

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY TWELVE

Hope Beyond Extremism: Marching Orders for
Soldiers of the Cross*1 Peter 4:7–11*

What I find in these verses are four commands and one goal. Notice the commands and observe how urgent and simple Peter keeps the goal. Since time is short, we must heed Peter's words.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN time is short, things get urgent and simple. When you see a small child fall into water, you jump right in regardless of what you're wearing or what's in your pockets. When your home catches fire, you might think about your possessions burning only after your whole family makes it out safely. When you receive the call that a loved one has just a few hours to live, you drop *everything* to go and be by his or her side.

Though these are costly decisions, they are usually not difficult to make. In these tense moments, your priorities almost naturally set themselves in the right order. When time is short and when the stakes are high, worldly possessions, busy schedules, and personal aspirations become inessential.

Central to the message of the New Testament is the imminence of Jesus' return. He *will* come back to rid from His beautiful creation the powers of sin and death for good, and He *will* do it soon. And those who follow Him must *always* be ready for His return.

So how do we prepare for Jesus' arrival? The apostle Peter answered this question in his first letter. He knew that time was short, so he offered simple instructions for how believers can set their priorities straight and live faithful and focused lives—while maintaining a posture of poise, not panic—as they await the return of their Lord.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

For Christians, prayer should sit at the very top of the prioritized “to-do” list. Our regular communion with God reminds us of our dependence on Him while aligning our desires with His. This is why King David wrote:

*“Morning, noon, and night
I cry out in my distress,
and the LORD hears my voice.” (Psalm 55:17)*

In Bible study, prayer prepares our hearts to hear and receive God’s Word. Before you turn to 1 Peter, offer your own prayer to God. Ask Him to help you see the urgency and importance of Christ’s coming return.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The world is ending.

Have you ever felt this way—especially during difficult seasons of life? The original readers of 1 Peter certainly felt like their world was coming to an end. Many of these committed believers had lost their jobs, their homes, their families, and even their lives because of their faith in Jesus Christ. So Peter offered a word of comfort . . .

“The end of the world is coming soon.” (1 Peter 4:7)

But what is comforting about the end of the world? For Peter, the end of the world wasn’t *bad* news at all. Instead, he knew it was *good* news because it meant that Christ would return to restore creation to its God-designed state of goodness and wholeness. In 4:7–11, Peter wrote to address how believers in Jesus Christ should live in light of this hope.



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Observation: Four Commands

You can't understand and apply the truth of God's Word if you don't first know what the actual text says.¹ Read *1 Peter 4:7–11* two or three times using different Bible translations. As you read, pay attention to the sense of urgency in Peter's words.

Peter opens this section with the heavy words, "The end of the world is coming soon" (4:7). What word immediately follows this statement? What kind of literary relationship does this word create between Peter's words about the end of the world and the statements that follow?

In 4:7–9, Peter offers three commands. List them below:

4:7: _____

4:8: _____

4:9: _____

According to 4:8, which of these three commands is the "most important of all"? Why does Peter have such a high view of this particular practice?



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According to *1 Peter 4:10*, what has God given to each believer of Jesus Christ? In light of this reality, what fourth command did Peter offer to his readers?

What two gifts did Peter specifically address in *4:11a*? For those who have one of these gifts, how are they to use them?

According to *4:11b*, what is the result of a believer carrying out these four commands?

Since He gets the glory, we're comfortable leaving the results with Him. Since He gets the glory, our limited umbrella of love is expanded. Since He gets the glory, our interest isn't in ourselves, but in showing courtesy and hospitality and warmth to others. Since He gets the glory, our spiritual gifts are exercised, not as a chore or a duty, but as a gift.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: One Goal

Though Peter gave his readers four specific points of instruction, he had one goal in mind: *to glorify God*.

God's glory is a theme that pops up in nearly every book of the Bible. Yet this all-important term is often difficult to define. Using your Bible-study tools, do some digging on the meaning of the word *glory*. For a free online resource, check out *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available at biblestudytools.com. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*.

What spiritual gems did you uncover as you researched this term? What is God's glory? Why is it so important for believers of Jesus Christ to glorify God with their lives?

How does following each of the four commands Peter discussed in *1 Peter 4:7–10* help us achieve the goal of glorifying God?



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Of the four commands, Peter used the most ink discussing the proper use of spiritual gifts. Yet speaking and serving aren't the only gifts God gives and uses for His purpose. The apostle Paul also discussed spiritual gifts in *Romans 12:6–8*, *1 Corinthians 12:28–30*, and *Ephesians 4:11–12*. In the space below, list every spiritual gift addressed in these passages. What stands out to you about your list?

The goal is to glorify God. Without that, your teaching becomes a drudgery, your helping leads to burnout, your evangelism is an intense thing that allows you to never rest. No, when the glory of God is your goal, it is amazing what it does to your spiritual health.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Good Soldiers of Jesus Christ

As the apostle Paul sat in prison and recognized his own time was short, he penned a letter to his protégé Timothy. He wrote to pass the torch of ministry and to share key bits of wisdom he gathered in his decades of service to Jesus Christ. Yet the letter of 2 Timothy is no theological *magnum opus*. Rather, it is a deeply personal and practical reminder of God's faithfulness.

In *2 Timothy 2:3–4*, Paul refers to Timothy as “a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” What did Paul want Timothy to do as a soldier?



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Paul shared these words because he knew what challenges stood on the horizon for Timothy, and he wanted his spiritual son to have his priorities straight. According to *2 Timothy 3:1–5*, what will happen “in the last days” (*2 Timothy 3:1*)?

According to *4:1–5*, how did Paul want Timothy to respond in light of the reality that time is short until these dark last days arrive?

Paul knew his time left on the earth would soon expire, so he encouraged Timothy to live as if his time were short as well. And we, too, are wise to heed Paul’s instructions as we seek to live as good soldiers of the cross today.



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Application: Urgent Living

In *1 Peter 4:7–11*, the apostle built his instruction on the truth that “the end of the world is coming soon” (*1 Peter 4:7*). How does knowing that time is short until Jesus’ return affect the way you view your time here on earth? How does the nearness of this event realign your priorities?

In what ways are you most tempted to seek out your own glory over God’s? In what practical ways can you cast aside your own preferences, desires, and agendas and set your eyes on God and His glory?

Look back at the list of gifts you compiled in the interpretation section. Read through the list and circle one or two gifts you believe God has given to you. You may not have a public gift like teaching, but God still wants to use you to serve His greater purposes. In what ways can use your gifts to serve others better and to bring more glory to God?



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Time is short. Jesus is coming back soon. Let's get our priorities straight. Thankfully, what He expects of us is clearly and simply laid out for us in God's Word. Pray deeply. Love fervently. Care hospitably. Serve selflessly. Do these things, and everything else will fall into place as your life shines as a beacon of hope pointing toward God and His glory.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I eagerly await the day of Christ's return. I know that my time here on earth is short, so help me understand the urgency of being a good soldier of the cross, of being a faithful witness to the gospel. Give me the wisdom and the courage to realign my priorities around loving others and glorifying You. In Jesus' glorious name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

