

The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why. The “why,” in a broad sense is to glorify God. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Westminster Shorter Catechism says. Peter summarizes his ultimate motivation in writing this letter in 4:11. His call is to live as servants of God “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” We are on this earth to glorify God, to represent and reflect His nature and purpose in a hostile, corrosive, godless culture. But we have a problem.

It’s not natural. It’s hard to live IN the world and not be OF the world. Paul Tripp writes, “Doubt is natural. Fear is natural. Living on the basis of your collected experience is natural. Pushing the current catalog of ‘what-ifs’ through your mind before you go to sleep or when you wake up in the morning is natural...envying the life of someone else and wondering why it isn’t your life is natural. Wishing that you were more sovereign over people, situations and locations than you will ever be is natural.” In short, living for myself and my own glory is natural. Living for the glory of God? Not natural. It’s supernatural.

Jesus demonstrated how to live for the glory of God. He left His throne in heaven to come to earth to reveal what the Father is like. We have been called for that same purpose. So, Peter says in 4:1, “arm yourselves also with the same purpose...so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” 1 Pe. 4:1-2. So how do I live in the will of God for the glory of God? The answer is found in vv. 7-11.

God shows up when we are fully conscious of His purpose and faithful stewards of His love and grace. God is glorified when we live purposefully and love practically. So, I want to ask you three questions that will help you up your game when it comes to living for the glory of God.

Do you live with urgency?

At first blush, v. 7 is a little tough to explain. After all, it has been a couple thousand years since Peter wrote this and the end has not yet come. His “near” and my “near” are separated by a couple millennia. But it may help to remember that there is a difference between immediate and imminent. Peter is pointing out that there is nothing more to be done. The next event on God’s time line is the return of Christ when He will gather the church to Himself and reign supreme over all people for all time. This verse is an accurate summary of redemptive history. Creation, Fall, call of Abraham, the exodus, Israel, exile, return, birth, life, death, resurrection of the Messiah, ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church...what’s next? The return of Christ. In other words, it’s getting late so let’s get busy. Live with a sense of urgency.

Why does it seem like there is so little urgency in our churches today? One possible explanation is that the more comfortable our circumstances the less urgent our actions. This is often the reason family businesses go downhill after a couple of generations. The first generation worked hard to succeed. Each succeeding generation lives off the success of the previous one until there is no urgency left.

There is however one event that brings us face to face with the urgency of our calling. Nothing sharpens your prospective on life like death. That is why Solomon wrote:

“It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.” Ecc. 7:2

Nothing brings life into focus quite like the prospect of dying. I recently read a remark from Greg Laurie whose son was suddenly and tragically killed on a SoCal Freeway on his way to work at the church. Greg writes,

“In the aftermath of my son Christopher going to Heaven, I felt like ‘iron entered into my soul.’ By that I mean I felt a strong resolve to do things for God’s kingdom that I had never done before. And I wasn’t going to let people’s opinions, or fear, or even failure stop me. Christopher’s passing gave me a stronger view of eternity. I wanted to make every day count. And that determination is still in me today. I don’t want to squander my time. I am not interested in quiet retirement. I want to leverage my opportunities for God’s glory to reach as many people as I can, while I can. I am not going to waste my pain. I am going to use it as a tool, even as a weapon against the devil. I want to bring hope to other people through the message of the gospel.” Greg Laurie

In light of the lateness of the hour, we should invest the time we have in two specific ways:

Do you pray purposefully?

Since the end is near, pray purposefully...7b. We are to be “self-controlled and sober-minded” when it comes to prayer. Peter is saying, “It’s getting late so we need to remain fully conscious of God’s purpose and passionately prayerful about our part in it.” This is not the only time Peter addresses the subject of mental sobriety. (1:13, 5:8). He is pointing out the danger of mental intoxication. We can become mentally lazy by flooding our brain with unhealthy images or irrational fears. Then our prayers become ceremonial generalities driven by duty rather than passionate, pinpoint pleas motivated by love. Prayer is not a priority.

If you could learn one thing from Jesus in 2018 what would it be? How to love better? How to preach? No, think big. How about, “I would like to learn to cast out demons or heal the sick or raise the dead.” Jesus’ disciples had been with Him for nearly two years. They had front row seats to the miraculous. Do you know what they wanted to learn? They ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And so He does, “Our Father, who art in heaven...” He wasn’t teaching them to repeat this prayer as some sort of magical incantation. He was giving them a pattern for prayer. This can be a weekly rhythm or a daily rhythm.

Monday – Recognition – Our Father, Who art in heaven...

Tuesday – Adoration – Hallowed by Thy name...

Wednesday – Submission – Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done...

Thursday – Petition – Give us this day our daily bread...

Friday – Confession – Forgive us our debts/trespases/sins as we forgive others...

Saturday – Protection – Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil...

Sunday – Exaltation – For Thine is the kingdom, power, and glory forever.

When we pray purposefully we reflect the practice of Jesus...Mk. 1:35...Jesus exercises the most important word in any language...NO... Sober prayer reawakens our purpose. Because it's getting late we need to remain fully conscious of God's purpose. Our mission as a church is to awaken God's people to their God-given purpose in Christ. When we find and follow that purpose we can then learn to say a gracious "NO" so that we can pursue an enthusiastic "YES."

Do you love sincerely?

Since the end is near, love deeply and sincerely. This is a course we never graduate from. It is so important that Jesus said, "By THIS, all men will know you are my disciples – if you truly love one another." But do we? We want to be loved. We want to be made much of. So, we often seek horizontally the things that we can only find vertically. When I do that, I don't love people I use people in order to be loved. We get caught in this endless cycle of self-love. We catch ourselves being the star of our own stories and then we say, "That's enough about me, let's talk about you. What do you think of me?" We seek horizontally what can only be gained vertically.

Peter provides us with two practical ways to love others: (1) Sincere love is demonstrated through hospitality (v. 9) and, (2), sincere love is demonstrated by our stewardship of God's grace. I want to save the second subject for next week but, for now, let's talk about hospitality. It literally means, "lover of strangers." Peter has already addressed this subject in 1:22. Love is the hallmark of a spiritually healthy church particularly in times of trial and testing. Love draws a church together in unity even in the toughest of times. But in both occurrences Peter adds the intensifier "fervently" (ektenos) an adverb meaning to stretch out, to go beyond what is expected. The word Peter chooses to illustrate love that goes beyond what is expected is philozenos, translated "hospitable." What a great word in a country that is growing increasingly xenophobic. Zenos is strangers. Philos is brotherly love. This word is literally, "lover of strangers." It is found in the list of qualities required of an elder in 1 Tim. 3. Those who lead the church should demonstrate a certain comfort level among strangers. Do you engage those who are very different from you? Are you welcoming toward the burned-out, tatted-up, broken-down, left-out people who won't darken the door of an established church? Or do you avoid those people?

God required the people of Israel to be "lovers of strangers." "For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So, show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Dt. 10:18-19

The early Christians were often persecuted, poor, and had no place to stay. They may have been Jews who spoke the same language as their neighbors but the early Christians were societal refugees. They didn't fit in with the prevailing culture so they couldn't expect much help. It became customary for believers to take in strangers. Who is most likely to be sympathetic toward a refugee? Another refugee. That is why we have Vickery Meadow...statistics.

What a great reminder to be a welcoming church. We love refugees here at Fellowship because God has called us to love our neighbors. And we have thousands of refugee neighbors. We host two congregations made up mostly of refugees – the Congolese and the Bhutanese. Our ministry to refugees is somewhat symbolic. While we do work with those who have come from a different country we also welcome people here who just don't fit the prevailing culture. If we are true to our calling as a church we should reflect the neighborhood around us.

The hour is late, have you surrendered to God's purpose "so that in all things Christ would be glorified?" God wants to show up through you. He wants to walk around Dallas in your body. The hour is late so let's live urgently and love deeply by our welcoming behavior. Let's be "armed and dangerous." 4:1-2, "arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." Those who are armed with the purpose of God are considered armed and dangerous in a selfie kingdom. Jesus was so fully committed to the will of God that He posed a threat to those who had their own personal agendas. So, they nailed Him to a cross. We are called to carry that cross. When you look at a cross, let the vertical post reminds you to pray purposefully, to be fully conscious of God's will. Let that horizontal post reminds you that we are called to love one another.

Tomorrow is MLK Day, a day in which we are reminded of the impact we can have when we live with urgency, fully committed to God's will. Dr. King is remembered because he was such a shining example of a person who was fully conscious of God's purpose and a faithful steward of God love. He was armed with an immutable truth – all men are created equal and bear the image and likeness of God. But he also knew that violence against those with whom you disagree is a violation of the will of God. So, he pounded the drum for justice and pounded the pavement to make people aware and he paid the price for his boldness. In his final speech on the night of his death, it was as if he had a premonition of what was about to happen. He knew that seeking the kingdom of God here in the kingdom of man will lead to great conflict. So, he stood to the podium in Memphis and said:

"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."