

Sermon: Live for God!

Text: [I Peter 4:1-11 ESV](#)

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: I can think of no better life-goal than to “live for God.” We all probably have known people who lived just for themselves. We should know how that turns out by experience and observation. Usually these people end up lonely, miserable, and with no hope for anything after this very short life indeed. Some people choose to marry and maybe even have children, but with no idea how to rear them. These milestones can certainly change a person’s perspective on life and who is the most important. Everyone needs goals.

Gerbert clip for CCBC A few years ago I attended a “creative writing” class at the Community College of Beaver County (PA), and I was asked regarding the Gerbert project which was a drug and alcohol prevention piece, what my goals were. And I said, “well, I don’t really have any; we are just going to see what happens.” Right? Of course not, that would be foolish - just like living life without a purpose and goals would be.

One question that will keep coming up in your life, even daily, is: “For Whom are you living?” The earlier you get this question settled, the happier you will be.

In studying [I Peter 3](#) we were reminded that Jesus died for our sins ([3:18](#)). Because of this sacrificial act, those who have faith and have been baptized want to follow Jesus’ example of victory over death and follow Him to heaven ([3:22](#)). Here the text reads:

[I Peter 4:1-11 ESV](#) ¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. ⁷ **The end of all things is at hand**; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: 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.

The Apostle Peter had worked out the answer to this question (for Whom will you live?) long ago. Peter decided he was going to live *for God*. In this passage, Peter shares not only the *reasons* for his life-decision, but also the *strategies* for achieving this goal and the *results* of having been successful.

If you decide to live for God there must be:

I Reasons (Faith is not irrational)

A. Jesus suffered for us (v. 1a, c)

Jesus gave up everything, became a servant, was humiliated, beaten, crucified - all for you and me. The question, now, is: what will we do for Him? We *may* have to suffer in *our* walk, following God. Yet death, divorce, financial ruin, loss of health and other events may actually provide a witness to others with God's help. Suffering is not the problem; it is the context. How we deal with suffering will speak volumes about the quality and genuineness of our faith.

Illus. Take the person who falls into a swimming pool full of water. The water is certainly a consideration, i.e., how deep, how cold, etc., but the real issue is how the person deals with the water. Can he swim? How well? Is there anyone who can throw him a lifeline?
(examples from camp and the Quebec lake)

Suffering is not the problem. Suffering is an opportunity for a Christian to bring life and encouragement to others.

Romans 5:1-5 ESV ¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

If a person has been truly saved and given new life through the Spirit:

B. The new life is to be lived for God (v. 2b).

Q. What is the reason a person should try to follow God's will? ...to avoid punishment?

A. Love, and in appreciation for what God has accomplished in us and for us through Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we no longer have to worry about Judgment Day even though:

C. Judgment is near (vv. 5-7a).

The Church has been persecuted and suffered at the hands of pagans (no more than last century). In Scripture, Jews and Gentiles alike are called “unbelievers.” But vindication is coming because judgment is coming with the second and final coming of Jesus. The end and goal (τελος) of all human history is coming! And it will be a *sudden* event!

Judgment has already begun, and someday will be universal. No one will escape. It is for those who have already died and those still living.

Q. What does God need to do to finally redeem mankind?

A. Come back! He has done everything else that is required. We are in the “last days!”

If God is ready to judge, the question must be also: “am I ready to be judged?” Just like the old game of hide and seek, I can hear God say: “Ready or not, here I come!”

If you decide to live for God there must be:

II. Strategies

Christians must:

A. Think like Christ (vv. 1b, 7b). - Intentionality

The idea of *arming oneself* is battle talk. God is a mighty warrior. We are in a cosmic conflict between good and evil, and there are only two sides (no spiritual Switzerland).

Ephesians 6:10-12 ESV ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Christ’s attitude and way of thinking had sinful humanity in mind. His hope, is salvation, not judgment, for all His creation. He loves us and in return expects us to:

B. Love the members of Christ’s Church (vv. 8-9).

We are to love each other “deeply” (NIV) and “earnestly” (ESV). Love can be shown certainly in hospitality and service.

Q. Why should we do this?

A. **Proverbs 10:12 ESV** ¹² Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. *see text, v.8*

It is so much easier to overlook sin when you love the person. “But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding and conflicts abound - to Satan’s perverse delight.” - Grudem, *I Peter*, pp. 173-174

Another strategy is to:

C. Use your God-given gifts (v. 10).

There are spiritual gifts and abilities that the Holy Spirit has given us. The Apostle Paul, in the NT, gives us many of the lists for these gifts. One place is:

I Corinthians 12:4-7 ESV ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

If you decide to live for God there must be:

III. Results (Fruit)

A. A Christian comes to his senses (v. 2-3).

The story of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15** is an example of just that. After living the kind of life described in the Lucan story (**15:17a**), it reads he “came to his senses” (NIV) or “he came to his self” (ESV). In our text in **I Peter 4:3** the word translated *suffices* (*enough*, NIV) means “more than sufficient.” When living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry, and this is a partial list, has run its course and consideration is given to what God, the Father, offers, *some* come to their senses.

I would like to pursue a thought with you here. It is not that people who behave this way are condemned because we all know wonderful Christians who used to act like this (**I Corinthians 6:9ff**); but God requires repentance, and He provides the power to change.

It is not so much what pagans do, but it is *why* (we all like to recite the lists of sins that we are not involved with). Non-Christians say “there will be no accounting. I can do whatever I want.” When a person speaks against faith and God’s ministry to the Church and rejects the presence of the Holy Spirit, he is in “grave” danger.

Matthew 12:31-32 ESV ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

B. Not everyone appreciates a good example (v. 4).

Have you ever noticed? People don’t like to be made to feel guilty by a “good example” or to be in situations where attention is brought to their sinful condition. Quite frankly, that’s why some do not attend worship services. Rather than repent, they hide.

Sometimes if we lead holy lives and make correct decisions, it will convict others of their sin. But just like in the time of Noah there will be scoffers, and not everyone will respond to God's demands on his/her life. We, however, need to do the best we can to provide a life where Jesus can be seen.

C. God is praised (v. 11c).

Everything we do as Christians is equivalent to worship. We have been equipped with God's Word and His power to live a life that will result in His praise, glory and honor. When we speak or serve others, it should be God-honoring. Having God recognized and praised is our reason for living. This worship touches every aspect of our lives.

Paul has an even broader explanation: **I Corinthians 10:31-11:1 ESV** ³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. **11:1** Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Conclusion: Whether we are paid professional staff or Christians with other vocations, all our lives should be spent loving and serving God and others to His glory. We must follow Christ's example.

Illus. (*Community* by Philip Gulley taken from the book *Front Porch Tales* - 1997)
When I was in fourth grade, I was offered a job as a paper boy. It didn't pay much money, but I knew having a job would build my character - so I took it, good character being important to fourth graders. My lessons started the first day on the job. A customer paying his bill asked me if I wanted a tip, and I said, "Sure." He said, "Stay away from wild women."

One of my customers was a lady named Mrs. Stanley. She was a widow and not prone to wild living, so I took to lingering on her front porch during my rounds. She'd watch for me to come down her street, and by the time I'd pedaled up to her house, there'd be a slushy bottle of Coke waiting for me. I'd sit and drink while she talked. That was our understanding - I drank; she talked.

The widow Stanley talked mostly about her dead husband, Roger. "Roger and I went grocery shopping this morning over to the IGA," she'd say. The first she said that, the Coke went up my nose. That was back in the day when Coke going up your nose wasn't a crime, just a mite uncomfortable.

Went home and told my father about Mrs. Stanley and how she talked as if Mr. Stanley were still alive. Dad said she was probably lonely, and that maybe I just ought to sit and listen and nod my head and smile, and maybe she'd work it out of her system. So that's what I did. I figured this was where the character-building came into play. Turned out dad was right. After a few summers, she seemed content to leave her husband over at the South Cemetery.

Nowadays, we'd send Mrs. Stanley to a psychiatrist. But all she had back then was a front porch rocker and her paperboy's ear, which turned out to be enough.

I quit my paper route after her healing. Moved on to the lucrative business of lawn mowing. Didn't see the widow Stanley for several years. Then we crossed paths up at the Christian Church's annual fund-raising dinner. She was standing behind the steam table spooning out mashed potatoes and looking radiant. Four years before she'd had to bribe her paper boy with a Coke to have someone to talk with; now, she had friends brimming over. Her husband was gone, but life went on. She had her community and was luminous with love. Community is a beautiful thing; sometimes, it even heals us and makes us better than we would otherwise be.

I live in the city now. My front porch is a concrete slab. And my paper boy is a lady named Edna who has three kids and a twelve-year-old Honda Civic. Every day she asks me how I am doing. When I don't say "fine," she sticks around long enough to find out why. She's such a nice lady that sometimes I act as if I have a problem, just so she will hang around for a while. She lived in the city all her life, but she knows about community, too. Community isn't so much a locale as it is a state of mind. You find it whenever folks ask how you are doing because they care, and not because they're getting paid to inquire.

Two thousand years ago, a church elder named Peter wrote the recipe for community: "Above all else," he wrote, "hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins ([I Peter 4:8](#)).

That means when you love a person, you occasionally have to turn a blind eye toward their shortcomings. Kind of like what my dad told me about the widow Stanley. Sometimes it's better to nod your head and smile.

Psychiatrists call that "enabling denial," but back when I delivered papers, we called it "compassion."

The best advice I can give you this morning is "Live for God!"