

*There is an old fable about a time when the devil was training three apprentice demons, and the devil asked them about their plans to tempt people and to lead them astray.*

*The first demon said, “I will tell them there is no God.” The devil replied, “That will fool some, but not many, for people know there’s a God; even though, they may not know Him.”*

*The second demon said, “I will tell them there is no hell.” The devil replied, “You will surely deceive some that way, but still not enough.”*

*Then third demon said, “I will tell them there is no hurry” and with that answer, the devil responded with excitement, “Go forth, and you will ruin them by the thousands.”*

Sadly, many people think they have plenty of time – plenty of time to live their lives in this world – but what if you were told you didn’t. What if you were told your time was coming to an end. **Would that make a difference in your life? Would it change your priorities? Would knowing the end was approaching impact how you treat other people?**

That’s what we are going to explore this morning – what are we to do as believers knowing that life in this world is short. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 Peter 4:7**. Peter says,

**The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.**

Peter begins this verse with the phrase **“the end of all things is near”** which serves as a really good, thought-provoking springboard for our passage, and I think there might be a couple of ways to look at that phrase.

If you recall from last week, Peter had just mentioned in **verse 5** of this chapter that Jesus was ready to judge the living and the dead, and Peter, like many others in his day, believed that the Second Coming of Christ was quickly approaching. Jesus had been crucified and died, He was buried, and on the third day, He rose from the dead – all the essential activities of Jesus had been fulfilled as promised – so, from their vantage point, all that was left, was for Him to return. That’s what they thought – Jesus is going to show up at any time to usher in His earthly kingdom.

Now, some 2000 years have since passed, but that phrase “**the end of all things is near**” still rings true for believers today. We have been making our way through the book of Revelation on Wednesday nights, and I am strongly convinced that the Rapture of the church could occur at any time – where true followers of Christ, the church, is taken out of this world. From my understanding of end time events, the Rapture is the next event on God’s calendar, which then triggers the seven-year Tribulation period of God’s judgment on those who are left behind, and immediately following the Tribulation period – Jesus returns to set up His earthly kingdom. The Rapture could happen at any moment, so in that respect, we could accurately say “**the end of all things is near**” for the church.

Now, I also think we can look at that phrase, not only from a church perspective but from an individual perspective, as Peter could just as well be saying that as far as they were personally concerned, **the end of all things is near**. In other words, personally, your time here on this earth is limited, and sooner or later, once God has determined your time here is fulfilled, each one of us will come to the end of this life. Life is fleeting at best, and **the end of all things** may be nearer than you would like to think, so in light of this truth – **should that impact in your life?** If you really believe your time is limited on this side of heaven, and the end is approaching for you, **would you do anything different?**

As many of you know, before I became your pastor, I volunteered as a chaplain for eight years in several nursing homes, and in that capacity as a chaplain, there were several times where I was honored to minister to people who had come to the end of their lives, and if they were able to engage in a conversation with me, **what do you think they wanted to talk about? Do you think it was politics? How about the complexities of life? Do you think they wanted to chat about their busy schedules, the rise and fall of the stock market, or crazy conspiracy theories? What do you think they wanted to talk about?**

In the end, it got simple for people, and they talked about those things that really mattered. They talked about the loved ones they would be leaving behind, they wondered if their lives had really mattered, and sometimes they talked about their regrets – typically regrets related to their relationships – regrets of leaving some things undone and unfinished and regrets of leaving some words unsaid that should have been said.

In our passage this morning, in a sense, Peter is bringing us to that same point of considering what really matters in the end – what’s really important, what are the priorities from God’s point of view, and how should we live as our time in this world draws to an end.

Look back at **verse 7**. Peter, says **the end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer**. In other words, as our time draws near, our first priority is our relationship with God, more specifically our communication with Him. **Why would prayer be our first priority?** Because prayer reflects our dependence upon God – we desperately need Him, and in those critical times, in the end, we should be driven to God in prayer.

Peter tells us that, for the **purpose of prayer**, we are to be of **sound judgment** and a **sober spirit** – both of which refer to our state of mind. To be of **sound judgment** means to be clear-headed, to use good judgment, to view things from a sound biblical perspective, and to have a **sober spirit** suggests we are to be focused and alert, and when these are put together, they help us to see our circumstances from God’s point of view and create a confidence and a calmness that we can experience in prayer instead of freaking out and coming apart at the seams when tragedy strikes or when the evening news is packed with nothing but bad news.

*Charles Swindoll commented on this, and he tells the following story. It happened in 1968, on an airplane headed for New York – a routine and normally boring flight, but this time it proved otherwise. As the plane was on its descent pattern, the pilot realized that the landing gear was not engaging. He messed around with the controls, trying again and again to get the gear to lock into place ... without success. He then asked ground control for instruction. As the plane circled the landing field, the emergency crew coated the runway with foam as fire trucks and other emergency vehicles moved into position.*

*Meanwhile, the passengers were told of each maneuver in that calm, unemotional voice pilots do so well. Flight attendants glided about the cabin with an air of cool reserve. Passengers were told to place their heads between their knees and grab their ankles just before impact. There were tears and a few cries of despair. It was one of those “I can’t believe this is happening to me” experiences.*

*Then, with the landing only minutes away, the pilot suddenly announced over the intercom: “We are beginning our final descent. At this moment, in accordance with International Aviation Codes established at Geneva, it is my obligation to inform you that if you believe in God, you should commence prayer.” Scout’s honor – that’s exactly what he said!*

*I’m happy to report that the belly landing occurred without a hitch. No one was injured and, aside from some extensive damage to the plane, the airline hardly remembered the incident. In fact, a relative of one passenger called the airline the*

*very next day and asked about that prayer rule the pilot quoted. The answer was a cool, reserved, “No comment.”*

*Swindoll continues and says, “When something alarms you, pray. When current events confuse you, pray. If the world looks like it’s spinning out of control, pray. Prayer sharpens our awareness so that we are able to be more discerning. It gives us genuine hope and confidence in God in the midst of our confusion. When you’re panicking, you’re not praying. When you’re reacting, you’re not trusting in your sovereign God.”*

So, as **the end of all things is near**, for the **purpose of prayer**, don’t forget Who you are talking to – Who you depend upon. He is the Lord God Almighty, the One who spoke the universe into existence, the only One truly in control, and crazy enough, He desires to hear your voice. And because God is who He is, and we know Him, we can confidently and calmly come to our Heavenly Father as a child to talk about those things that really matter in the end.

Then Peter gives us a second priority in **verse 8**.

**Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.**

As **the end of all things is near**, and as we consider what really matters, Peter tells us to focus on our relationships – to love and forgive one another. When it comes to love, he says we are to love each other fervently. That word “**fervent**” is an interesting word and it means to extend, to strain, or to stretch out, and it speaks of determination, like that of an athlete stretching to the limit to reach the goal line in a football game. As our time draws near, Peter is telling us to be intentional – to strain and stretch out our love to others, and not just those who are easy to love, but we are to love the unlovable and those who have wronged us – those we might struggle to forgive. Peter says that our love is to be forgiving, in that it **covers a multitude of sins**. That’s a quote from **Proverbs 10:12**, and let me explain what Peter is saying by using that quote.

Love covers sin. That’s what it does, it forgives. That’s its nature, and every time someone wrongs us, we essentially have two choices. In love, we can address it – I’m not saying to ignore it or to condone it, but address it and forgive it, or we can drag that person through the mud and stir up all kinds of trouble. The kind of love Peter is describing chooses to forgive and cover sin, and refuses to wash dirty laundry in public. Love handles sin privately; it goes out of its way to treat it

discreetly, which is the exact opposite of what hatred does to humiliate and tear down someone in public. Only as a last resort, is sin to be addressed publicly – in a church setting, and even in that setting, it has to be done in love. Nothing turns unbelievers off of Christ more quickly than watching those who say they follow Christ fighting with each other rather than loving and forgiving one another.

In **verse 9**, Peter gives us a practical application of loving one another with our resources. He says,

**Be hospitable to one another without complaint.**

Someone said, *“I think most of us are fine with the idea of hospitality, so long as we get to define what that looks like.”*

Hospitality is simply loving strangers in a practical way, and in Peter’s day, that was a common courtesy. In New Testament times, hospitality was an important thing, because there were few inns, and the inns that were present were often used for prostitution or they were too expensive. So, in the early church, hospitality was vital for traveling ministers and evangelists to find a temporary place to stay, and in light of the persecution against the church at that time, believers who were fleeing from one area to another, also needed a place to stay where they could be assisted and encouraged. So, hospitality was crucial – inviting fellow believers who were truly in need into your home was necessary, and it was a practical expression of loving one another fervently.

Then Peter tacks on the words, **“without complaint”** which kind of raises the bar a little bit. We know that being hospitable can cost money. It takes time. It can be inconvenient, and it can be very frustrating if visitors overstay their welcome or abuse your kindness, but Peter urges believers to have a positive attitude when using one’s resources to demonstrate love for one another.

Peter continues and explains that within the church, as our time draws near, our love for one another is also to be expressed in the use of our spiritual gifts. Beginning with **verse 10**, he says,

**<sup>10</sup> As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup> Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

There are a couple of truths we learn from **verse 10**. We are told that every single believer in every single church has received a spiritual gift from God – literally it is a gift of grace, and this spiritual gift may not be the same that others have – for there are a variety of gifts, or gifts of many colors, that’s what **manifold** means, and these spiritual gifts are used to lovingly serve others for the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul essentially said the same thing when he talked about spiritual gifts in **1 Corinthians 12**. He said beginning with **verse 4**,

***<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup>And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup>But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***

So, every believer in every church has a spiritual gift – there are a variety of these gifts, and they are all given by God for the purpose of loving and serving one another as our time draws near.

Now in **verse 11**, Peter appears to separate these gifts into two broad categories – the speaking gifts and the serving gifts. The speaking gifts are those gifts which are typically seen *up front* like preaching and teaching, leading a Sunday School class or a small group study where the Word of God is shared, whereas the serving gifts are generally done *behind the scenes*, with God’s strength, and they can be almost any type of service or support that helps others. We are to use the spiritual gifts that God has given to us – for God would not give us spiritual gifts if He did not want us them.

Since we are on this topic, there are a couple of things I want to say about spiritual gifts. First, don’t assume that your spiritual gift somehow locks you into a certain role or activity. I am your pastor and I preach and I teach, but my spiritual gift is service. Serving comes naturally to me, it’s what motivates me, but that doesn’t mean I cannot preach and teach – I just preach and teach out of a motivation to feed you with God’s Word because that is how I was gifted by God. Hopefully, that makes sense.

And please, don’t make the mistake of assuming that those gifts done *up front* are more important and prestigious than those done *behind the scenes*. Yes, the roles may be different, but these gifts of grace are not given to us to boost our egos or to serve our own personal interests. Gifts are given to individuals who will faithfully use them for the benefit of others. As believers, we are to be faithful with what

God has given us – no matter what it is, and someday you and I will stand before the Lord and He will ask, **“What did you do with what I gave you?”** You won’t be quizzed about anyone else, but you will have to give an account of your stewardship.

One more thing about spiritual gifts. Don’t make the mistake waiting to learn what your spiritual gift is before you get busy. Instead, I urge you to do the exact opposite. Just get busy and your spiritual gift will be revealed to you.

*One day a couple of church members were out distributing loaves of bread in a low-income housing complex. They came to an apartment where they heard arguing through the door, but they decided to knock anyway. A man opened the door and asked what they wanted. One of the visitors said, “We don't want anything. **We just wondered if you know anyone who could use some loaves of bread?**”*

*“**Why are you doing that?**” the man asked.*

*“Just to let people know that God loves them.”*

*“**What did you just say?**” the man asked.*

*“We're just handing out loaves of bread to let people know that God loves them.”*

*The man stared and said, “I can't believe this. We just buried our three-week-old son yesterday, and now here you are at our door.”*

*The visitors offered to pray with them, and the couple accepted their offer. As they were leaving, and the door was being closed, they overheard the husband say to his wife, “See, honey, I told you God cares. We thought he wasn't paying attention to us, but he sent those people here to make sure we knew.”*

Too many people make excuses as to why they can't serve. **Can you bake brownies? Can you cut someone's grass? Can you call people and give them an encouraging word? Can you do housework? Can you do handy work? Can you donate anything? Can you let someone know you are thinking about them? Can you take an interest in someone?**

Here’s my point – as **the end of all things is near**, we need to focus on those things that really matter from God’s point of view – that being our relationship

with Him and our need to love, and forgive and serve one another. That's what matters.

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude – Max Anders, David Walls  
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible – David Brown, A.R. Fausset, Bobby Jamieson  
James, 1, 2 Peter & Jude, The Randall House Bible Commentary – Robert E. Picirilli & Paul V. Harrison  
Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter – R. E. Picirilli  
Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter – Charles R. Swindoll  
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe  
Faithlife Study Bible - Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D.  
Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude – Albert Barnes  
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck  
Enduring Word – David Guzik