

## **Sermon Outline**

### **“Pray, Love, Serve”**

#### **1 Peter 4:7-11 – Living Hope Series – Joshua Harris – August 1, 2010**

##### **Introduction**

Bestselling novel *Eat, Pray, Love* describes one year in the author’s life as she explored the question, “What do I really want?” The answer she seemed to find during her travels in Italy, India, and Indonesia could be summed up as good pizza, lots of sex, and spirituality that deepens life experience without restricting one’s freedoms.

When this world is all you have, you eat for yourself, pray to yourself, and love yourself. All of us naturally desire the kinds of sensual pleasures Peter describes in 4:3. But because of Christ’s transforming work in our hearts, we no longer live for “human passions but for the will of God” (4:2).

Before going further, it’s important to understand Peter’s opening phrase in verse 7: “The end of all things is at hand...” He is not predicting the date of the world’s end. Rather, he is calling us to live in light of the reality of impending judgment when Christ returns. Unbelievers, take this seriously—turn from your sin and trust Christ today! Believers, be comforted by the promise of ultimate justice ... and be motivated by the promise of reward.

“The imminence of the end should function as stimulus to action in this world. The knowledge that believers are sojourners and exiles, whose time is short, should galvanize them to make their lives count now.” —*Thomas Schreiner*

Having new hearts that live for the will of God, how do we know what God wants of us? Peter spells that out in verses 7-11.

##### **Prayer (verse 7)**

1. Prayer sums up the Christian life. We pray because we know our great need for God. We strive to be self-controlled (v. 7) so that we can pray most effectively. Without self-control, any number of things—a movie, a good book, Facebook, a bowl of ice cream—will draw us away from prayer. But the thought of the coming judgment helps us control our appetites and pray with urgency.
2. Peter also tells us in verse 7 to be sober-minded in prayer, a concept he repeats in 1:13 and 5:8. A sober mind is a watchful, clear-headed, vigilant mind. It realizes how high the spiritual stakes are for this life.
3. Novelist David Mitchell describes prisoners in Japan who are given an opiate called “Solace” each day. It dulls the desire and ability to escape. As the main character weans herself from “Solace,” her mind slowly clears and she plots her escape.

## **Sermon Outline**

4. What is our “Solace”? What dulls our spiritual sensitivity and pulls us away from prayer? What deceives us into thinking the world’s pleasures are all that matter? We must turn from it and strive to be sober-minded so we can pray.

### **Love (verses 8-9)**

1. A life of clear-headed prayer is not a life of isolation. God calls us to “love one another earnestly,” to cultivate our living hope in relationships with other Christians. He calls us to love others as Christ loved us—passionately and sacrificially.
2. Relationships in Christian community are messy. When Peter says that “love covers a multitude of sins,” he is exhorting us as brothers and sisters to overlook each other’s faults. This doesn’t mean we minimize sin or avoid confrontation when necessary, but we must see fellow believers as people being transformed by God’s grace, just as we are. Earnest love allows no room for judgmental impatience or holding one’s past sins over their head. Love “covers all offenses” (Prov. 10:12).
3. Those who know that Jesus will soon judge the whole world don’t waste their time picking and tearing at each other. They don’t keep track of every mistake. They love each other earnestly from the heart, and that love attracts the world to Jesus.
4. Showing hospitality (v. 9) is a practical expression of this love—not just a weekly handshake in church, not just dinner parties with our best friends, but the generous giving of our food, space, and time to refresh and nourish the souls of other believers.
5. Do you realize the power of your home? Let me urge every household to pray and create a strategy for consistent hospitality.
  - a. Toward visitors, new members, and new Christians
  - b. Toward internationals who feel isolated in our culture
  - c. Toward widows and orphans
  - d. Toward hurting and neglected people in and out of the church
  - e. Toward people in financial need
6. Do you ever grumble about the relational challenges of being in a big church? Instead of complaining that you don’t know anybody, start inviting folks into your home! Let’s be a church that excels in hospitality.

### **Serve (verses 10-11)**

1. God has given each of us gifts with which to serve. They may not be specifically named in Scripture, but the Bible’s lists are not meant to be exhaustive. We all have something to contribute. Peter divides gifts into two broad categories: speech gifts and service gifts.
2. God’s gifts are varied. We dishonor God by disregarding our gifts or envying the gifts of others. We honor him when we steward our diverse gifts for his glory, not our own.

## **Sermon Outline**

3. As important as the ministry teams in our church are (like Discovery Land and Parking Crew), I think I (Joshua) have placed too much emphasis on serving on "official" ministry teams. But let's not limit our serving to Sundays, or to certain teams. Where is God calling you to speak truth from his Word to others? How can you help people in need?
4. If we're going to be faithful to the mission God has given us, we cannot wait for pastors to start every program. We can't limit our use of gifts to this building. The end of all things is at hand ... by the strength that God supplies, let's serve!

### **Conclusion:**

1. What do people do who hope in the imminent return of Jesus Christ? They pray. They love. They serve.
2. It seems so simple. And yet isn't this how God showed you the reality of hope in the risen Savior?
  - a. He answered the prayers of someone who cried out to God for your salvation.
  - b. He drew you through the compelling witness of a loving Christian community.
  - c. He opened your eyes to some of the most important realities of the Christian life as you hung out in someone's home.
  - d. And he used the gifts of countless unimpressive servants (not just one impressive teacher) to build you up and encourage you.
3. Pray. Love. Serve. This is God's way of spreading his gospel and making disciples. We want to be a church that embodies this and plants other churches in this region and throughout the world that do the same. The end is near. Let's keep at it.

### **Fellowship Starters**

1. Before you trusted in Christ, what were you living for? What made you happy?
2. How should the Lord's return motivate us? Is it having that effect in your life?
3. Are you satisfied with your practice of prayer? Why or why not?
4. What is your "Solace" that dulls you spiritually and draws you away from prayer?
5. "...keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8) Don't share names, but is there someone whose sins you find it difficult to "cover"? How might the gospel enable you to obey this command?
6. Describe a time when you experienced God's grace through hospitality, either on the giving or receiving end.
7. Where have you experienced joy in using your gifts to serve the church or community? Has God given you any ideas for serving in new areas?