

1 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Week 8: Living for God's Will

1Peter 4:1–11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 4:1–11 calls believers to a decisive break with their old way of life and a wholesale reorientation toward the will of God. What is doctrinally at stake here includes the believer's death to sin and new life in Christ, the certainty of final judgment for all people, the purpose of gospel proclamation, the nearness of the end and its effect on Christian living, and the doctrine of spiritual gifts and stewardship in the service of the body. The teacher should be ready to handle the call to be finished with sin, the reality of the coming judgment of the living and the dead, and the teaching that every believer has received a gift of grace to be used for the good of others and the glory of God.

This passage is also relentlessly practical and formational. Peter presses for a settled resolve to be done with the old life, prepares believers for the pressure of former companions who malign them, and channels the whole Christian life toward earnest love, hospitality, and the faithful use of gifts in service. The teacher's task is to help students reach genuine clarity about what they are living for, to stand firm against the pull of the old life and the fear of people, and to pour themselves out in love and service rather than living for self.

Keep both targets in view. Students should leave with a clearer grasp of their death to sin, the coming judgment, and the call to stewardship of their gifts, and with a concrete resolve about a specific area of self-living to surrender and a specific way to serve in love. The disciple we are forming is someone who has settled what they live for, the will of God, and who spends themselves in love so that God is glorified through Jesus Christ.

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 is the "way of thinking" Peter calls us to arm ourselves with, and how does a willingness to suffer for Christ break the power of sin in our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws a conclusion from the suffering of Christ in the previous chapter: "arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." The image is military. A soldier arms himself before battle; the believer arms the mind with a settled resolve. The resolve is the same mindset Christ had, a willingness to suffer in the flesh rather than to sin.

Explain the puzzling phrase, “whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” Peter is not teaching that physical suffering automatically makes a person sinless. He means that the person who has so identified with Christ that they are willing to suffer rather than disobey has, in principle, broken with sin. Sin’s great weapon is the threat: do this, or you will suffer, lose out, be rejected, be hurt. The believer who has already settled that they would rather suffer than sin has disarmed that threat. Sin can no longer bully them into compromise.

Connect this to the believer’s death to sin in Christ. In baptism we died with Christ and were raised to new life (Romans 6:1–14); those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions (Galatians 5:24). Arming ourselves with Christ’s mindset is living out that death to sin deliberately, day by day, refusing to let sinful desires or the fear of suffering set our course.

Help students grow in faith by seeing the freedom in this resolve. As long as we are unwilling to suffer any loss for Christ, sin holds leverage over us. When we settle, in advance, that we will obey God even if it costs us, sin’s threats lose their power. The willingness to suffer for Christ is not grim; it is liberating, because it makes us un-blackmailable. Invite students to consider where the fear of loss or discomfort still gives sin leverage in their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Arming the mind with the mindset of Christ, willing to suffer rather than sin
- Sin’s leverage being the threat of suffering or loss
- The willingness to suffer for Christ disarming sin’s power to bully us
- The believer’s death to sin and new life in Christ (Romans 6:1–14; Galatians 5:24)
- Freedom found in settling, in advance, to obey God whatever the cost

Discussion Prompts

- What is the “way of thinking” Peter calls us to arm ourselves with?
- How does a willingness to suffer for Christ break sin’s power to bully us?
- Where does the fear of loss or discomfort still give sin leverage over you?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter says we should “no longer” live for human passions but “for the will of God,” because we have already spent enough of our past in such things (vv. 2–3). What is one area where you are still living partly for your own cravings rather than for God’s will? What would it look like to settle that question this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says believers should live the rest of their earthly lives no longer for human passions but for the will of God, because “the time that is past suffices” for the old way of living. There is a

note of finality here: enough, the old life has had more than enough of our years; the rest belongs to God.

Help students feel the force of a decisive settling. Many believers live in a divided way, genuinely following Christ in most things while keeping a private reserve for an old craving or habit, never quite deciding to surrender it. Peter calls for an end to that negotiation. Living for the will of God means the whole of life, including the reserved corner, comes under God's will.

Move toward the specific and concrete. Invite students to name one area where they are still living partly for their own cravings, an appetite, a relationship, a use of money or time, a private indulgence, and to consider what it would mean to settle that question once and for all this week. The aim is not vague resolve but a decision about a particular thing, the kind of clarity that simplifies the whole Christian walk. This is genuine growth toward Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The decisive break with the old life: "the time that is past suffices"
- The danger of a divided life with a reserved corner for sin
- Living for the will of God as comprehensive, not partial
- Settling a specific area once and for all as the path to clarity

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so tempting to keep a private corner reserved from God's will?
- What is one area where you are still living partly for your own cravings?
- What would it look like to settle that question once and for all this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says that those who malign Christians "will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead," and that the gospel was preached so that people might "live in the spirit the way God does" (vv. 5–6). What does this teach about the certainty of final judgment and the purpose for which the gospel is proclaimed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says those who malign believers "will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." This is a clear affirmation of a coming final judgment from which no one is exempt. The living and the dead, all people of all times, will give account to God. This truth steadies believers under the scorn of others: the verdict that matters is not the world's but God's.

Underline the certainty and universality of judgment. Scripture consistently teaches that all will stand before God (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:31). This is not a threat designed to terrify believers, but a sober reality that puts every earthly opinion in perspective. Those who mock the believer's changed life are not the final judges; they themselves will be judged. The Christian can therefore endure being maligned without needing to retaliate or win approval.

Handle verse 6 carefully, as it can puzzle students: the gospel was preached "even to those who are dead." The most natural reading is that the gospel was preached, during their lifetimes, to people who have since died; though they were judged in the flesh as all people are (they died), the purpose of the gospel was that they might live in the spirit according to God. The point is the purpose of gospel proclamation: God proclaims the good news so that people, though they face death and judgment like everyone else, might have life with Him. Avoid building speculative doctrines of a second chance after death on this difficult verse; let the clear purpose, that the gospel gives life, govern the reading.

Help students grow in faith by letting the coming judgment reorder their fears. The fear of God's judgment, rightly understood, frees us from the tyranny of human opinion. We live for an audience of One. And the purpose of the gospel, that we might live with God, fills the sobering reality of judgment with hope for all who are in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty and universality of final judgment (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:31)
- God as the one ready to judge the living and the dead
- The world's verdict relativized by God's final judgment
- The purpose of gospel proclamation: that people might live according to God
- Avoiding speculative doctrines from the difficult verse 6

Discussion Prompts

- How does the certainty of God's judgment steady us when others malign us?
- Why is the coming judgment a reason for hope and not only for fear, for those in Christ?
- What is the stated purpose for which the gospel is proclaimed?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter acknowledges that former friends are surprised and may malign us when we no longer join them (v. 4). Whose disapproval do you fear most when you choose Christ's way over the old way? How is that fear of people shaping the choices you make?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the reality of opposition inward. Peter has named the experience: former companions are “surprised” and they “malign” us when we no longer join them. This question asks students to name whose disapproval they actually fear, and how that fear is steering their choices.

Help students see how the fear of people operates. We rarely admit it, but the dread of being thought strange, judgmental, or no fun can quietly govern our decisions, what we will and will not do in front of certain people, what we laugh at, what we stay silent about, where we compromise to keep the peace. The pressure is strongest from those closest to our old life: friends, family, coworkers who feel implicitly judged by our change.

Move toward freedom and a concrete step. The antidote, as the passage shows, is remembering that we answer to God, not to them. Invite students to identify the specific person or group whose disapproval most pulls them back toward the old way, and to consider one choice this week where they will live for God’s will regardless of that disapproval. Naming the fear and defying it in one concrete instance is real growth in courage and faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of people as a hidden governor of our choices
- Pressure strongest from those tied to our old way of life
- Living for God’s approval rather than human approval
- Defying a specific disapproval as concrete growth in courage

Discussion Prompts

- Whose disapproval do you fear most when you choose Christ’s way?
- How is that fear shaping the choices you make?
- Where could you live for God’s will this week regardless of that disapproval?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter writes, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (v. 7). What does Peter mean that “the end of all things is at hand,” and how should the nearness of the end shape a Christian’s self-control, sobriety, and prayer life now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter writes, “The end of all things is at hand.” This reflects the New Testament conviction that with the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, the last days have already begun, and history is moving toward its appointed end in Christ’s return. The phrase is not a prediction of a date; it is a statement that we live in the final era, and the end could come at any time.

Be clear about what this does and does not mean, to keep students from speculation. Peter is not setting a timetable or encouraging calculations about when the end will come. He is saying that Christians live in light of a sure and possibly soon end, and that this should shape how we live now. The reign of Christ has already been established; we await its consummation. The proper response to the nearness of the end is not date-setting or panic, but sober, prayerful, faithful living.

Draw out the practical effects Peter names. Because the end is at hand, be “self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” The nearness of the end is meant to produce clarity, not frenzy: a disciplined mind, restraint of excess, and a serious commitment to prayer. People who know that this age is passing and Christ is returning do not give themselves to drunkenness or distraction; they keep their heads clear so they can pray and watch.

Help students grow in faith by living with the end in view. An eternal perspective changes priorities: it loosens our grip on passing things, sharpens our love, and fuels our prayers. The question is not whether the end is near in days, but whether we are living as people who truly believe this age is not the final word. That conviction should make us more clear-minded and more prayerful, not less engaged with our actual responsibilities.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “The end of all things at hand” as life in the last days, not a date prediction
- Christ’s reign established, awaiting its consummation at His return
- Avoiding both date-setting and panic
- Self-control, sober-mindedness, and prayer as the response to the nearness of the end
- An eternal perspective reordering priorities and fueling prayer

Discussion Prompts

- What does Peter mean that “the end of all things is at hand”?
- How should the nearness of the end shape our self-control and prayer?
- Why does Peter respond to the end with sobriety and prayer rather than speculation?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter ties self-control and sober-mindedness to “the sake of your prayers” (v. 7). How healthy is your prayer life right now, and what undisciplined habits, distractions, or excesses are crowding it out? What is one step toward the clear-minded, prayerful life Peter describes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses verse 7 into the student's actual prayer life. Peter links self-control and sober-mindedness directly to prayer: a cluttered, intoxicated, undisciplined life cannot pray well. The state of our prayer life is often a fair barometer of the state of our self-control.

Help students examine honestly. Prayer is usually the first casualty of a distracted, overcommitted, or self-indulgent life. The endless scroll, the late nights, the crowded schedule, the small excesses we permit ourselves, all of these quietly crowd out communion with God. Peter implies that getting serious about prayer requires getting serious about the disciplines that protect it.

Move toward one concrete step. Rather than a vague resolve to pray more, invite students to identify one undisciplined habit that crowds out prayer and one specific change that would make room for it: a set time, a guarded hour, a limit on a distraction, a return to praying with their family. The aim is the clear-minded, prayerful life Peter describes, cultivated by one realistic step this week. This is concrete growth in the believer's walk with God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-control and sober-mindedness as the soil of a healthy prayer life
- Prayer as an early casualty of distraction and excess
- The state of prayer as a barometer of self-control
- One concrete discipline to protect and make room for prayer

Discussion Prompts

- How healthy is your prayer life right now, honestly?
- What undisciplined habits or distractions are crowding out your prayer?
- What is one realistic step toward a more prayerful life this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter says, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins," and then commands hospitality "without grumbling" (vv. 8–9). What does it mean that love "covers a multitude of sins," and why does Peter place love "above all" in the life of God's people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly." The phrase "above all" signals priority: among all the qualities of the Christian life, love stands first. And the love he commands is earnest, literally stretched or fervent, the kind of love that exerts itself rather than coasting on mere goodwill.

Explain the phrase “love covers a multitude of sins,” drawn from Proverbs 10:12. It does not mean love ignores sin, excuses wrongdoing, or hides serious matters that must be addressed. It means that love is willing to forgive, to overlook offenses, to refuse to keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5), and to protect rather than expose a brother or sister. Where the world uncovers and broadcasts faults, love covers them with forgiveness. In a community of sinners, such love is the only thing that keeps the fellowship from tearing itself apart.

Show why love is placed “above all.” A church can have right doctrine, busy ministries, and even courage under persecution, and still fail if it lacks earnest love. Love is the atmosphere in which every other grace flourishes. It is also the mark Jesus said would identify His disciples to the world (John 13:35). Peter immediately gives love hands and feet: hospitality “without grumbling,” the practical, costly welcome of others into our homes and lives, offered gladly rather than resentfully.

Help students grow in faith by seeing love as the priority that orders everything else. It is possible to be doctrinally careful and personally cold; Peter will not allow it. Earnest, forgiving, hospitable love is not optional decoration on the Christian life; it is, above all, the thing. Invite students to consider whether their love matches the priority Peter gives it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Love placed “above all” as the first priority of the Christian life
- Earnest love as fervent and self-exerting, not passive goodwill
- “Love covers a multitude of sins” as forgiveness, not the ignoring of sin (Proverbs 10:12; 1 Corinthians 13:5)
- Love as the atmosphere in which every other grace flourishes (John 13:35)
- Hospitality without grumbling as love with hands and feet

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that love “covers a multitude of sins,” and what does it not mean?
- Why does Peter place love “above all” in the life of God’s people?
- How does ungrumbling hospitality put love into practice?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter commands earnest love and ungrumbling hospitality (vv. 8–9). Where is your love for fellow believers more grudging than earnest, more calculating than free? Whom could you welcome, forgive, or serve this week in a way that costs you something?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the command to earnest love and hospitality inward. It is easy to affirm love in principle; it is harder to admit where our own love has become grudging, calculating, or selective. Peter's words press for honesty.

Help students examine the quality of their love. Grudging love serves while resenting the cost. Calculating love weighs what it will get in return and loves those who can repay. Selective love welcomes the easy and avoids the awkward, the needy, or the offensive. Peter's call to earnest love and ungrumbling hospitality exposes all three. The test of love is often the inconvenient person and the unrepayable kindness.

Move toward a concrete, costly act. Invite students to name one person they could welcome, forgive, or serve this week in a way that actually costs them something: opening their home, extending forgiveness they have withheld, reaching out to someone on the margins of the fellowship, serving without recognition. The aim is love with skin on it, offered gladly. This is where the priority of love becomes real growth in Christlikeness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grudging, calculating, and selective love as counterfeits of earnest love
- The test of love in the inconvenient person and the unrepayable kindness
- Forgiveness as an expression of love that covers offenses
- A concrete, costly act of love as the path of growth

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your love for fellow believers more grudging or calculating than earnest?
- Who is the inconvenient or unrepayable person your love tends to avoid?
- Whom could you welcome, forgive, or serve this week in a way that costs you something?

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 spiritual gifts, Christian service, and stewardship, and how does serving with our gifts bring glory to God rather than to ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it sets out the New Testament theology of spiritual gifts and stewardship in service. Peter says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Several truths are packed into this.

First, every believer has received a gift. Not some, but each. There are no giftless Christians and no merely passive members in the body of Christ. God has given to every member some ability, capacity, or grace to be used for the good of others (compare Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12). This dignifies every believer and removes any excuse for spiritual passivity.

Second, gifts are given to serve, not to display. The purpose is to “serve one another,” to build up the body, not to elevate the gifted individual. Peter divides gifts broadly into speaking gifts and serving gifts: “whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.” The one who teaches handles God’s word with reverence; the one who serves does so in God’s strength, not their own. Both are ministry; both matter.

Third, we are “stewards” of God’s varied grace. A steward manages what belongs to another. Our gifts are not our possessions to use or bury as we please; they are entrusted to us by God to be invested for His purposes. This makes the use of our gifts a matter of faithfulness, and their neglect a matter of unfaithfulness (compare the parable of the talents). The variety of gifts, “God’s varied grace,” means the body needs every member’s contribution; no gift is dispensable.

Finally, the goal is the glory of God: “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” This is the safeguard against pride. When we serve with our gifts in God’s strength, the credit goes to God, not to us. Service done for self-display glorifies the servant; service done in dependence on God glorifies God. Help students grow in faith by identifying their gift, committing to use it in service, and consciously aiming at God’s glory rather than their own recognition. Note that the use of speaking gifts in the assembly follows the New Testament pattern of order, including God’s assignment of the public teaching of the gathered congregation to qualified men, while every member, men and women alike, has gifts to serve the body in countless ways.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every believer endowed with a gift of grace (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12)
- Gifts given to serve and build up the body, not to display the individual
- The two broad categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts, both done in God’s strength
- Stewardship: gifts entrusted by God, their use a matter of faithfulness
- “God’s varied grace”: every member’s contribution needed, no gift dispensable
- The glory of God as the goal, safeguarding against pride
- Use of gifts in the assembly within the New Testament pattern of order

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that every believer has received a gift to be used in service?
- How does serving as a “steward of God’s grace” change the way we view our abilities?
- How does serving in God’s strength bring glory to God rather than to ourselves?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Peter calls us to be finished with sin, to live for God's will under pressure, to stay clear-minded and prayerful, and to pour ourselves out in love and service for God's glory. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 4:1–11 you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage. Peter has called believers to arm themselves with Christ's mindset and be finished with sin (vv. 1–3), to live for God's will under the pressure of former companions (vv. 4–6), to be clear-minded and prayerful in light of the end (v. 7), and to pour themselves out in earnest love, hospitality, and the faithful use of their gifts for God's glory (vv. 8–11). The question asks each student to name one specific way Christ is forming them through these verses.

Resist generalities. Walk students back through the movement of the passage: the corner of self-living still unsundered, the disapproval they fear, the prayer life that needs reviving, the love that has grown grudging, the gift they are neglecting. Invite each person to name the single point that lands most directly on their life.

Close by returning to the goal of the passage: "that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." The aim of living for God's will is not a joyless rule-keeping but a life poured out in love and service for God's glory. Encourage each person to carry one truth from this passage into the week, to return to it, and to act on it, spending themselves on what they were made for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living for God's will as a life poured out in love and service
- The glory of God as the aim of the whole Christian life
- Stewardship of gifts as faithful service in the body
- Self-examination leading to one concrete step

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage lands most directly on your life right now?
- What one concrete step toward living for God's will can you take before we meet again?
- How can this group support and pray for you in that specific step?