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LIFE IN THE CHURCH



What do you like best about the church?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLidentity

THE POINT

I love and serve Christ when I love and serve His body, the church.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It was like standing at a fork in the road, except the road went in a dozen directions. I was preparing to graduate from college and was terrified because I had no idea what to do for the rest of my life. And that was because I had no real idea about who I was up to that point in my life. Throughout my 16-year educational journey, I had learned a lot of things about other people, but almost nothing about myself.

All that changed when I found my identity in Christ.

When I came to Christ, I came to His body, the church. My identity in Christ is wrapped up in my identity with other believers. That's true of all who follow Christ. We find who we are in Christ, and we live out that identity through our involvement with other Christians.

As you explore an important passage from 1 Peter 4 in this session, you'll see that to love and serve the body of Christ is to love and serve the Head of that body: Christ Himself.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Peter 4:7

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

If we are connected to Christ, we also are connected to other believers. Scripture describes the church in several ways: the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:27), the bride of Christ (see Rev. 19:7-9), and the family of God (see Eph. 2:19). All of these word pictures convey a key truth about the church: we need to work together.

In our Scripture focus, Peter began by telling believers that “The end of all things is near.” This “end” refers to the end of time when all humanity will stand before Jesus (see Rev. 20:11-12). The last days were inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ; the New Testament frequently refers to this period between His first and second comings as the last days (see Rom. 13:11-12; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 10:23-25).

Considering the brevity of our time, Peter identified three ways believers can serve one another and, therefore, strengthen the church. First, we’re told to “be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.” As a spiritual family, we hold on to each other and hold each other up through prayer. As a pastor, I can’t tell you how important this is for me. I need the prayers of other believers—and so do you.

Jesus didn’t save us so that each of us could be an only child. He called us to love both Him and His family. If we love the church—the family of God—we will pray for her members. By praying for the church, we’re serving other believers. Prayer is dependence on God, and when we take the lives of others before God’s throne of grace, we’re laying their needs before the One who loves, cares, and can fully meet their needs.

Part of discovering who we are is discovering that God made us to be prayer warriors. All believers have a direct connection to God because of our faith in Jesus. Let’s use that connection to bless the church with prayer.

***When have you seen prayer make an impact
in the lives of others?***

QUESTION #2

1 Peter 4:8-9

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Even in the best marriages, where two people love each other more than anything else, conflict happens. It's inevitable. Conflict also happens in the church. And just like in a marriage, Christians are called to respond to that conflict with love.

Peter has already told us that, in light of "the end of all things," we should pray. For the same reason, the second way Peter taught us to serve our spiritual family was to be filled with a deep love for each other. This is the selfless, benevolent, *agape* love (or affection) that God bestows on His people.

Such love isn't automatic or easy. It takes work to maintain love in any relationship. Life among believers is no different—which is why Peter wrote, "Above all, love each other deeply."

When we work to maintain love for each other, that love "covers over a multitude of sins." Peter wasn't writing about our sins toward God. Our faith in Jesus Christ covers those. Instead, Peter was referring to the offenses we commit against each other. My love for others leads me to overlook their offenses against me. Love leads us to move past the hurt and see beyond one another's faults.

The church isn't filled with perfect people; therefore, it must be filled with God's perfect love.

Peter gave us a picture of what love should look like. In doing so, he described the third way we are to serve our spiritual family: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." To be "hospitable" means to be kind and welcoming to people. This is to be a hallmark of the Christian community, otherwise known as the church.



What are some ways love covers the damage done by sin?

QUESTION #3

Peter wasn't the first to elevate the importance of hospitality in the New Testament. Paul called all Christians to pursue hospitality in Romans 12:13, and he listed hospitality among the defining traits of Christian leaders (see 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Such hospitality was especially significant in the early years of the church, when lodging wasn't affordable for traveling Christians. The advance of the church's mission in sharing the gospel was greatly aided by believers who were willing to open their homes to travelers.

It's one thing to share a home or share a meal; it's another thing to do it without grumbling. We can begrudge our own hospitality if we feel obligated to offer it. But if we strive to maintain an intense love for those who share our tables or lodge at our homes, we can be hospitable without complaining.

Hospitality moves love away from an abstract truth. Indeed, hospitality is love in action.

1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Have you ever wondered why God placed so many different kinds of people within the church? It's because He has given each different person a different set of gifts.

Every person in the church is a gift who brings gifts to the body of Christ in order to make it stronger. We need all of these members and their gifts, and they need us.

Why is hospitality an essential part of any church family?

QUESTION #4

That's important. Christians know they need Jesus, but we sometimes fail to realize we need other Christians, too. We weren't made for just ourselves; rather, we were made to serve Christ by serving His body, the church.

For that reason, you are called to use your gifts to serve the Lord and His church. That phrase "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received" means you already have a gift from God. Each one who has trusted in Christ has received a spiritual gift—one that is purely a gift of God's grace. All of these gifts involve serving and helping others, which is why Peter categorized them by a general function of speaking or serving. When we review the other passages where spiritual gifts are listed (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-10), each gift can be placed in one of these two categories.

We don't use these gifts in our own power or for our own benefit. Rather, we do so as people dependent on God. We speak "as one who speaks the very words of God," and we serve "with the strength God provides."

How has God gifted you? God will awaken you to these gifts by the power of His Spirit, and He often uses two avenues:

- 1. From others.** Many times other believers will see your giftedness before you see it in yourself. Christians around us will help us to discover how we can speak the truth and serve others.
- 2. From action.** God's giftedness may become clear, not as we seek His gifts, but as we get our hands dirty and begin to serve.

Every believer is called to service, but God will not enable the full potential of your gift until you surrender to Him. He hasn't given us all the same gift, but He has called us all to the same service. Once you discover your identity as a servant of God in His church, you will understand so much more about who you are as a person—and who you are meant to become.

What opportunities help you feel excited about using your gifts to serve others?

QUESTION #5

THE GIFT OF GIFTS

Take a moment to review the lists of spiritual gifts below. Make a circle around gifts you see represented in your group. Make a rectangle around gifts you possess.

GIFTS OF SERVICE

Giving	Mercy	Service	Faith
Discernment	Administration	Hospitality	

GIFTS OF SPEECH

Prophecy	Teaching	Exhortation	Leadership
Wisdom	Knowledge	Evangelism	

What step can you take to learn more about your own spiritual gifts?

"The motto of every missionary - whether preacher, printer, or schoolmaster - ought to be 'Devoted for life.'"

—ADONIRAM JUDSON

LIVE IT OUT

How will you love and serve Christ through His church this week? Consider the following suggestions.

- ▶ **Pray.** Make a commitment to pray each day. Prayer is simply talking to God. Pray for your church and those who lead it. Serve them by praying for them.
- ▶ **Practice hospitality.** Identify a way you can show more love and kindness to the people in your church, in your community, and in your family.
- ▶ **Identify others' gifts.** Every member in God's church is gifted, but many Christians don't see themselves that way. Encourage others by pointing out the gifts you see in them. Bless each other with a word of encouragement, a note, a phone call, and so on.



Whether you've been a Christian for years, or whether you recently discovered your identity in Christ—you have a vital connection to the church. Don't miss out on that incredible gift.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLidentity**