

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Living for God's Will, Not the Flesh

1 Peter 4:1–11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 4:1–11 turns from suffering to its purpose: a life decisively broken from sin and poured out for the will of God and the good of the church. Doctrinally, be ready to teach the decisive break that conversion makes with the old life (echoing Romans 6), the certainty of final judgment for the living and the dead, and the biblical theology of spiritual gifts, that every member has received some gift of God's grace to use in serving others, all aimed at the glory of God through Jesus Christ. Peter's phrase "the end of all things is at hand" calls for sober urgency, not date-setting or speculation; he uses the nearness of the end to motivate clear-minded prayer, earnest love, and faithful service, never to feed apocalyptic prediction.

Pastorally, this passage speaks to the real cost of leaving the old life behind, the bafflement and hostility of former friends, the loneliness of the one who no longer fits in. It also paints a deeply attractive picture of the alternative: a community marked by earnest love that covers sins, ungrudging hospitality, and every member serving with their gift. Help students feel both the cost of the turn and the warmth of the family they have turned toward. The Christian life here is not mainly about what we abstain from but about what we are now free to live for.

So aim to leave students with a settled resolve and a serving heart: resolved, like Christ, to suffer rather than sin, and freed to spend their limited days on love, hospitality, and ministry for God's glory. The disciple we are forming has made up his mind, has stopped grieving the loss of the old crowd, and has thrown himself into the family of God as a good steward of grace.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter says, "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" (v. 1). What does it mean to "arm yourselves" with the mind of Christ, and how does a settled resolve to suffer rather than sin actually break sin's power in our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter uses military language: "arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." The Christian life requires a deliberate inner resolve, a mind made up in advance. Christ went to the cross with a settled determination to do the Father's will whatever it cost; we are to take up that same mindset, ready to suffer rather than to sin.

Unpack the puzzling phrase “whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” Peter is not teaching sinless perfection. He means that the person who has resolved to follow Christ even into suffering has, by that very resolve, broken decisively with a life ruled by sin. When we would rather suffer than sin, sin has lost its controlling power over us. The willingness to suffer is itself a kind of death to sin’s tyranny.

Make it practical. Most temptation wins because we have not decided in advance; we negotiate in the moment and lose. The believer who has armed himself, who has settled that he will accept the cost of obedience before the test arrives, fights from a position of strength. Resolve, formed before the battle, is half the victory.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as a deliberate, armed resolve, not passive drifting (Luke 9:51)
- The mind of Christ: ready to suffer rather than to sin (Philippians 2:5)
- Willingness to suffer as the breaking of sin’s controlling power
- Settled resolve before temptation as the path to victory

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to ‘arm’ your mind before temptation comes?
- How does a willingness to suffer rather than sin break sin’s power?
- Where do you tend to lose because you negotiate with temptation in the moment?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter says we should live the rest of our time “no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (v. 2). Where are you still tempted to spend your time and energy on “human passions,” and what would it look like to redirect that area toward the will of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes Peter’s ‘human passions versus the will of God’ contrast personal. Time and energy are limited; whatever we pour into human passions we cannot also pour into the will of God. The issue is not only avoiding gross sin but redirecting the flow of a life.

Help students identify their particular drain. For one it may be an appetite, for another the endless pursuit of comfort, entertainment, status, or money. These are not always sinful in themselves, but they quietly absorb the energy that was meant for God and others. Naming the specific area is more useful than a general resolve to be more spiritual.

Move toward redirection, not just subtraction. Peter does not merely say stop living for passions; he says live for the will of God. Ask each student to name one area and one concrete

way to redirect its energy, the same hours, money, or attention turned toward God, His people, and His mission.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The limited stewardship of time and energy (Ephesians 5:15–16)
- Redirecting life toward the will of God, not only subtracting sin
- Good gifts that quietly absorb the energy meant for God
- Living the rest of our time with intentional purpose

Discussion Prompts

- Where is most of your time and energy actually going right now?
- Which 'human passion' most competes with the will of God in your life?
- How could you redirect that same energy toward God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says, "The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do," and lists the old way of life the believers had left (vv. 3–4). What does this teach about the decisive break conversion makes with the old life, and why does Peter speak of the past as something already "sufficient" and finished?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter speaks of the past with a striking finality: "The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do." Enough. That chapter is closed. Conversion is not a gradual improvement of the old life but a decisive break with it, a turning so real that the past is treated as finished business.

Note the catalog Peter lists, the sins of a pagan culture, and notice he does not have the believers wallow in shame over it. He simply says that is past; the time spent on it is sufficient, and there is no need to give it another hour. There is freedom in this. The gospel does not chain us to our former selves; it draws a line and bids us walk forward.

Apply it to the temptation to return. The pull of the old life is real, and Peter knows former friends will press us to come back. The believer answers not with self-righteousness but with settled clarity: that life is over for me; I have spent enough time there already. The past is acknowledged, forgiven, and left behind.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Conversion as a decisive break with the old life, not gradual reform (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- The past as finished business, forgiven and left behind

- Freedom from the chains of one's former self
- Settled clarity against the pull to return to old ways

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the time spent on the old life is already 'enough'?
- How does the gospel free you from being chained to your past?
- Where do you still feel the pull to return to an old way of living?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter notes that former friends "malign you" when you no longer join them (v. 4). How do you typically respond when you are misunderstood or criticized for your faith, and how might Peter want you to respond instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the social cost Peter names: former friends "malign you" when you no longer join them. Being misunderstood and criticized for following Christ is one of the most common and discouraging forms of suffering, and how we respond reveals much about our hearts.

Help students notice their default reactions, defensiveness, retaliation, people-pleasing compromise, or quiet resentment. Each is a way of letting the critics control us. Peter has already shown the better way in chapter 3: do not repay reviling with reviling, but bless, and keep a clear conscience so the slander cannot stick.

Point toward a settled, non-anxious response. The believer who knows the past is finished and the future is secure can absorb being misunderstood without needing to win the argument or earn back approval. Ask students how they might respond to a specific critic with both clarity and kindness this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Being maligned for faith as a common form of Christian suffering (Matthew 5:11)
- Refusing defensiveness, retaliation, and compromise
- Blessing critics and keeping a clear conscience (1 Peter 3:9, 16)
- Security in Christ freeing us from needing others' approval

Discussion Prompts

- How do you usually respond when criticized for your faith?
- How might Peter want you to respond instead?
- Who is a critic you could meet with both clarity and kindness this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says even the dead will be judged, and that the gospel was preached so that people “might live in the spirit the way God does” (vv. 5–6), reminding us that everyone will give account to God “who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” What does this teach about the certainty of judgment and the seriousness with which we should live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter sounds the note of judgment: people “will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” Both those alive at Christ’s coming and those already dead will stand before God. Judgment is certain and universal; no one escapes it, and this certainty gives moral seriousness to how we live.

Handle verse 6 carefully: the gospel “was preached even to those who are dead.” This most naturally means the gospel was preached to people who have since died; though they were judged in the flesh as all humans are (they died), they were preached to so that they might live in the spirit, that is, share God’s own life. It is not teaching a second chance to be saved after death, which Scripture elsewhere excludes (Hebrews 9:27).

Draw out the application. The certainty that we will all give account is not meant to terrify the faithful but to sober everyone. It strips away the illusion that our choices do not matter and that we answer to no one. A life lived in view of the judgment is a serious, purposeful, hopeful life, not a fearful one, for the believer’s judge is also his Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty and universality of final judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27)
- Verse 6 as gospel preached to those now dead, not a second chance after death
- Living in the spirit the way God does as the goal of the gospel
- The sobering, purposeful effect of remembering the judgment

Discussion Prompts

- How does the certainty of judgment change the way you view your choices?
- Why is verse 6 not teaching a second chance after death?
- How can living in view of judgment be sobering without being fearful?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter calls us to be “self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (v. 7). How is the health of your prayer life connected to your self-control and clear-headedness, and where might a lack of one be weakening the other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter links clear-headed self-control directly to prayer: “be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” A scattered, intoxicated, undisciplined life cannot pray well. Prayer requires a measure of inner order; the mind cluttered with appetite and distraction struggles to attend to God.

Help students see the two-way connection. A lack of self-control weakens prayer, and weak prayer leaves us without the strength for self-control, a downward spiral. Conversely, growing discipline deepens prayer, and deepening prayer fuels discipline, an upward one. Where one is weak, the other usually is too.

Make it concrete in light of ‘the end of all things is at hand.’ The nearness of the end is Peter’s reason for sober clarity now. Time is short; we cannot afford to live in a fog. Ask students where a lack of self-control, in media, food, drink, schedule, is quietly eroding their life with God, and what one boundary would strengthen their prayers.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The connection between self-control, clear-mindedness, and prayer
- Prayer requiring inner order and attentiveness (Colossians 4:2)
- The mutual reinforcement of discipline and prayer
- Sober urgency in light of the nearness of the end

Discussion Prompts

- How is the health of your prayer life connected to your self-control?
- Where is a lack of discipline quietly weakening your walk with God?
- What one boundary would strengthen your prayers this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Above all, Peter says, “keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (v. 8). What does it mean that love “covers” a multitude of sins, and why does Peter rank earnest love “above all” the other commands in this passage?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter ranks love first: “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.” Of all the commands in this passage, earnest love for one another stands at the top. The word earnest again carries the

sense of stretched-out, strenuous effort; this is love that works hard and keeps going, not a passing feeling.

Explain how “love covers a multitude of sins.” This does not mean love ignores sin or refuses to confront it where confrontation is needed. It means love does not broadcast or keep score of offenses; it forgives, overlooks minor faults, and refuses to let every slight become a wound. A community where love covers sins is a community where people are not constantly exposed, gossiped about, and held to their worst moments. Love throws a cloak over the failures of others the way we would want our own covered.

Show why this is ‘above all.’ A church can have sound doctrine, busy programs, and faithful attendance and still die for lack of earnest, sin-covering love. Love is the atmosphere in which every other grace grows. Ask students where their love for the brethren has grown thin or score-keeping, and what earnest, covering love would require of them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Earnest love for one another as the first priority (John 13:34–35)
- Love covering a multitude of sins: forgiving, not broadcasting, offenses (Proverbs 10:12)
- Love as the atmosphere in which all other graces grow (1 Corinthians 13)
- The difference between covering sin in love and ignoring sin that must be addressed

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for love to ‘cover’ a multitude of sins?
- Why does Peter rank earnest love ‘above all’?
- Where has your love for fellow believers grown thin or score-keeping?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter commands, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (v. 9). How open is your life and your home to others, especially to those who cannot repay you? What keeps you from greater hospitality, and what would a first step look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter commands hospitality, and adds a pointed phrase: “without grumbling.” In the first century, hospitality often meant housing traveling Christians and preachers; today it means opening our lives and homes to others, especially those who cannot repay us. The added ‘without grumbling’ exposes how easily we serve with a resentful heart.

Help students examine the barriers. We resist hospitality out of busyness, self-consciousness about our homes, introversion, or simple selfishness with our space and time. Peter cuts

through the excuses; hospitality is not a gift for the few but a command for all, and the manner matters as much as the act. Grudging hospitality blesses no one.

Move toward a first step. Hospitality need not be elaborate; it is the open life more than the impressive meal. Ask each student what keeps them from greater hospitality and what one concrete step, a meal shared, a guest welcomed, a lonely person included, they could take this week, and to take it gladly rather than grudgingly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hospitality as a command for all believers, not a gift for a few (Romans 12:13)
- The manner of service: without grumbling or resentment
- Opening our lives to those who cannot repay (Luke 14:12–14)
- Hospitality as the open life more than the impressive display

Discussion Prompts

- How open is your life and home to others, especially those who cannot repay you?
- What most keeps you from greater hospitality?
- What is one step toward gladly welcoming someone this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter says, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace,” so “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (vv. 10–11). What does this teach about the purpose of spiritual gifts in the church, about every member having a part, and about the ultimate aim of all Christian service being the glory of God rather than ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson: Peter’s theology of gifts and service. “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.” Note the universality: each one has received a gift. There are no giftless Christians and no merely spectator members. Every believer has been entrusted with some measure of God’s grace to be used for others.

Unpack the stewardship language. We are “good stewards of God’s varied grace.” A gift is not a possession to admire or a credit to our account but a trust to be managed for the Owner’s purposes. Peter names two broad categories, speaking and serving, and says of each that it should be done in God’s strength and with His resources, “by the strength that God supplies.” Even our service depends on grace.

Drive home the ultimate purpose, stated plainly: “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” This is the great corrective to every self-centered use of ministry.

Gifts are not given to make us impressive, to build our reputation, or to meet our need to be needed. They are given so that God gets the glory. The moment ministry becomes about the minister, it has missed its point.

Apply it to the local church. A congregation flourishes when every member uses their gift and no one waits to be served, and when all of it points away from the servants to the glory of God. Ask students to identify the gift God has given them and one way to put it to work, deliberately for His glory and not their own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every believer gifted by God for the service of others (Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12)
- Gifts as a stewardship to be managed, not a possession to display
- Service performed by the strength God supplies, in dependence on grace
- The glory of God through Jesus Christ as the ultimate aim of all ministry (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- The flourishing church where every member serves and no one merely spectates

Discussion Prompts

- What gift has God entrusted to you for serving others?
- How does seeing your gift as a stewardship change how you use it?
- How do you keep your service aimed at God's glory rather than your own?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from arming our minds, to leaving the old life, to living for God's will, to love, hospitality, and service for God's glory. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 4:1–11 do you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the threads. Peter has moved from arming the mind, to the decisive break with the old life, to living for God's will in view of the end, to earnest love, hospitality, and the use of every gift for God's glory. The whole passage answers the question: how shall a person with limited days spend them well?

Press for one concrete point of formation. Ask each student to name the single truth they most need and one place it will land this week, whether a resolve to suffer rather than sin, a redirected use of time, or a renewed commitment to love and serve the church.

Close on the aim of it all: “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” Send students out resolved, freed from the old life, and pouring their remaining days into the love and service that puts God on display.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of personal resolve, holy living, and self-giving service
- The glory of God as the unifying aim of the Christian life
- Ongoing formation into the image of Christ through love and service

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- Where do you sense Jesus forming you through 1 Peter 4:1–11?
- What is one way you will spend your limited days for God’s glory this week?