jesus commands us to love one another. This is not optional for Christians. It means it is not natural or easy to do so. It requires much effort, intentionality, prayer, and spiritual struggle. Naturally, we are proud, indifferent, selfish, and self-centered. Naturally, we judge, argue and get mad at others. But what does love do? Peter adds, “since love covers a multitude of sins.” Love covers sin. Judges point out sins. Hypocrites expose others’ sins, while covering up, minimizing, and hiding their own sins. We all do it. Peter is telling us to stop exposing and pointing out others’ sins, and to cover them with the grace of Jesus Christ. May God help us to do so more and more, following in Jesus’ steps.

Now look at verse 9. “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” The Greek word for hospitality here is “love the stranger or foreigner.” The NLT Bible translates this sentence, “Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.” Peter says we are to show hospitality to one another; he is talking about believers here.

We are to treat our fellow Christians like family. Many of our church members open their homes when we have visitors to Chicago. It's a beautiful thing. But it doesn't mean much if we grumble in the process. "Without grumbling" means to do it joyfully.

Now look at our key verse, 10. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace..." All Christians have received the gift of salvation and the indwelling Holy Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ. In addition, all Christians have received at least one spiritual gift from God. These gifts are not like chocolate that we simply consume. These gifts are blessings intended to serve others. Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another..." Our gifts are given to serve others with them. We just talked about love and hospitality in verses 8 and 9. These are gifts from God that we use to serve one another. Because they are gifts, which we did not earn, we thank God for them. And we thank God for the privilege to use them to serve others. The gift of love. The gift of hospitality. We use these gifts to serve others in the name of Jesus, and without grumbling, or without thinking I should get something in return.

Peter says, "as good stewards of God's varied grace." A steward is someone who manages something entrusted to him or her. A good steward manages well what has been given to them. They don't ignore what has been given them, or abuse it, or misuse it, or neglect it, like putting it on a shelf. Jesus taught many parables that teach us to be good stewards of what has been entrusted to us, such as the Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:11-27), the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30), and the Parable of the Unworthy Servant (Lk 17:7-10), and many more. We've all been given one life. How are we using it, investing it, or spending it, to serve others for the sake of God's kingdom?

C.T. Studd was born in the United Kingdom in 1860 into a family of wealth and privilege. He served the Lord in China, India and Africa. He died at age 70 in Congo, Africa. He wrote a famous poem titled, "Only One Life, 'Twill Soon Be Past." The poem has a repeated refrain: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Another famous missionary, Jim Elliott, was martyred along with four other men while doing mission work in South America. Their martyrdom inspired many to volunteer for Christian missions. Jim Elliott is famous for his quote, "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose." These men were not fools. For they gave their lives for the imperishable kingdom of Christ.

Peter says that God's grace is varied. We all have different gifts. Actually we are all very different, even though we are all the same as human beings. But each person's character and gifts are different. This is why we need each other. This is also why we can appreciate and respect one another.

Now look at verse 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."

Peter mentions two categories of spiritual gifts here: speaking and serving. Speaking gifts including preaching, teaching, and encouraging. How should we speak to others? The Bible tells us to use our words not to judge or criticize and grumble or complain. Rather, Peter says here to speak "as one who speaks oracles of God." The NIV Bible translates this: "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God." The NLT says, "...speak as though God himself were speaking through you." A good way to do this is just to quote the Bible, graciously, not to smash others, but with gentleness and respect. This takes humility. It is easier to speak from common sense or what is popular. This is where careful, prayerful Bible study pays off. God's word is living and active (Heb 4:12). Peter says it is "living and abiding" (1Pe 1:23). Since God's word is alive and powerful, it is wise to meditate on it, memorize it, and speak it often.

The other category of gifts here is serving. Actually all the spiritual gifts are serving gifts, since we are to use them to serve one another. And we are to serve not with our own strength, but by the strength that God supplies. There are two good reasons for this. For one, our strength is limited and easily runs out and we get exhausted. When we are exhausted, we quickly complain. So, we need the strength that God supplies. The other reason is that when we depend on our own strength we become proud and boastful. If God supplies the strength then we can only thank and praise God.

This is Peter's conclusion: "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." To God be the glory. This should be the aim of our lives. This is why we are alive. This is where our joy comes from. Only God has the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Through this overview of 1 Peter, we were reminded of our identity in Christ and our call to suffer for Christ as our joy and glory. We were exhorted to love one another earnestly, and to be hospitable without grumbling. Especially, we were encouraged by Apostle Peter to use our gifts and our lives to serve one another in Christ. This includes speaking God's words and serving with the strength that God supplies. In all this, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. May God help us all to use the gifts we have received to serve one another for God's glory in the name of Jesus Christ.