

If you knew the day of your death would anything change in your life? If you knew you had a short time to live, what changes would you make? What would you prioritize? 1 Pe. 4:7-10 Peter reminds us of the priorities that lead to the glory of God – one is vertical, the other horizontal. Since the end is near, pray purposefully and love sincerely. When we are fully conscious of God's purpose and faithful stewards of His grace, He is glorified and we are satisfied. When we keep the communication lines open with our Heavenly Father and fervently love those in our orbit we make God visible. Jesus said, "By this, all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," said it this way. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." 1 Jn. 4:10-12

There are three specific ways God's love is demonstrated here in 1 Pe. 4:10.

God's love is demonstrated by His unmerited favor. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is called grace. Grace is a gift. It cannot be earned. It cannot be deserved. There is nothing you can do persuade God to give it and there is nothing you can do to convince God to withdraw it.

Everyone who is born again has received God's grace. It is our greatest resource. It is a challenge to get a firm grip on grace because it is such an abstract concept. Some view grace as a hall pass - God gives us permission to do anything we want to do without any consequences. I call that "grace gone wild." Others see grace as gap insurance, God's standard is impossible so I do the best I can and God fills in the gap. Grace is not only God's undeserved kindness or unmerited favor but it is His divine enablement that saves us and trains us so that we can accomplish our mission on earth. By grace we are saved and by grace we serve.

There is only one kind of Christian; the messed up-falling down-failing constantly-full of pride-desperately-insecure but clinging tenaciously to God's amazing grace kind. The Bible presents us with a steady parade of characters who are a mess. Look at the disciples. How is Jesus going to save the world with these guys? We have nothing to offer, He has everything we need. The source of our strength is the grace of God. One of the biggest challenges for any follower of Christ is to accept their limitations and to learn to rely on God's strength. That's why it is crucial that we preach the gospel to ourselves first before we try to preach to others.

God's love is demonstrated by the gifts He gives. Don't you enjoy giving gifts to people you love? So does God. God's grace is a gift that He loves to give. The word translated gift is "charismata," lit. a manifestation of God's grace. A "gift" is a specific manifestation of God's grace. Grace is an abstract concept. You can't see it or touch it but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It is a gift from God and that equips us to serve others. When grace comes into your life it takes on a particular form, different from everyone else. It is like light. In Jr. High science, I learned that light is not white. Light is made up of all the colors of the rainbow. Holding a prism up to the light revealed an entire spectrum of color that can't be seen by the naked eye.

The Bible provides us with four lists of gifts – Ro. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4 and 1 Pe. 4:11. This one is the shortest description. These lists are suggestive not exhaustive.

The greatest joy in life is knowing that I am partnering with God and His people and making a contribution to His eternal plan. You've made the team. God is crazy about you. God loves you so much that He wants to be with you and He wants you to join Him in all the massive projects He has in this world. He could do it all by Himself but that's not His nature. He is our Father. A father loves having his kids with him when he is doing something. Dads, do nothing alone.

God's love is demonstrated by our faithful service to others. Everyone who has a gift of grace has a responsibility to steward that gift. Gifts are given for ministry. The word ministry just means service. You are a minister of the gospel. Our service to others proves our love.

How can I know where and how to serve? For starters, ask yourself three questions:

1. What motivates you? Some people are passionate about children. Others love to do strategic planning. I have always been interested in words. From my earliest years, I wanted to read aloud.
2. Is it affirmed by others? Your gifts were not given to you for you. They were given to you to serve others. So, they are the best judge of your gifts. Listen to those who know you well. Give them permission to honestly assess your gifts and abilities.
3. Is it fruitful? I use "fruit" rather than success because fruit is excess life. You can be a worldly success but be dying on the inside. What gives you life?

If you want to really dig down on your charismata, sign up for Repurposed, a six-week experience designed to help you find and follow your God-given purpose in Christ. IF:Gathering, 2/9-2/10, focuses on how to fan into flame the gift of God's grace that is in you.

All God's children got gifts. It doesn't matter how great or how small, when we play our part in God's symphony, the sweet music of the gospel goes forth to the glory of God.

East Texas Symphony. I love the symphony...for about ten minutes. My favorite part is the beginning. The tuning, the conductor appears, the stillness, the uplifted baton, the anticipation, and when that baton descends the heavens open. All of those various instruments playing their parts creating one magnificent sound. But on this particular night I did not hear the Lord in the whirlwind of the woodwinds, I did not see the Lord in the rumbling earthquake of the kettle drums, I saw him standing there in the back with this...(triangle), a humble dinger. (Triangulator? Percussive Triangulist? Dinger?) The man was focused on the score in front of him. While the violins were bowing and the oboes were blowing he simply waited, and waited, and waited. Finally, at just the right time he went...DING. I almost came out of my chair and shout, "You rock."

It occurred to me that Jesus is putting together a symphony orchestra that will play the music of the Gospel for all eternity, "so that God may be praised (glorified)." V. 11. And I have a part to play. My part may be no big deal to others but the one who wrote the music needs a dinger.

God doesn't ask us to save the world. It's not ours to save. God doesn't expect you to do it all. He just invites you to play the instrument He assigned you, to just ding. Everything God created has a purpose. And every creation of God is equipped for that purpose. God wouldn't put fish in the sea without gills or birds in the sky without wings. God wouldn't put you where you are to reflect who He is without giving you the equipment to do it. You may not be 1st chair but you have a part, and when you play your part I'm sure the One who died for you wants to come up out of His chair and say, "You rock," which being translated means, "Well done good and faithful servant."

Some day you will leave this earth. In the meantime, pray that God would use you to make beautiful music, to play in His symphony. Play your part and, for God's sake, just ding.

One of our Sons, Mike,
wanted to take private speech.
He's such a talker anyway,
I recommended hush instead.
But it was inexpensive
and he was interested,
so we let him.

The climax of the year's labor
was a two-hour assortment
of clowns, kings, rabbits,
and forgotten lines
known as the Speech Recital,
given to a devoted audience
of eager parents
and trapped friends.
Mike was a king.
He looked rather regal, too,
if I do say so myself.
At least until the queen,
a head taller and
twenty pounds heavier,
stood beside him
casting a pall on his regality.
He had only three lines to say—
nine months of speech,
three short lines.
And they came very late,
in the last moment
of the last act
of the very last play.
Anyway you looked at it,
he was not the star.
At least not to anyone except

a couple about halfway back
on the left side.

It was a long evening
and it was miserably hot.
But Mike waited
and he was ready
and he said his lines
and he said them well.
Not too soon, not too late,
not too loud, not too soft,
but just right, he said his lines.

I'm just a bit player, too,
not a star in any way.
But God gave me a line or so
in the pageant of life,
and when the curtain falls
and the drama ends,
and the stage is vacant at last,
I don't ask for a critics raves
or fame in any amount.
I only hope that he can say,
"He said his lines.
Not too soon, not too late,
not too loud, not too soft.
He said his lines
and he said them well."