

# Keeping Going Together in Light of the End

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Preacher: James Burnett

[ 0 : 0 0 ] live in light, to encourage them in their faith, and to remind them how they need to live in light of their faith, even if they want to live in hard times. And as he does that, he also points them to the reason that they want to continue on through those hard times, and that's because of the Lord Jesus, of who he is, and what he's done for them. It does mean that quite often we come to passages that are a lot about how we should live, instructions, and sometimes that's not as easy to sit and listen to, and so as we go through it, there are things that Peter is saying that we should be doing as God's people, and so we'll frame that in the way he intends it to be framed, that we're doing this in light of Jesus, we're doing this to be like Jesus, but the reality is that as Christians, we're called to live differently, and through God's word, he often chooses to remind us of that. So yeah, we'll work through this in a moment, but some of you will probably remember earlier in the year, I was wearing a sling, my shoulder, I had a surgery on it, but I played rugby for the first time a few weeks ago. Didn't go very well, don't worry, probably not going to play again, but as I was playing, I was kind of concerned about my shoulder, but it turned out the biggest problem was actually that I was just really, really unfit, and hadn't actually ran.

For a long time. And so as the game went on, I was kind of struggling more and more, and it caught towards the end, and I was just thinking at this point, like I really wish they would just take me off, like I have nothing left to give here. And then the ref said, the referee said, last five minutes, guys. And in that moment, I thought, do you know what, maybe I could do five more minutes. I could push on for five more. And I think that idea that when we're doing something or working at something, and we know the end is close, we know the end is in sight, we're able to push through, we're able to push on. That's what it was for me that Saturday afternoon. And that idea, I think, is something that Peter here is picking up on. He begins, you'll notice in verse seven, by saying that the end of things is at hand. He's saying that you're now living in the last days. These people who are struggling, who are having a hard time, he's reminding them that it won't always go on like this.

You are in the last days, Jesus. He has come once. We're now in this in-between time, and he will come again. And so he's saying, because we're almost at the end, he says, therefore, you see that in verse seven, and he's going to then go on to tell them how they are to continue living. Because they know the end is coming, he's saying, keep going until you get there.

And now, of course, in their lifetime, Jesus, he never came back. He might not return in our lifetime. Maybe he will. But I think the point here that Peter is making to his readers, and by extension to us this morning, is that we have to have our eyes fixed on that great future that is coming.

If we remember, like we heard last week, that Jesus will judge the living and the dead, then that's what's to keep us going in these moments of hardship, these times that we're struggling, remembering what is coming, that the end is in sight, and to continue on living for him.

[ 3 : 31 ] Remember that great hope that is ours. Something that we can do together, I think, remembering that hope, encourage each other, and I think as a church, as a people that are being written to that, that's a big part of the calling here, to remain united in these things. And so, as we ourselves go through hard times, we should be encouraging each other in the gospel.

There's three key areas in these verses that Peter here wants to remind the people, to call them how they are to live, in light that the end is coming. And so, we're going to work through those three areas and think a bit about them. The first area that he speaks of is that, in light of the end, of all things being at hand, he says, be people who pray. That's in verse 7.

Be people who pray. We read there, therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. That praying has been something that Peter's spoken about a few times now in this letter. Particularly, he's spoken about it in the reality that the way we live, our prayers can often be hindered. That was said in chapter 3, verse 7. And when Peter spoke there to husbands, he said, live in this certain way so that your prayers may not be hindered. And then later in that chapter, chapter 3, he quotes from a psalm. The psalm says, the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. His ears are open to their prayer. And then it seems here that he's calling them to be in the right state.

So, as again, that their prayers might not be hindered. It's quite a stark thought, I think, that how we live can have an effect, can hinder our prayers. And so, I think we need to just be clear that this isn't bringing our salvation into question. Our salvation isn't less or more certain depending if we sin or how we live. Our salvation, the Bible assures us, is completely certain because the work of Jesus wasn't a partial work. It was a complete work. It's a finished work. Our salvation is completely assured in him. But I think what Peter here is getting at, it seems to be that when we're living in sin, when we're not seeking to repent of it, our prayers, they won't be heard or responded to in the same way. When we are not self-controlled or sober-minded, in those moments, we have to come to the Lord. We have to recognize that we've messed up. We have to ask for his help to change. And not just to try and ignore it or deny it and act like everything's fine and continue on normally, but to take responsibility for it. At the teens group, we were talking about just that on Sunday night, that there's real godliness to be seen when we're honest about those shortcomings and we're struggling and we mess up and we're honest with each other and with the Lord. There's godliness in our shortcomings in those moments. Don't continue in those sins that Peter's speaking going to feel repent of them. And then our prayers, they won't be hindered. I don't think it's unfair to highlight that Peter's not just throwing around instructions that are easy for him to say, that are maybe irrelevant to him. Peter himself, the Bible tells us that he struggled with self-control.

And Jesus asked him to keep watch in the garden of Gethsemane. He kept falling asleep. He reacted to Jesus being arrested and he cut off the ear of the high priest, the high priest's servant. And so Peter himself, he knows what it's like to struggle with self-control and he knows himself, therefore, how damaging that can be for how our close relationship with God feels. He's more than qualified to give this instruction. So I guess all of that to say that we need to be a people who are godly in our shortcomings, meaning that when we sin, we admit it, we take responsibility for it, and we then genuinely repent as we pursue holiness with God's help. And I think that if we do that, I think it removes any confusion, any worry or anxiety about the idea of our prayers being hindered. If we come to the Lord faithfully when we've messed up and ask for his forgiveness and ask for his help, our prayers will certainly not be hindered. But if there's anything on that that you want to ask or to clarify, then please do feel free to grab me after and we can chat a little bit more about it.

[ 8 : 39 ] But moving on to think about the prayers, prayer itself and why Peter is calling them to be people who pray. There's obviously lots of reasons that we should all be people who pray. There's just two that I'm going to mention that seems particularly important for those that Peter was writing to as he calls them to be praying people. I think firstly, what kind of state an individual's prayer life is in.

It's often a really good indication of how they're doing spiritually. When someone's prayer life, it starts to waver, they begin to neglect praying. When even they lose the desire to pray and they gradually stop. It almost always has a profound impact on our faith. We begin to feel further and further away from God. That close relationship that is ours through Christ, it begins to feel more and more distant. And the result of that, I think, is often that we become more likely to give in to temptation. We become more likely to be ruled by the passions of our flesh. Now, if we're not praying, we find ourselves then under stress or like those that Peter was writing to, we find ourselves facing hard times because of our faith. In those moments, we're going to be so much more likely to crumble.

And Peter, I'm sure, was aware of this reality. Those he's writing to, they need to have a faithful prayer life in order that they feel close to the Lord. That'll help them to be faithful in the times that are hard when they're being persecuted. I know myself, when my prayer life is in a good place, I find coming to God in repentance much easier. It happens much more naturally. I don't sit and kind of continue in those sins the same way that I might otherwise. When we're in that posture of prayer and we mess up, it's natural to apologize for slipping up and ask God to help us. But whereas when we're not praying, that idea of repentance can feel much less natural. Sometimes it can feel forced. It can not actually feel all that genuine.

And so for these reasons, Peter knew that the people needed to be praying people. They had to be in that good place with the Lord so that when these pressures from outside come upon them, they're able to remain firm because they're so close to the Lord. They're praying people. And secondly, I think another reason he calls them to be a people who pray is that they need to demonstrate their dependence upon the Lord. Quite often, if you've been here for a while, when we speak at the prayer meeting, Ali often says that on Wednesday we're going to meet to pray. And as we do that, it's so important because as we meet and pray together, we are demonstrating our dependence on the Lord. And as he calls them to be a people who pray here, he's calling them to demonstrate that they depend upon the Lord. That's an essential thing for these people as they are facing persecution because of their faith. They need to depend fully on the Lord or they're going to fall at the first hurdle. It's so important for them to be dependent on the Lord and for that to be seen through their commitment to prayer. In verse 11, you'll see that

Peter kind of highlights that all of these things we're going to work through, although they're separate, maybe seen a little bit detached in some senses. They're all to be done for God's glory.

[ 12 : 49 ] And so as he calls these people here to be a people who pray, that's through their prayer life, through their faithfulness and prayer, through ensuring that they're repenting of the wrong things they're doing so that their prayers aren't hindered. Through doing all of that, the hope is that it is God himself who will receive the glory. So Peter calls them to be a people who pray.

And then secondly, we see that they're to be a people of profound love. See that in verses 8 and 9, they're to be a people of profound love. Verse 8, the apostle Peter, he writes, above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins.

This exhortation to profound love, it is central to the Christian faith. It serves in a sense as a real cornerstone for our community of believers. Understanding the significance of this call to profound love, it helps us to grasp not only its importance, but also how it impacts our relationships, but also impacts our witness in the world. Peter emphasizes that love, in a sense, should be our primary focus. He says, above all. This phrase tells us that love isn't just one of the many things that we're supposed to commit to, but in a sense, it's actually the foundation upon which all the other Christian actions, the way we live, are built. In a world around us where we see division, we see hate, we see conflict. Peter reminds us that love is to be what distinguishes us from the world, from others. It's to be such a key characteristic of the Christian. It's not just a kind of little show of affection, but it's a committed and it's a selfless choice to prioritize the well-being of others in our fellowship as we seek to reflect the love of Christ. The term earnestly, we see in there, that indicates as well that it's not casual, it's not surface level that it's been spoken about here. This kind of love, it requires effort, it requires commitment, and that therefore means that it's not always easy, especially when faced with challenges going on, like offenses from others within the church, but even outwith the church.

Now, Peter recognizes that Christians will inevitably encounter conflict within the community, and yet he urges believers to respond with a love that seeks reconciliation and healing rather than causing more division. On the idea of love being difficult, he gives an example of how we can love, how we can live that love out. He speaks of hospitality, and Peter calls them to be a people who offer hospitality without grumbling. In churches, there's always going to be people that we get on really well with, and others that we have to work quite hard to love. I'm going to be looking and thinking, yeah, that's you, James. But that is just life. We're always going to get on better with others in all spheres of life, but Peter is telling those that he's writing to hear that they've to show hospitality to everyone, and not just those that they're getting on best with. They're to demonstrate love to everyone, and they're to do it without grumbling. It's much easier said than done, but that's the love that he's speaking about in these verses. The people he's writing to, they would have been meeting for church in each other's homes. It wouldn't have been like this on a Sunday, but there would have been probably smaller groups in homes. And could you imagine how hard it would have been if you were there, and you knew that people were grumbling that they had to have you around to their house? We need to love, we need to show hospitality, but we have to not just do it for the sake of doing it, because it's the right thing, but do it without grumbling, doing it as we rejoice in who we are, and who they are, in the Lord Jesus. Christ himself, he gives us great examples of doing just this, the examples of, in the gospels. How often does Jesus go to those who weren't loved in society?

How often does he go to the outcasts, the people that others had no time for? Jesus went to them, and he showed them love. And as his followers, we're to follow in his footsteps, we're to love everyone well in the church, and we're to work hard at it, and we can demonstrate that love through our hospitality.

[18:38] Peter, then he speaks of love being something that can cover a multitude of sins. I remember hearing someone speaking on this before, and they used an illustration of what they think Peter's saying there. I thought it was quite helpful. They were speaking about the engine in a car, and they were saying that as long as there's oil going through the engine, then quite often that it'll keep going, that things will work quite well. But as soon as the oil dries up, very quickly, the engine will start to show a lot of problems, and there'll be a big issue and a costly issue as well. I think that's similar to this idea here of love. I think in our church or in our relationships, when love is present, when love is flowing through that relationship, so often we're able to have real, honest chats about things that have gone wrong.

We're able to overlook, when people mess up, forgive them. But when love isn't present, when love isn't there, when things are hard, when people aren't kind or harsh with us, it's very difficult to look past when they do us wrong. And so I think that idea of love being a bit like the oil in an engine of a car, I think that's quite helpful, that when we do have a lot of love for each other, that we're much more likely to work through a lot of things together. But when love is absent, a lot of problems and cracks are going to appear.

So he says that love covers a multitude of sins. I think this is a kind of idea that's seen in the Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 10 verse 12. It teaches us there that love has the power to overlook faults. In practical terms, it means that when we love earnestly, that we're much more inclined to forgive others, to bear with each other's shortcomings. It doesn't imply that sin is then just kind of excused or ignored or it doesn't matter. But it highlights to us the power of love in dealing with sin. Love between believers, it encourages a spirit of grace. It enables believers to confront sin, to deal with it compassionately rather than with condemnation. And so we're to be a community that is marked by this profound love as we seek to create a space where we all feel safe and valued, able to be honest with each other without the fear of judgment. When believers love earnestly, they find this kind of ability to trust and be open, which allows those honest chats.

It allows spiritual growth. But I think when we have this commitment to profound love with each other, it makes the need for accountability not as daunting. Sometimes having those relationships where we're held accountable for how we live, to be honest in those can be really hard. You're scared at how people respond when you tell them things that you've been up to, things you've done, things you've thought, things you're struggling with. But when we're committed to loving each other so well, it makes that accountability so much more natural. Because we know that when we're honest with our brothers, they're not going to be judgmental, but actually they're going to respond in love, not in condemnation, respond, desire in our best in those moments. And so love, as Peter said, above all, love each other because it is so important and it permeates so many aspects of the Christian life.

Love as well. Jesus says in John 13, 35, by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

[ 22 : 54 ] This love, it becomes then not just a thing about us in here, but it becomes a powerful witness to those who are in the world. They see the way we are with each other. They see the profound love that we don't just live out, but that we commit to and that we prioritize between each other.

And so this call to profound love, what is it based on? Why should we do it? What is the source of this love? Our capacity and our desire to love like this, it flows from our relationship with the living God.

John 4, 19. 1 John 4, 19. We love because he first loved us. And so understanding that reality that we're not just doing it for the sake of it, we're doing it in response to the love we received in the gospel.

That is why we love, because he first loved us. He has demonstrated the most profound act of love at the cross.

As he went there to die in our place, that was how much he loved us. That's how profound his love is for us. And the people that he went to the cross to die for, they weren't good people.

[ 24 : 20 ] They weren't the people that are easy to love. They were people like you and like me. They were people who by choice had made themselves his enemies through how we've lived.

And yet, he demonstrated the most profound love that is known to man as for those very people who had chosen to be his enemies are the ones that he went to the cross to die in the place of.

And so, it is that man who was nailed to our cross and our place who calls us now to respond because he's loved us by loving others.

So, Peter here, he calls the people to be a people of profound love and to reflect the love of Christ to those around them.

So, Peter calls them to be people who pray, to be a people of profound love. And now, thirdly, and finally, Peter calls them to be a people of purposeful service, a people of purposeful service.

[ 25 : 30 ] 1 Peter 4, 10 and 11 here, he exhorts the believers to use their spiritual gifts, to use all of their gifts in service to others.

We read, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. This call here to purposeful service, it's so important for the life of the Christian community and it reflects the character of Christ to others.

Christ himself who came not to be served, but to serve. Peter begins here by acknowledging that each believer, they have received a gift.

And this implies that no one's left out. Every Christian is equipped with gifts to serve. Whether they're talents, abilities, specific roles within the church, time, these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit who empowers believers for these acts of service.

Recognizing and understanding our gifts is really important. Sometimes it can be hard to work out.

[ 26 : 55 ] What is our gifts? It's worth exploring that, praying about that, asking people, what do you think my gifts are? How can I serve the Lord and his people in this church?

In the New Testament and elsewhere, the Apostle Paul, he writes a bit more on this idea of service, 1 Corinthians 12, where he compares the church itself to a body with many parts, each part having its own function.

And just as a body cannot function properly without all of its parts, so the church relies on each and every person to fulfill their role.

That's how the church thrives, as we all work together to serve by using our gifts. Peter says to us, to serve one another. I think that highlights the family aspect of our faith.

We're not called to be Christians by ourselves. We're called to be part of a body of the Lord's people. And it's within that that we're to serve each other.

[ 28 : 04 ] It's about building up the body of Christ. It's about meeting the needs of others. There's also the mention of speaking, God's word here, as being a particular gifting.

I think we can take that in more than one way. I think people are gifted to teach God's word, maybe from here or in Bible studies, different contexts. And that's great.

We need that. God calls us to be committed to that and to set people apart for that role of service. But also, I think we all share in the calling to speak God's word into different contexts.

Whether that's with friends. Whether that's in conversations where people are struggling. And you have a verse you want to share with them. You want to build them up in their faith. Or even if you want to challenge them for the way they've been living.

I think we all have that same calling in our lives. That we're to speak the truth to those around us. To speak the truth in love.

[ 29 : 12 ] And this idea of service. Again, I'm hoping we're seeing that these all link to the Lord Jesus. They're much more fulfilled than him.

And we are following in his footsteps. This idea of service. I think we see in a lot of areas of the Lord Jesus' life. But one of them is in John 13.

We see there a real expression of our Lord's character. His love and his desire to serve others. Jesus there, he washes his disciples' feet.

He demonstrates there that true greatness in the kingdom comes through humble service. When believers serve one another, they are seeking in those moments to be like the Lord Jesus.

They are seeking to live out the gospel in tangible ways. So that the gospel that we believe in is then seen through how we are then conducting ourselves.

[ 30 : 22 ] Peter also says that we're to be good stewards of God's varied grace here. And I think the word stewardship speaks a little bit of responsibility.

As people who have received God's grace, we are then entrusted with this task of managing our own gifts wisely. And effectively.

And so this requires us to be intentional. To look for opportunities. To look for ways in which we can use our gifts. Whether that's to sign up on different roles.

To get involved in different areas of the church. Whatever it may be. Whatever is on your mind. We don't have to wait until someone comes and says, we really need someone to do this.

When we see ways that we can offer service. When we see ways that we can use our gifts. We should be intentional about that. We should delight to offer our service.

[ 31 : 19 ] I'm not saying that one person should do everything. But we should all be able to find a way that we can serve. Not just each other. But the Lord. As we look to serve in this church.

For his glory. And this service. Is of course also rooted in that previous point of profound love.

We want to serve each other. And we want to serve the Lord. Not to make ourselves feel good. Not because we just really think that we should. But actually because we've experienced that profound love of the Lord Jesus.

And we now want to show our love to others. Through seeking to serve them as best as we can. And so that's service.

That's a call on our lives. To serve each other. And to serve the Lord through what we do. Let me just briefly recap those points. And then we'll finish our time this morning.

[ 32 : 22 ] And Peter he calls them. Those he's writing to hear. In light of the last days. In light of the end of the times. He says that you've got to be people who pray.

You've got to prepare yourself. Prepare your heart. So that your prayers aren't hindered. And then come to the Lord in prayer. And we see that. Modelled in the person of the Lord Jesus.

And when he was on this earth. He was a man. Who was committed to praying. He was a man who went away. Often by himself. To spend time with the Lord.

In prayer. And as his followers. We follow in his footsteps. And we seek to be people. Who are marked by praying. And then to be people of profound love.

That's the con for those. That he's writing to. But also for us. We're to demonstrate that profound love. In our lives with each other. How we are with each other. And how we treat each other.

[ 33 : 23 ] And again. It's a reflection of the love. That we have first received. In the gospel. And then finally. We just thought there about. Purposeful service. And how we need to look for ways.

To serve each other. How we need to recognize. That we have each been given different gifts. God's varied grace. We've been given different gifts. And we seek to serve each other.

Out of love for each other. And out of love for the Lord. And so. Yeah. Peter. A lot of instructions. A lot of things. Of how we are to live.

And yet. I think they are still so helpful. To be reminded of. The specific way. That as God's people. We are to live. And conduct ourselves. In this fallen world. And we are to do it all.

With our eyes fixed. Upon that final day. When the Lord Jesus comes back. To bring us. Into his kingdom. Forever. And these things.

[ 34 : 18 ] Again. They are not just about us. But Peter frames it all. And it is kind of. Towards the end there. That we do it all. For God's glory. And we seek to put these things.

Into practice. Into response. To what has been done for us already. But we do it. That God's glory. Might be made known. Through us. People. And who might see God's glory.

Through how we live. But also those outwith. The church. As we. Make known. The Lord Jesus. As glory is known. Through how we live. And that is. The great call.

On our lives. The great privilege. As well. On our lives. To live for him. To follow in the footsteps. Of our master. And Peter. Tells us. He ends. And we'll end on this as well.

He ends by. Reminding them. That all that they do. Is going to lead. To God. Himself. Being gloried. Who is completely justified. Of that glory. As Peter says.

[ 35 : 13 ] For to him. Belong. Glory. And dominion. Forever. And ever. That is. The God that we serve. The one. To whom. All glory. And all dominion.

Is due. Let's pray. Together. Let's pray. Father God. We thank you. So much.

For your word. Thank you. You've given it to us. That we can spend time. Looking at it together. Thank you. That it's so. Helpful. So relevant. Thank you. For the heart. That you gave Peter. For this church.

And for the way. That you encouraged them. To stand firm. And to live out. Their faith. Even in the midst of. Real hardship. And persecution. We pray for ourselves.

That you'd help us. All to be. A people. Who are. Committed to praying. Who are committed. To loving. Profoundly. And you're committed. To purposeful.

[ 36 : 07 ] Service. Would you lead us. In those things. We recognize. That we're going to mess up. At times. Would you help us. To come to you. In repentance. In those moments. And would you. By the work of your spirit. Continue to transform us.

So that as we seek. To follow in our. Master's footsteps. You would do that. Better. And better. Until. That day. When. We are called home. And we are made. Perfectly. Like him.

But until then. Continue to lead us forward. In faith. As we seek. To. Make known. To those around us. Our Lord Jesus. Through. Putting these things.

Into practice. And we ask these things. That you might receive. All the glory. All the honor. And all the praise. Amen.