

1 Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners
“Life Together on the Edge of the Temporary World”
1 Peter 4:7-11

Take a first look.

I. DUSTIN HOFFMAN IS THE ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING ACTOR who has played a great diversity of characters over his career, from gangsters to pirates to a developmentally challenged person. In an interview some years ago, Hoffman revealed his plans for the epitaph on his tombstone. He says it will simply read, “I knew this was going to happen.”¹

At any moment, the reality of what it means to live on the edge of the temporary can break in on us. If we know this is going to happen, what difference is it making in the way we live, the way we relate to each other, and the way we relate to God?

II. Peter wrote, “The end of all things is near.” He declared, along with the rest of the New Testament writers, that since the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, we have entered the Last Days of earth. We should be able to see, on our horizon, the very edge of this temporary world. The eternal threatens to invade and consume at any moment. Though widespread suffering from persecution is a sign that this horizon may be right over the next hill, we should always live with a continual expectation of the possible interruption of even this present moment. In light of such a possible interruption, he challenges us to cultivate three priorities in the Christian life and in the Church.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 4:7-11.

I. ON THE EDGE OF THE TEMPORARY WORLD, CHRISTIANS MUST BE READY TO PRAY. v. 7

1. This involves thinking clearly. It is impossible to pray if our frame of mind is more worldly than Christ-centered, if our emotions are controlled by the circumstances of our present lives, or if we have not got a good grasp of essential Christian teaching.

A—The best preparation for prayer is right thinking which leads both to good theology and ethical judgment. In short, if we are thinking rightly about God, we can then think rightly about how we live and how we treat other people.

I—Ken Olan was a motivational speaker who lives in Houston, Texas. When he has tried to help people understand the importance of clear goals, he would divide his listeners into two groups. He would give each group an identical puzzle and then give them a time limit for getting all the pieces into place. But he would only give one of the groups the box, so they could see how the final puzzle was meant to appear.

Without exception, he says, the group with the box maintained their enthusiasm while the other group floundered and lost morale.²

¹ *IOW*, Winter 98, p. 5.

² *In Other Words*, Volume 8, Issue 1, p. 1.

This analogy reminds us of the value of a clear-minded vision, based on what God has revealed in Scripture and in Christ, of what human life is meant to be. Without this picture, people in every age have floundered, trying to piece human life together with only their own visions to guide them.

2. *This involves being self-controlled.* Again, if our minds are controlled by some addiction, whether to alcohol (a primary idea here), or to drugs, or to sexual stimulation, or to food, or something else, we cannot pray effectively.

A—Have we found the victory of Christ over everything that might turn our hearts away from dependence on Him? We must be fortified by the truth of God against all kinds of temptation.

I—David Young asked, “Can you imagine what fish might say to one another when they see a fishing lure? From underneath a log two bass watch a plastic worm wiggle by. One says, ‘That worm means death!’ The other replies, ‘You’re just an extremist. Don’t be so radical.’

“Maybe two walleye, one old, the other younger, watch a glittering spinner go by. The old pike says, ‘Beware, there are hooks on that thing.’ But the younger says, ‘You old foggy, you just don’t want me to have any pleasure.’ And he makes his final surge for the sparkling lure.”³

Why do we need self-control? So we can be free to respond to the promptings of God's Spirit when He calls us to speak, or to act, or to pray.

3. *This involves praying (!).* If we think clearly and maintain self-control in order to pray, then we must pray!

A—We must begin to pray as though everything that matters depends on the work of Christ Himself, because it does.

I—Jim Burnett is a pastor who told about an incident that taught him something about childlike trust, and about prayer. The family dog named Molly, a black female chow, was struck by a car and carried about 20 feet. He saw it all happen. She slowly picked herself up from the pavement and began walking in circles.

A neighbor advised penning her. Fearful that in her condition she might bite his five-year-old son who played with her often, Burnett took the advice and penned her up.

That night, he says, his little boy began praying for his dog, and the next day Pastor “expected-to-be-spiritual-man-of-faith” Burnett saw a miracle. He hesitantly went out to the pen expecting the worst, and there was Molly, he says, “vibrant and raring to go, moving as if nothing had happened.”

“God reminded me through my son and a dog,” he confesses, “that He still answers prayers offered in faith.” And then he reflects, “No wonder Jesus, while on earth, used a child’s faith as an example of how one should receive the Kingdom (Mark 10:15); they are the ones that never doubt God’s ability to do anything.”⁴

I have told people many times that if I have a five-year-old child and a seventy-five-year-old seasoned saint praying for me I can face the world, the flesh, and the devil, and win every time. They have clout. Each is able simply to trust God, and to pray accordingly. The younger prays on the simple trust of the promise of God related to him/her from adults. The other prays from faith born of both the promise of God and of the experience of God’s protection and provision through life.

³ *Proclaim*, Spring 98, p. 23.

⁴ *Proclaim*, Spring 98, p. 20.

II. ON THE EDGE OF THE TEMPORARY, CHRISTIANS MUST BE READY TO LOVE. v. 8

1. *This kind of love is self-giving.* The verb in verse 8 is a form of ἀγάπη (agape), the kind of love that chooses to value the object of love highly and treat that person accordingly, the kind of love that God has shown us at the cross of Christ (see Romans 5:8).

2. *This kind of love goes below the surface.* I. H. Marshall comments that this idea of loving one another “deeply,” has to do with loving “at full stretch.” He says, “... this love will be stretched to the limit by the demands made on it.”⁵

A—Are we willing to be stretched by the Holy Spirit in loving others in Jesus’ name?
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I—Sometimes our hearts are stretched as God shows us how greatly others need loving actions. Remember Jimmy Durante? He was the world-class entertainer with the big nose and the gruff voice. After WWII, he was asked to be a part of a show for our country’s veterans. He said yes, but with one reservation. He was really busy, and he would only have time for a short monologue. The director eagerly agreed, and Durante was booked. He came and did his monologue as scheduled. But something happened. He didn’t stop at the appointed time but moved right into other material. The crowd was ecstatic. His brief appearance grew into a 30-minute performance. He took his final bow and left the stage.

The director questioned him afterward. Everyone was thrilled that he had gone on, but they wondered why. From the wings, Durante pointed to the front row and said, “There’s the reason I stayed.” Seated next to each other were two war heroes who had both lost an arm in battle. One had lost his right arm, the other his left. Together they were creating lively applause that crept right into a compassionate entertainer’s heart, stretching his schedule.⁶

3. *This kind of love is forgiving.* This is a part of the stretching experience of loving others. It will stretch us beyond ourselves to forgive others for the flaws of their character that cause behavior that either just bugs us or that has hurt us.

A—Have we found the power of God’s forgiving love in our expression of faith?

I—Ruth Stafford Peale wrote a few years ago, “It seems a mother took her young son, eight or nine years old, to a concert by [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski, the great Polish statesman and concert pianist, because she thought the child had some musical talent and might benefit from hearing a genius play. They sat close to the stage, where the curtain was up, revealing the grand piano. Paderewski was in the wings; it wasn’t quite time to start.

The mother turned to speak to an acquaintance behind her. As she did, the little boy wriggled out of his seat, ran up the steps to the stage, sat down and began to play ‘Chopsticks’ with all his might. The mother was appalled. The audience gasped as Paderewski himself strode onto the stage.

“But instead of being angry the maestro smiled, sat down on the piano bench with the little boy, whispered to him to continue and then, putting both arms around the little figure began to improvise a soft but brilliant accompaniment to the childish music. He kept it up until the audience, charmed and fascinated, burst into applause.”

⁵ 1 Peter in IVP series, p. 143.

⁶ Ibid.

Peale concludes, “I like to think that perhaps when we finally come into God’s presence and try to explain our lives with all the faults and flaws, He will put His loving arms around us and turn our faltering notes into a triumphant song of redemption and fulfillment.”⁷

This is what He calls us to do in His name for those with weaknesses and irritating habits of speech and action who perhaps have hurt us. Extend the arms of Jesus around them and invite Him to play His music about their lives.

4. *This kind of love is welcoming.* Here the ancient practice of hospitality is urged. Often, the traveling Christian teacher would need a place to stay, or the local church would need to meet in a person’s home. Hospitality was a practical necessity where motels and church buildings were seldom available.

A—Are our hearts and homes open to the family of God?

I—Without much comment, I must compliment my lovely wife, Jeannie, here. She has the gift of hospitality. Our home has always been open, despite my often and doubtless irritating resistance. I believe that if left to myself, I would tend to be reclusive when at home. Jeannie is the perfect foil, the counterpart, the “suitable helper,” that someone like me needs to keep me from totally hibernating into the cave of the hermit. And just maybe, I help her to have a quiet moment or two along the way—maybe. 😊

III. ON THE EDGE OF THE TEMPORARY, CHRISTIANS MUST BE READY TO SERVE. vv. 10-11

1. *Every Christian has been given gifts that equip him/her for the servant-life.* Peter wrote, “*Each one* should use whatever gift he has received” This is both a command and an assumption. The assumption is that every Christian is gifted for ministry. The command is, “You must use what God has given you as a calling from Him.”

2. *Each of these is different and therefore needed.* This is the Body principle that is developed so eloquently by the Apostle Paul (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). Unique roles but completely interdependent. One body but many members.

A—Are we seeking to discover and offer to God through His Church and in His world what He has gifted us to do?
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I—The small and unnoticeable gift is still vital. In his book *Margin*, Richard Swenson writes, “Most Americans [who were alive at the time] can recall what they were doing on January 28, 1986. On that historic date, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded just 73 seconds into flight. Seven families were robbed by death and an entire nation was racked with grief. All of this loss was ultimately blamed on one inexpensive O-ring. Records revealed that the Space Shuttle was comprised of one million components. In this sea of mechanical makeup, it took just one part to destroy the whole. One million parts did their job but one failed and disaster occurred. Most people feel their role within the church is not only small and insignificant, but inconsequential as well. This erroneous doctrine of the church causes

⁷ From *Biblical Illustrator*, illustration database.

individuals to believe their behavior can't hurt the church. But like that small and seemingly insignificant O-ring, one failed performance can produce catastrophic results.”⁸

3. *Speaking gifts must be used with God's authority.* Both the content and the manner of speaking for God must be in harmony. We are called to speak His revealed truth, not our personal speculations. There may be times when speculations should be discussed, but they are not proclaimed as the truth of God.

A—Has God gifted and called us in speaking ministry? Then we must speak clearly, accurately, and with confidence the truth of God in Christ.

I—The truth of God will not always correspond to the latest fad. It will not offer instant gratification to our Pop Tart culture. But it will still be the truth. It will be what people need to hear, even though they may not welcome it at first.

I used to like Snapple, before I gave up on sugar and most caffeine in my drinks. At the end of the last millennium, I got a kick out of what they were printing on their bottle caps. Their new trademark was “Win nothing instantly!” Then the cap had all the rest: “Look under cap.” “No purchase necessary.” “Open to residents of U.S. and Puerto Rico. Game ends 10/31/98.” There was even a toll-free number one could call to get “Rules and free game piece mailing instructions.”

This was not only a clever marketing angle, but it was usually the truth on the other “win instantly” games. Most of the time, the *company* wins from your business and you “Win *nothing* instantly!”

People in our “win instantly” culture need to be challenged with the truth of God. It will offer no shortcuts to fulfilling the call and will of God. It will offer not bursts of emotion alone, but a calling to develop the character of Jesus Christ over the long haul.

4. *Serving gifts must be used with God's strength.* All non-speaking gifts are in view here. Surely, we must not trust in our own strength to do what God has called us to do, whether it is in showing mercy by bringing food to a person just out of the hospital, mowing a lawn, setting up for a potluck dinner, or running the sound system for a worship service—or a myriad of other acts of service. God's work must all be done in God's strength.

A—Are we relying on the strength of God for the unique calling God has given to us?

I—If we can do it in our own strength, it probably is not a calling from God. If we are trying to fulfill His calling on our life in our own power, we will be continually frustrated. “Apart from me you can do nothing,” said Jesus (John 15:5). He meant it. We can bear no spiritual fruit without abiding in Him.

A couple of decades ago, I was preaching for four days in the First Baptist Church of North Bend, Oregon. North Bend is right next to Coos Bay in the south-central area of the Oregon coast. As I was worshipping through the musical element of the service one night, I was again overcome with the absurdity of my situation. “What am I doing here? What do I have to offer to this congregation? How did I get myself into this situation?” Such questions reeled through my mind.

The only answer I came to was this: “I am here because God has sent me here. I have nothing in myself to offer these people. I have only the Word of God under the power of the

⁸ Richard Swenson, *Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need* (NavPress, 1992), p. 48.

Holy Spirit.” That was enough to get me on my feet at the proper time. It was enough to get me to my feet today, as well!

5. *The result will be praise to God through Jesus Christ.*

A—This should be both the goal and the result of all service to God: to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

I—When Pastor Jim Henry addressed the Northwest Baptist Convention in 1997, he told about a missionary physician who was treating 150 patients a day. The doctor told that 70% of them come to him because of worry, fear, or depression. He talked to them, and then they would often say, “You are a great physician.” His usual answer was, “No, I’m not, but I work for Him!” That often sets up a powerful witness opportunity.

Take it home (applications).

I. When Jesus comes back in power and great glory, the Christian’s response will be “I knew this was going to happen.” Are we living appropriately on the edge of this temporary world? Are we living in the light of eternity?

II. What should we do differently as those who have received the eternal truth of God as temporary citizens of earth?

1. Accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior—today.

2. Adjust our ethics to match what Jesus Himself revealed and what the apostles of the Lord confirmed in the New Testament.

3. Offer ourselves to Him to live the servant-life.

4. Pray earnestly.

5. Love deeply.