

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Between Two Worlds

PART

15

TITLE

Exiled Together

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 4:7-11



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If you want to turn with me to 1 Peter 4. We're in a series through the book, and we have to be up to verse seven. And so I'd love for you to turn there with me. Providence family, it's so good to see you, see your face, and to sing with you. And if you're a guest here with us, we're really honored that you have come. As a church family, we believe that the Bible tells us that as a church, every church is called to introduce people to Christ and to grow them up to love and worship Him.

And here at Providence, there's ways to go about doing that. In fact, there's a Pathway. It's what we call it, it's the Pathway. It's where we want to help you to connect with Christ and to connect with each other. We want to help you to grow in truth and knowledge of the truth and in love towards people. We want to help you to identify your gifts so that you can serve people within the church, as well as those who are out. And then we want to equip you. We want to equip you to be able to tell the greatest news in all the world, and that is that Jesus Christ died for our sin to take it away. And He rose from the dead in order to give us eternal life. And that you and I would be equipped to take that news, the greatest news in the whole world, equipped to take it to the whole world. That's really who we are as a church family. And so if you're a guest with us, we would love for you to be a part. So let me pray for us.

Father in heaven, we come before you now, our maker and sustainer, the lover of our souls. You're the shepherd over us, the caretaker of us. You are the author of life, and you're the author of truth. We take our place at your feet asking that you would do what we can't do. We thank you for the Bible. Without an outpouring of your spirit, we won't be able to understand it. Without an outpouring of your spirit, our hearts will not be inclined to lean toward it, it will be inclined to lead away from it. Without an outpouring of your spirit, we will not have the courage to apply it or the interest to try.

And so I ask that you would pour out your Spirit, that as we read it, that you would peak our curiosity. I ask, Father, for those who were living isolated lives, susceptible, that you would convince them this morning of the need for people in their life and they could love and who would love them. I ask, God, that you would give us grace, you would speak through weakness. As we walk out of this place, that we would not be convinced that we heard a human being speak, that we would be convinced that you are powerful, that you are good, and that you are right, that you were true, that you are worthy of belief. You're worthy of adoration and worship.

God, I pray that every part of what we talk about, every application would be motivated, that you would motivate our heart to see how trustworthy you are, that we would believe you and apply it to our life with courage. We thank you, God, that you have the power to be able to look into our heart to be able to see what we need and to rightly apply your Word to each person in a way that we would require. And so God, would you be glorified? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, 1 Peter was written by Peter. Peter was writing to Christians. This is really important that you understand this. If you are here searching, “What is the gospel and who is Jesus, and what has He done?” and you’re looking for 1 Peter to have a section of the book that is written specifically to you, those of you who have never trusted Christ yet, you’re not going to find one in the book. It’s written to Christians. And yet, it’s written to humanity so that people would look in particular in a passage like this that’s not written directly to unbelievers, but that people would recognize the glory of Christ, that they would see in it just the winsomeness and the wisdom of God in ordering a life that is no bull, excellent, true, praiseworthy.

And so, if you don’t know Christ, I encourage you to ask God, “If you’re real, would you convince my heart of such?” But 1 Peter is written to Christians and Christians who were being persecuted. They’re vulnerable people. Their persecution is because of their faith. The world hates Jesus. And in this setting in Rome, the Roman Empire, they made it a point to eliminate, imprison, kill, revile people who willingly associated with Jesus Christ. And Peter knew that when times get tough, this is really important, when times get tough in the world, he knew that our human instinct is to draw in, it’s to get tight. And when we draw in and we get tight, we tend to isolate ourselves from other people. And when we isolate ourselves from other people, we become more susceptible to temptation and even denial of the very things that we cherish or say that we cherish.

This is precisely what led and contributed to Peter’s worst day. This worst day began on a Thursday. Peter, as well as the other disciples, were meeting with Jesus in the Upper Room. He had finished washing their feet. He had instituted the Lord’s Supper. He had told them what was going to take place. And then He looked at Peter and He said, “Peter, I want you to know something. Satan has asked me for you. But I’ve prayed for you that you would endure.” Peter says, “I promise you, wherever you go, I’ll go. You can count on me.” And Jesus said, “Peter, before the rooster crows, you will have denied me three times.” Peter said, “Look, that’s not going to happen. Between you and me, it wouldn’t surprise me at all if the rest of these people deny you, but you can count on me.”

It’s interesting that in Luke’s gospel and in the 22nd chapter, Jesus actually says to him, adds this, He says, “Look, and Peter, this is going to happen. But when you return, when you repent, you come back, I’m going to give you a purpose, a life mission. And that is I want you to strengthen your brothers and sisters in Christ so that they will not replicate your greatest err.” Later that night, the Bible tells us that Jesus had gone out to a garden. He had actually taken Peter even further than some of the others, three of them a little further. He goes in, and He’s praying. He keeps going back to the disciples, urging them to pray, and yet, Peter was asleep. He kept waking him up.

The sequence of Jesus praying and Peter sleeping was interrupted when Jesus looked and there He saw His betrayer, Judas, at the front of what looked like a snake, a fire that was weeding through the trees, an army, a band of soldiers, people who were coming in order to arrest Him. They bound Him. And suddenly it says that these disciples, that they all scattered. They didn’t scatter together, they scattered in isolation. And suddenly they were more susceptible. Peter had to see what was going to happen to Jesus. He was so intrigued

with Him. He wanted to be faithful and loyal. He had just said hours before then, “Even if they kill you all, I’m willing to die with you.” But now when it came and there was no accountability, there was no strength in numbers in his life, he wanted to be close to see what was going to happen but far enough away to avoid harm.

There Jesus was on trial. He’s being spat upon. He’s being beaten. He’s being accused and reviled. While that’s happening, Peter is warming himself and suddenly someone says, “You’re one of His friends. I know you are.” Peter says, “No, it’s not. It’s not me.” He denies Jesus the first time. Someone else says, “No, wait a minute, you’re one of His disciples. I’ve seen you with Him. I know you’re one of His disciples.” He’s all alone, and he says, “No, no, you got the wrong guy.” He denies Him again.

The Bible says sometime later, it says that a third person, John’s gospel says a little girl, “You were one of His disciples.” And it says in Luke’s gospel, it says, “And with oaths and curses.” What that means is Peter said, “May God strike me dead if I knew that man, Jesus.” And suddenly, the rooster crows as Jesus promised. Luke’s gospel says something that the rest of them don’t. It doesn’t mean it’s wrong, it just means that Luke recognized that there was a significant event that took place. And it says while Jesus was literally being beaten and as a crown of thorns was being pressed over His head, He heard that rooster crow. He knew what Peter had done. And it says that He turned His face, and His eyes met Peter’s eyes. Peter became so overwhelmed with guilt and grief that he ran away. And then Jesus went to die.

And now 30 years later, Peter is writing, and he gets to this point of his letter and he says, “There’s some things that you can do and you need to do, even though you’re exiled, even though you’re in this world, you can’t live alone.” You can’t run alone. God did not create you to run alone. He did not recreate you in Christ to live into yourself. You need one another. You need to stick together for strength in your exile. He’s doing just what Jesus told him to do, he’s trying to strengthen his brothers and sisters to not replicate his err. And the question that our text today answers is, how do we help each other endure?

This is what he says starting in verse seven, “The end of all things is at hand, therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace. Whoever speaks is 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.”

Now, if you could imagine a bookshelf, and on that bookshelf, there are four books. On either side of those four books, there are these strong, immovable bookends that will not allow those books to fall. If you can imagine that, then you also can imagine and see within our text how Peter has structured. He gives four instructions, four specific things that we’re supposed to do. And those four specific things are not only held up but they’re resourced by two critical realities. Two bookends. The first bookend you see in verse seven. He

says, “The end of all things is at hand, therefore,” and then he gives us four things to do.

What he’s talking about here is urgency. One of the bookends that motivates these kinds of behaviors is a sense of urgency and readiness within our heart. At the end of the age, sometimes called the last days you read within the Bible, was a period of time that when it was written, the writers and authors, they didn’t know how long it was going to be. It was a period of time between Christ’s First Coming and His Second Coming. In Hebrews 9:26, it says that “He,” Jesus, “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin.” In other words, the end times began when Jesus left heaven, took on a body to die on a cross, to put away our sin.

The Bible says that this era, this age marked as the end, or the last, it culminates, it concludes when Jesus Christ is going to come again to judge the living and the dead. It’s been 2000 years, and so some people say, “The end of all things is at hand. Peter, must’ve got it wrong because it’s now been 2000 years.” What’s interesting is people today who say that were saying the exact same thing only 30 years after Jesus rose from the dead. We know that because in his very next letter in 2 Peter, this is what he says, he says, “Scoffers will come in the last days,” during that period between Christ’s First Coming and His Second Coming, “they will come in the last days and they’re going to say, ‘Where’s the promise of His coming?’ In other words, even Peter was being asked, “You keep talking about Jesus is going to come back again. Well, where is he? We don’t see Him.”

The same thing happens today. And so what Peter does to his first audience, and then to us, he says, “This is how you should not only think about this time gap, but this is also how you can respond to other people.” And he says, “Basically, you need to remember that God is not working off of your timetable but His.” He says, “Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is one day.” So in God’s time economy, if a thousand years is one day, then Jesus died and rose again, what? Two days ago. So it’s not been that long.

What’s interesting as you continue to read through the scriptures, and it’s in every single book, this cadence of, “He’s coming again. He’s coming again. He’s coming again.” It’s meant there to motivate purity and to motivate a sense of readiness. I mean, you do know, right, that there’s a significant difference in the way that you live the rest of your day if you wake up and you say, “It’s probably going to be today,” versus, “It’s probably not going to be today.”? There’s tremendous incentive towards purity, readiness, integrity, honesty, reconciliation with other people if you knew. Very few people, only those who are most brazen, would look at porn at three o’clock if they knew that Jesus was coming at five. And so he says, “Ready.” He’s only echoing Jesus, of course.

In Luke 12, Jesus said, “Be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that when they may open the door to him at once, when he comes and knocks.” He says, “You also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” I love what He does here because at the end, there will not be time to straighten up the house when He knocks. But He uses an example that we all understand. We invite someone over to the house, and suddenly time gets away from us. Food’s not ready.

The house is kind of a wreck, and you hear a knock, and you're like, "Don't open it yet." You scurry around the house in order to try to clean it up in order to give a good impression while they're out there waiting. Jesus says, "When I come, you will not have time to clean up your house or your heart."

You need to be ready. You need to be ready so that you can do the other bookend. So let's look at that, verse 11, on the other end. He says, "The end of all things is at hand, therefore," do four things, and then he says this, "in order that," this is why, this is the other bookend, "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." What he's talking about here is priority. The utmost priority, the most significant priority you could ever give your life to is Jesus and making Him known. One day, you are going to see Jesus face to face. And on that day, you will know without a shadow of a doubt that glorifying Him was the purpose of why you were on the earth. And so, he puts these bookends, urgency, priority, urgency, priority.

Now, if the Bible just left some blanks and it said, "You fill it in." What do you think would be four instructions that you would call people to do if you had just said, "Look, the end of all things is at hand, and the greatest thing you can give yourself to is this. And if you do these four things, you will not only be ready for that day, but you will glorify Jesus with your life." What would you instruct people to do? It's really fascinating what he does. He goes through four. This is him. You, ready? He's going to say, "Pray. Love, ask somebody over for dinner, serve."

Now for people who like big, fast, and famous, these sure seem small, slow, and obscure. And yet, what you find is in God's economy, He's not looking for behaviors that make you famous, He's making for behaviors to make Him famous. So the first thing he tells us to do is to protect your prayers, protect your prayers. Many of us today, even in the room, we fail to see prayer as something that's in need of our protection. But that's not how Peter saw things, which is why in verse seven, the first thing he says is, "Be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." You see, when Jesus died on the cross, there was a temple at the time. The temple had a huge curtain that separated the holy of holy place to the holy place where other people could come. Only the chief priest, the high priest could pass, and normally only one time. It was separated.

People and God were separated. Sinful people, holy God. But notice, if you remember, what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:18, he says, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous," Why? "To bring us to God." And so when Jesus died on the cross, once He gave up His Spirit, the Bible says that that curtain was torn from top to bottom. The significance of that is that for everyone who would believe in Jesus Christ is that we would no longer need another human priest, that we would have direct access to God to be able to go and receive help and care and grace and forgiveness in our time of need. Hebrews 10 says, "Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus and since we have a great priest over the whole house of God." You still need a priest, it just doesn't have to be one of us. You have one in Christ. Because of that, he says, "Let us draw near." What Peter says is this, "Protect this."

Now, the question you should ask yourself is this, “Well, what could threaten this?” And Peter says, “Let me tell you what you need to protect it from. You.” Satan can’t threaten your prayer life. The world cannot threaten your prayer life. The government cannot threaten your prayer life. The education system or virus or snakes or bears or wolves and everything else running around Raleigh cannot threaten your prayer life. But you can threaten your prayer life.”

And so what does he say? He says, “You better be careful.” How do we be careful? How should we be careful? He says two things, “Be self-controlled.” Self-controlled is this, it’s controlling urgent desires for important desires. Some of us, we want to be healthy. We want to lose some weight. That’s an important desire. We also want to eat a whole sleeve of Oreos today. That’s an urgent desire, right? Self-control is somebody that says, “For the important things, I’m going to forsake the impulse of my flesh for urgent things.” And then he says, “Be sober-minded,” opposite of drunk-minded. This is what he means, whatever it is that keeps you from praying is your strong drink. You wake up in the morning, you can pray or you can give yourself to Facebook or some other social media. Triviality, prayer, triviality, prayer. And when you pick one over prayer, Peter says, “Your mind is drunk.”

We give ourselves over to sensuality. I hear this all the time, I’m really struggling with pornography. I’m really struggling with what I’m seeing with my eyes. I’m also really struggling with my prayer. I feel like when I pray, it seems like there’s this iron dome with my prayers. I don’t enjoy it.” It’s because you’re defiled. You can be forgiven, you can be purified, but for the sake of your prayers, you can’t be drunk on sensuality. Productivity. Some of us are like, “You know what? I know the Bible says, ‘Apart from me, you can do nothing,’ but there’s some things that I think we can do. And if I could do those things, then I could pray more effectively.” So we have this idol or strong drink, it’s called productivity. If you wake up and you say, “I could pray right now, or I could wipe these things off of my list,” and you pick the list, Peter says it’s because your mind is impaired.

For the sake of your prayers, protect it. Think of your prayers like a city, a precious city that you need to build walls around, to protect your prayer, to protect your desire to pray, to protect answered prayer, to protect your enjoyment of coming to Him and not feeling like I have to literally wipe out a whole week full of activity of triviality and sensuality and sin so that I could actually talk to Him, but I can immediately run right to Him and say, “Hey, friend, how are you doing? This is what’s going on in my life.”

You see, prayer is the primary sign of a relationship with God, not sitting in these chairs. You see this ring? This ring says I’m married, it doesn’t say happily married. What says I’m happily married? You watch how I talk to her, love her, prioritize her. So it is with prayer. You say, “I’m a Christian, I was baptized all those times ago. I never want to talk to Him,” you got a ring, but you got no relationship.

Protect those prayers. And because this is the case, prayer is also the primary area of attack in our relationship with God. You see, Satan, he aims to keep us drunk in our mind, keeping us distracted and defiled so that we won’t pray. I hope you know this, Satan has absolutely no fear of a busy church, an organized church,

a gifted church, a rich church, a comfortable church, a Bible-studying church, only a praying church. He does not shake when he shows up at the battlefield and he sees the army that's going to raid against him, and they're unarmed with the only divinely fashioned weapon against him, which is why Peter says, "Look, put on the whole armor of God." I'm sorry, this is Paul. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert."

I said this the last few services, and each time I feel like it doesn't go as well as I hope. If I were today to stand before God, and if you are to ask me, "What's one area of your leadership over Providence that you would be ashamed of when you stood before Him?" There's only a couple that immediately come to my mind, but one of them is this, is my inability to convince us as a church family that when we call a prayer and worship night, that we are utterly convinced that we must come and pray. As a church, our go-to is to throw a dollar at it instead of a prayer, a gift instead of a prayer. I believe we leave so much power on the table, and Satan rarely feels fear because we as a people are not protecting our prayer.

I know that some of you, you look at this and you go, "That's terrible. I feel just convicted and horrible now." I felt horrible all week. And so, I'm with you. And so instead of just simply saying, "Hey, feel guilty about this..." "Guilt is a horrible fuel. It can get you here, but it'll never keep you here. Let me encourage you to renew our commitment as a church family to protect and prioritize prayer. Don't you see, Providence? The time is too urgent and the mission is too important to leave this weapon, this power in the box.

The second thing he tells us to do is to love one another earnestly. Protect your prayers, and second, love one another earnestly. See this in verse eight. First of all, you see it back in chapter one, verse 22. Peter actually comes to us and he says, "Love one another earnestly." He waits a few chapters, and he says, "Above all things, keep on loving one another earnestly." Keep loving one another earnestly. The word earnest, it means reach. It means to stretch. The idea behind earnest or the word reach and stretch is that when you see somebody who has a need and you see where you're at, is instead of asking them to make the uncomfortable moves towards you, is that you willingly love them by making the uncomfortable moves towards them.

You know that you have loved somebody not when you feel warm and fuzzy after it, but when their need is met. That's what loving one another earnestly is all about. And isn't it amazing, nobody has ever reached like Jesus? He reached when He took on a body. He reached when He came to the earth. He reached when He chose a poor family. He reached towards us when there were sick people and nobody would touch, and He would reach out and touch them. He reached towards the disciples' feet to wash them. He reached toward us when He prayed for us the night before He was killed. He reached for us when He took our sin upon Himself. He reached when He died on that cross. He reached when He rose from the dead. And then He reached for each one of us when He sent somebody to tell us about Jesus.

He's just constantly reaching. And this who's constantly reaching, what did He tell us? He says, "Love one another as I have loved you, as I have reached for you. So you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another." I love how Peter, his buddy, Paul, partner in ministry, he wrote a lot of letters in the New Testament, and in one of them he says, "I want to give you an illustration that you're never going to forget because you do it every single day that talks about spiritual growth in your life." He says, "Every one of us, we wake up at the beginning of the day, we put on clothes. And then throughout the course of that day, those clothes get dirty. So what do we do? We take those clothes off." He goes, "Same as the Christian. All those former attitudes and aptitudes and patterns and habits and sinful desires, all those things that were a part of our first, our old way of living," he says, "you've got to take all that off."

He says, "But you don't want to walk around naked spiritually, so you got to put some clothes on." So he says, "Put on then compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other." Then notice what he says. Peter said, "Above all things, keep loving." Notice what Paul says, "Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Listen to what he's saying. You get dressed and you start putting on these characteristics. You need an overcoat, and love is the overcoat of the believer. Love is the coat that literally wraps around us, covering us upper neck all the way to the feet, and binds all of these Christian characteristics together so that they're unified and working in concert with one another.

You see, love is the mark of our distinction. Why is it so urgent? Why does he say, "Above all things.?" I think it's this one. Verse eight, he tells us, "because or since love covers a multitude of sins." Now he's not saying that if you love other people, God will forgive you of your sins. So your love is a wage that you pay to get into the family of God. No, he's writing Christians, who are already forgiven of their sin because they've already placed their faith in Jesus Christ. So what sins is he talking about here will be covered? Well, if you live any time in Christian community, someone's going to sin against you. They're going to talk bad. They're going to be rude. They're going to be irritable and sensitive. They're going to take your parking spot. So if you live in community with other people, you are going to be sinned against.

And so many people, and I think this is what Peter has in mind, he's saying, "Look, you are simply in a place that is too vulnerable to fragment and divide over sins that you commit against one another. And so instead, consider how Jesus has loved and reached and forgiven you, and then forgive and forgive again." So let me encourage you to be earnest. Let's be earnest in our love by forgiving one another. Is there anybody within our church family that your relationship is unreconciled, and the reason it is, is because you're simply unwilling to forgive? Peter says, "Love one another earnestly to cover over a whole mountain of sin."

The third thing he tells us to do is to show hospitality without grumbling. A love that's in the heart, it's got to come out in the hands. So he says, "Not only will love forgive, it'll do something else, it'll practice hospitality." Verse nine says, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." I just love what he does here. He says,

“Look, when we love, our lives and our homes and our church turns into a hospital. Isn’t that the basis of the word hospitality? Hospital. Sometimes we use the word hospitality, we think, “Oh, it’s the greeting ministry.” No, hospitality is the greeting ministry that recognizes that every single person who walks through the doors is in need of a hospital spiritually, is in need of encouragement and hope and a prayer and a hug. To show hospitality is to be a hospital to people.

Hospitality is not about impressing people with our things. We hear this thing, hospitality, sometimes we even say, “Hey, let’s do a thing on hospitality. And let’s really focus on things like, how do you set a table? Hospitality is not about impressing people with our stuff, it’s loving people with our stuff. And because of that, so many people are so confused that we think, “Until I have nice enough stuff, I can’t be hospitable.”

If you have a table and a sleeve of saltines, you can be hospitable. You don’t really even need a table and really only need one saltine. Hospitality looks like opening the door and greeting people in the room you don’t know, asking someone to lunch, always making enough food for and one, and looking around who could use this food. Who couldn’t use an hour of encouragement? Then he tells us, “Now when you do this, do this without grumbling.” I love this. He says, “Be hospitable without secretly wishing you didn’t have to be hospitable.” All of us know what this is like. We ask somebody over to the house, is like a month from now. And because it’s so long, we’ve not felt the sacrifice, we feel so hospitable. We feel so caring, so Christian, “I just asked somebody over to the house. What a noble thing I’ve done.”

But you don’t feel it until the night before, when you have no food, the house is a wreck, and you look at either yourself or somebody else in your home and say, “Why did you ask them to come over to our house tomorrow?” Jesus described the judgment of the righteous to the end this way, which is the reason why we do this without grumbling, He says, “‘I was hungry and you gave me food. And I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me in. And I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.’ And then the righteous will answer Him saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did to me.’”

This is why you do it, and you do it without grumbling. Because when you do it to another human being, you’re showing hospitality to Christ Himself. So let’s display the gospel of grace at our tables. Really, I can say our lobbies, our homes, our tables, whatever. But when people sit at our tables, those tables preach grace when they prop up weary arms, hungry hearts, thirsty souls. Hospitality.

The last to close, he tells us to steward your gifts to serve. When you were born again, when you trusted Christ, the Holy Spirit came and lived within your heart. The Bible says that He gave you a gift, at least one. Peter says, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” I love how God created the church. You have gifts that I don’t have. I may have a gift that you don’t have, which is why we need each other. When everybody is stewarding their gifts and using those gifts, the church has all

the gifts the church needs to do the mission that God has given that church to do. And that's why this, if this is your church experience, listening to the one person, then you're missing the vast majority of what God has for you.

Every member of ministry, everybody has a place, everybody has a role. He says that we're stewards. It's so important to understand this. If you have a gift and you know what that gift is, you're not an owner of that gift, it's been lent to you. You're a manager of that gift. That gift is Christ. And one day He's going to come back and He's going to evaluate your management of that gift. So each one of us should simply ask this question, "Had Jesus not gone away, if He was here and He was a member of Providence, and He had the gift that He gave to me, how would He use it here at Providence?" Or wherever your church family is, how would He use that gift?

However close you align yourself and the management of your gifts with how He would use that gift, the Bible calls that faithfulness. So he talks about two categories. He says, "All right, some of you, your gift has to do with your mouth." He says, "Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God." In other words, if your gift involves your mouth, then serve words that originate with God. This is so important. The world does not need more of us. Our thoughts, our philosophies, our words. So if you have a gift with your mouth, this is so true of me, the people of God simply don't need a whole lot more words that come from a human being. They need these words. In other words, if you have the gift that uses your mouth, encouragement, preaching, teaching, exhortation, here's your content, the oracles of God.

Some of us, the mouth is not our gift, it's our hands. And so he says, "And whoever serves is one who serves with the strength that God supplies." The preparing coffee, parking cars, holding babies, singing, playing, whatever it is, here's his point, it would be motivated by the return of Christ. And being motivated, we would serve Christ's people in Christ's strength with Christ's words for the glory of Christ. So let me encourage you to consider how we can utilize our gifts for His glory.

One question I always love to ask myself, and it's this, at any given time, if everyone at Providence used their gifts as efficiently and faithfully as I am using my gifts for Providence, how healthy would Providence be? If everyone was committed to a local church as you are, how healthy would that place be? I know this year has been so weird. It's so weird. There was a time at Providence to where the vast majority of people who call Providence their home had a place recognized where they were serving. And now that's not the case. As fall approaches, though, I want to encourage you as there is permission to do so in our own hearts, that Christ moves us. Let me just simply encourage you, would you consider returning to a place of service, to use your gift to serve somewhere?

There's all kinds of needs that we have, but here's just a few of them. We need people to serve with children and students. That's always the case, to teach our younger generations the amazing things about Christ. We're growing as a church family. In some areas way faster than we have places in Life Groups where they can be.

And so we need to begin more new adult Life Groups. Would you consider? Do you have a gift that could lead a group? Musicians, singers, and audio visual team. Let me just say, if you've not figured out your TV remote, this is not for you, this one here. Okay? We will train you. We will train you effectively. They don't let me touch it either, right? I get one button, it's this one here, it's on, off. That's what they give me, right? And I figured that one out with some training.

There's also, obviously, needs for hospitality, online chat team. What that is right now for those people who are here with us from home, they're listening, participating, we're trying to connect with them. They're saying, "Hey, who's there?" Is there anyone who has a need for prayer? We would love to meet you personally." Or just trying to reach out to them. Some of you may have a gift to be able to help with that.

Prayer, love, hospitality, and service. For people who love big, fast, and famous, this all may seem so small, slow, and obscure. And yet this is the Word of God, and I beg you to obey. Let me close before we sing with a word for those who are considering following Christ. I promise you, it will not be easy, but it will be worth it. By admitting your need for a savior and putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ because He died and rose for you, He will remove your guilt and your sin. He will forgive you. He will bring you into His family. He'll give you a mission worth your life. As a church family, we implore you, be reconciled to God, trust Him now. So let me pray.

Father in heaven, we love you, and we thank you for your kindness. It leads us to repentance, leads us to turn wherever it is that we need to turn. God, whatever you have laid on each person's heart, would you give us the courage by your Spirit to apply it to our life? And now we pray that as we sing to you, with the very words that we have read that in everything you may be glorified through Jesus Christ. We want to sing about that. And so we pray that not only the words of our mouth but also the meditations of our heart, that they would be pleasing to you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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