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**Living For God**  
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1 Peter 4:7-11

For those of you new or have not been here in a while, we are in a series entitled “You Can Make A Difference!” There are a variety of ways which we, meaning everyone here, can contribute and make a difference to God’s work in the church, the community, and the world.

These past three weeks, Doug has shared with us the importance of stepping up and making a difference in the church.

- We learned that each of us has something to offer and that we have role to play in the church.
- We learned that each of us has spiritual gifts and talents to help the church to move forward.
- Last week, we learned that we are all “interdependent”. When we come together and connect and work together, we can do great things. Each of us has a part to play in the church. Each of us should be part of a ministry at BBC.

We are on week four of the series “You Can Make A Difference.” Today we are going to be talking about “Living For God”.

Let me begin today by asking you a question: What does it mean to be a Christian and to be Living For God? What does it mean to be a Christian and to be Living for God on Cape Cod?

I know sometimes I struggle with that question. I struggle with that question because often there are two competing voices in my mind, yet each of these voices sees to be correct.

One voice is telling me that I need to be **doing more** and that I am not doing enough. The voice reminds me that God has given me gifts and talents and I should be doing more, serving more. This one voice repeatedly tells me to “do more”.

There is another voice that is saying the opposite. That voice reminds me that it’s not about “doing”, rather it is about **being with God**. God wants a relationship with me. For that to happen, I need to meet God and spend time with Him. I need to get to know Him better, read the Bible more, and make time to pray.

These competing voices challenge me to “do and serve” while also reminding me to “be still” with God. Do you feel that you also have these struggles?

So, what does it mean to be “**Living for God**”? This is something that early believers and the early church struggled with. The Apostle Peter who wrote a letter to early church addressing this need to be living for God. The early church was facing persecution, hostility, and harassment from their Greek and Roman neighbors. Peter wrote this letter to encourage the early believers. He wanted them to know that in the midst of suffering that they were important to God, that God still loved them, and they were not alone.

When you face persecution, you can begin to doubt and wonder, and begin to wonder what is most important? The Apostle Peter was bringing clarity to the early believers and the early church about what it means to be “Living for God”.

This is a reminder for all us about what is most important and essential in the eyes of God. It says in *1 Peter 4:7-11* ***The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 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.***

The Apostle Peter wanted to encourage the early believers to **focus on three things** in this passage. **I believe these three things are the essentials to “Living for God”.**

The **first essential trait** is found in *1 Peter 4:7b* “*Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.*”

What then is the first essential that the early believers and early church needed to focus on? What is it that we need to focus on? **Prayer**

What exactly is prayer? Prayer is communication with God. Prayer can be spoken, silent, or in a song. Prayer can be used to praise and thank God. Prayer can be asking for help. Prayer is about forgiveness and being thankful.

Prayer is simply talking to God. When I pray, I just share with God what I am thinking. I start out praising God and thanking Him first. Then I ask God for wisdom. Sometimes I

will share my struggles in life and ask God for help. I will have time of confession; acknowledging what I have done wrong.

Why would the Apostle Peter tell the early believers to make prayer a priority? It is because when we pray we **focus on God** and focus less on ourselves. When our eyes are on God, we do the right things. But when our eyes are on our ourselves, our focus may be pointed the wrong direction.

The Apostle Peter wanted to remind the early Christians, and also remind us, that our focus needs to be on Jesus. We need to spend time with God and meet with Him daily. Coming to church once a week or twice a month is not enough. God wants a relationship with us.

I believe there is something magical about prayer. When I start to pray, my heart and mind begin to focus on God and I begin to have peace in my heart. I begin to put God first in my thoughts. I realize that I need God in my life. When I have finished praying, I have hope because I know God is with me and will help carry me to another day.

What God wants more than anything else is our attention, our time, and making Him a priority in our life. We can do this by praying to him.

Prayer will look different for each person.

One form of prayer may be a formal prayer. It can be a prayer that we say aloud to God. It might be before a meal or before we go to bed. It's a time where we share out loud with God the highlights about our day or ask Him for help or forgiveness.

A less formal prayer time may be simply talking with God during the day. For example, sometimes I will be in my car and I will just start up a conversation with God. I will share with Him my thoughts or what I am going through. I may even share a complaint with God. This is just another form of prayer.

A third way we can pray is by writing our prayers down on paper. There are times when my mind is racing with so many thoughts that I find it best to sit down and write out my prayers. That way, I can focus on, and think through, that I am struggling with. I will write a page or two, sometimes even more. When I have finished writing, I will often then read my prayer to God. I just feel so much better every time I journal and write out my prayers.

**How do you make God a priority? One way is prayer!**

A second way to commune with, and get to know, God is reading the Bible.

I can remember in college when I started to take my faith more seriously I knew that I needed to learn more about God. I heard a speaker challenge me to read one chapter of the Bible a day. At the time, this seemed like a huge ordeal or so I thought. I was challenged to read one chapter of the Bible, meditate upon it, and then close in prayer. I found this took only 7 to 10 minutes of my day.

When I took time and read my Bible, I noticed my attitude began to change and my mind and my heart would change for the better. I would look at life differently. I would look at people differently. I would want to do the right things. I wanted to become more Christ-like.

Why are prayer and reading the Bible so important? It is because God desires a relationship us, and the only way we can have a relationship is by spending time with Him. It is what God desires most from us. Everything is else secondary.

**What does it mean to be living for God? We need to be people who make it a priority to spend time with God by praying and reading the Bible.** According to Billy Graham, “the three secrets to successful ministry are prayer, prayer and more prayer.”

The **second essential trait** for Living For God is found in *1 Peter 4:8*. “Above all, **love each other deeply**, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

What is the second essential trait needed in order to Live for God? Above all else we are to **love one another deeply**.

The early church faced persecution, hostility, and harassment. It was very hard time to be a Christian. The early church leaders understood that what matters more than anything else is how we treat each other. Peter shared that we need to treat each other with love, emphasizing us that we are to love each other deeply.

What does it mean to love deeply? The Greek word translated “deeply” is used to describe the muscles of an athlete who is straining to win the race. When we love each other deeply, it may require us to stretch our “love muscle,” to put in some extra effort with certain people in our congregation and in our life. We may have to give love to those who need it a little bit more.

I want to read you illustration that I read this week. I repeat this is just an illustration on how we are to love deeply. The piece I read states:

*There in are people in your church who will always stretch us. There is Martha, who doesn't know much about hygiene and frankly is smelly. Bill wears you out with incessant talking. Cathy is unspiritual. Don doesn't get along with Evelyn.*

*Fred treats his wife badly. Gene is a teenager, never knowing how to act with courtesy and discretion. Hilary is always grumbling. Irene has a different set of interest and values. Kevin, who means the best, but always has a problem that needs to be fixed. Then there is Penny who you've continually helped over, over, and over again. None of them are very easy to love at full stretch. Yet love is really the only answer.*

What matters most is how we treat people. We need to treat people with love and care.

As Christians, we need to be reminded that just as Jesus offered us grace and forgiveness, as followers of Jesus we need to offer grace and love to the people that need it the most in our life.

In *1 Peter 4:9* Peter gives us practical example of how love can be shown in our life.

**“Offer hospitality** to one another without **grumbling.**”

Hospitality was very important to the early church. The early church did not have buildings to meet in. They relied on hospitality of some who had resources to have meetings and worship services in their homes. Hospitality between Christians was important. They did not have hotels and as people traveled there was no place to stay. Christians would take in other Christians. They may not even know the people. Sometimes these Christians would require food and care as they traveled. It was up to the host to care for them. They would provide a meal and give them acceptance while they stayed there. Peter reminded the early church about how they that are to practice hospitality. He said, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling!” As Christians in the early church, it was their duty to show love and open their house and provide food for people and strangers.

When we practice hospitality without grumbling, we show love.

As Cape Codders, you may have some experience that relates to this. Many of you have family and friends who come for a few days or even a week during the summer time and in the fall. You look forward to people visiting. You look forward to providing hospitality. You love your family and your friends. At some point, maybe after a few days, the excitement may wear off, and your heart and attitude may begin to change. You may begin to grumble.

What is Peter challenging us to do? We need to **offer hospitality without grumbling.**

We should not complain about family and friends as they stay with us. Yes, they may get on our nerves a little bit. They may get demanding. They may not appreciate the

food with give them. They might even break something in our house. What Peter is challenging us to do? **We need love these people deeply.**

When we offer hospitality, our goal in hospitality is to offer love and care. We need to meet our guests with grace...even when it is hard. When those times comes, I want you think back to Jesus. Jesus reminds us that He loves us even when we don't deserve it. What does God want us to do? He wants us to love without grumbling. He wants us love our guests deeply. We do this because we love God.

The **third essential trait** for Living For God is found in *1 Peter 4:10-11*. " Each of you should **use whatever gift you have received to serve others**, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 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. "

The third essential principal from the passage is simply that we are **serve others with our spiritual gifts**. God has given each us as believers spiritual gifts, talents and abilities.

What are we to do with these spiritual gifts? These spiritual gifts and talents are to help the body of Christ. We are to serve others. These gifts are to be shared and passed on to others. God wants us to help serve other people inside the church walls as well as outside the church walls.

In *verses 10 and 11*, we see two types of gifts singled out in two broad categories.

- 1) Speaking Gifts – Speaking gifts are seen in people who have the gift speaking the very words of God. Examples include preaching and teaching, This can include Small Group Leaders and Sunday School Teachers
- 2) Non-Speaking Gifts – Non Speaking gifts are seen in people who have the gifts of service. Examples include the gifts of helps, craftsmanship, hospitality, and serving.

The person who has the gift of speaking should do so to bring people face to face with God. The person who has the gift of service should work and serve with the emphasis of pointing people to Jesus. The aim of everything we do... whether we have speaking gift or non-speaking gift... is that God should be praised and glorified.

God can use your spiritual gifts and abilities to serve people who need our help. When we use our gifts and serve. God will be praised and glorified.

What does it mean to **live for God**? Simply:

1. **Prayer**
2. **Love one another deeply**
3. **Serve Others with our Spiritual Gifts**

In all things we are to praise and glorify God....