

Unexpected | Week 4

Mother's Day

Daniel Hebert, Author

In just a few days we will pay homage to mothers across the nation. Have you given thought to what you will do for your mother or a mother in your life? Some of the most common gifts include cards, flowers, restaurant outings, gift cards, clothing, a spa treatment, books, jewelry, and even gardening tools. The phones light up on Mother's Day. Approximately 122 million phone calls are made to moms in America on that day alone. It is a good time of year to be a florist. One quarter of all flowers sold annually are purchased as Mother's Day gifts.

This is clearly more than just a Hallmark-manufactured holiday. Mothers hold a special place in the hearts of people around the world — and for good reason. When I was a child our house did not have central heating or cooling. Each room in the house had a small natural gas space heater. For safety reasons the heaters were not used during the night. On cold winter nights the house would reach frigid temperatures by morning. My mom would brave the cold, rise before everyone else and quietly light the heaters while the rest of us slept. By the time she was rousing us from our beds the house was warm and comfortable. Looking back, I did not appreciate all those cold mornings she made her rounds. I just expected the house to be warm. As an adult I now realize she willingly sacrificed many things for her family. While she was still with us, I wish I had shown her more often and, in more ways, how much I appreciate the love she poured into my life.

Day 1

It is easy to get absorbed in our personal Christian walk. In the grand scheme of things, there are certainly worse things upon which we can fixate. This week we will look at a few verses Peter wrote to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. Although much of the text refers to how Christians should treat fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, there is an important ripple effect. We live in a self-absorbed world. Most of us barely know the people living in the houses on our own street. In public we have our headphones on our ears and our eyes on our phones. Peter's words challenge us to administer God's grace and love to those around us. To a self-absorbed world, this is unexpected.

Read the Word

1 Peter 4:7–11 (NIV)

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a

multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 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.

Reflect

- What is the difference between loving and loving deeply?
- Think of a time when you were shown unexpected hospitality. How did that make you feel?

Pray

As we rejoice in God who demonstrates his love in unexpected humility and majesty let's pray that we affect the world around us with unexpected love and grace.

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Dear Father, thank you for the love you have shown me in so many unexpected ways. Help me to love my family deeply. Bolster my courage to use the gifts you have given me to serve my family and the community around me. Help me overcome my fears so that I can impact the world in unexpected ways for your honor and glory. Amen.

Day 2

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We sometimes forget how radical the early church was. It cut across so many of the cultural norms of its day: Jews and Gentiles meeting and eating together, slave and free, rich and poor, men and women, no regard for race or social status. All believers were taught to refer to each other as brothers and sisters. The house churches in Asia Minor to whom Peter wrote the letter must have been an amazing melting pot of cultural diversity. No wonder the early church caused such a stir. It was certainly unexpected.

Read the Word

1 Peter 4:7–8

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Reflect

Diversity is one of the traits that Christ Fellowship shares with the early church. This body is made up of people from diverse religious backgrounds, social status, culture and race. My religious upbringing contributed to my difficulty understanding the verses we are considering today. How can the end be near when Christians have been saying that for 2,000 years? In preparing this study I uncovered some answers that I hope will help others as well. To begin with, the concept is not about elapsed time. Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 3:8 that God exists outside of time. “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” It is about the milestones in God’s redemption plan. There have been significant events throughout the plan. There was creation, the fall, the covenant with Abraham, and Christ’s death and resurrection to name a few. “The end is near” is a proclamation that the next major milestone in the redemption plan is for Jesus to return and gather his bride — the church.

- Given we understand this great truth, what does Peter encourage us to do?

We are not being called to blind faith. God has given us his word so that we can know who he is and what he has done. His redemption plan is a testament to his love for us and his unending faithfulness. Since the day of Pentecost, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen, and teach us. Through the Spirit we can have clear minds to understand God’s will and become more and more self-controlled. Jesus Christ conquered sin and death. In good times or bad we can live in victory.

- How does being clear minded and self-controlled contribute to one’s prayer life?
- How can knowing the end is near and being clear minded and self-controlled affect the way we impact our community?

Peter goes on to insist we “love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.” This is evident in God’s actions toward us. It is because of his great love for us that we enjoy his forgiveness. Out of love for us Jesus bore our guilt and shame on the cross. As a result of his sacrifice we are now heirs to the kingdom of God. Love needs to be the overriding characteristic of how we treat our brothers and sisters.

John 13:35 reminds us that “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The world is watching to see if there is anything different about “so-called” Christians. Well there is. Above all, we love because God loves us. We forgive because we understand the cost of our redemption. Love and forgiveness like this is completely unexpected. More than bumper stickers, more than billboards, and more than sermons, this unexpected love will draw non-believers to Christ.

- Describe what loving deeply looks like in our families, in our church and in our community.

Reflect

Yesterday we heard about a loving and encouraging mother. Sadly, not everyone has that kind of experience. Mother's Day, for some, is a day that reignites painful feelings of lose, abuse and neglect. If Mother's Day is difficult for you, for any reason, know that we at Christ Fellowship understand and want to help you deal with the hurt.

Pray

In Romans 8:38-39, Paul tells us "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Dear Lord, thank you for your great love. By your wounds we have been set free from sin and death. You know our burdens and long to heal us. Your love invites us to lay our burdens at your feet. We rejoice in the knowledge that your love never fails.

Day 3

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Some aspects of human nature transcend time and cultures. For instance, we all seem to care about what others think of us. In American culture we are judged by the clothes we wear, the size and location of our house and the make and model of our car. We may not like it, but it affects many of our decisions. Our words and actions are scrutinized as well. With one thoughtless tweet celebrities have ended careers.

In the Jewish culture of Peter's day, it was even worse. The moral police were everywhere, and they were vigilant. Committing a social offense in all likelihood meant breaking both the civil and religious law. We might understand why some Jews may have begrudgingly followed their religious code even when their hearts were not in it. They didn't want to risk becoming a social outcast. Are we any different today? In today's verses Peter gives us a new and exciting perspective on the subject.

Read the Word

1 Peter 4:9–10

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Reflect

It is difficult to imagine that Peter would have added “without grumbling” to his directive unless he had witnessed or heard that some in the church had been less than enthusiastic about showing hospitality. Hospitality was woven into the fabric of Jewish tradition. The shining example of hospitality is none other than Abraham himself.

Read Genesis 18:1-16. Abraham goes out of his way to show hospitality to three strangers who turn out to be angels.

- What was Abraham's attitude toward showing the strangers hospitality?
- In what ways did Abraham show hospitality?

Peter is calling us to much more than just offering a stranger at our door a glass of water and a quick meal. He calls out the intentions of our hearts. Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords humbled himself to be a servant. In an emotionally charged moment, with his betrayal approaching, Jesus did something unexpected. He washed his disciples' feet and then explained.

John 13:12-17

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Peter, perhaps remembering that unexpected encounter with Jesus, calls us to serve others. By doing so we are administering God's grace. Can we do anything more profound than that? The heart of the matter is our motive for serving. Are we serving because it is expected of us? Are we serving because we seek a higher rung on the church social ladder? Are we serving at all?

We did not earn it. We certainly don't deserve it. Yet, in our unworthy, sinful state Jesus took our sins to the cross. Let us not forget that he purchased our salvation through his great sacrifice. Take some time to reflect on the grace God has shown to you.

- How can the concept of hospitality extend beyond our own homes?

Out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for you:

- Can you find motivation to serve at Christ Fellowship?
- How might you serve non-believers in a way that demonstrates the love of Christ?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I recognize the amazing gift I have received in Jesus. I have the privilege of imitating you by serving others. Please give me a servant's heart so that I can respond with love to those around me.

Day 4

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Depending on your age, you may recall a popular TV commercial from the 80's for E.F. Hutton. The scene was usually a loud, busy dinner party. A handsome, professional looking young man would mention in conversation that his broker was E.F. Hutton. All talking and bustling ceased and everyone strained to hear what the young man was going to say next. Then in a deep, strong voice, an announcer says, "When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen." Well it was not E. F. Hutton talking, was it? The young man's influence was not his own doing. The source of his ability to command the room was the proven track record, character and reputation of a firm far greater than himself. As Christians our speech and actions are backed by the all-powerful Creator of all things — the great I Am!

Read the Word

1 Peter 4:11

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it 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.

Reflect

Peter sets a high bar for us, "...speaking the very words of God." Before we throw in the towel thinking this is beyond our reach, let us look at a few other verses that might give us more insight into Peter's thinking.

Act 7:38

(speaking of Moses) *He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.*

Romans 3:2

(speaking of Israel) *Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.*

The “words of God” is a phrase that refers to scripture. It seems unlikely that Peter is suggesting we only quote scripture when we speak. Like the man in the E. F. Hutton commercial we have a source of power that is greater than our own. It is not our reputation, but God’s that gives us authority.

2 Corinthians 5:20

We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

If we are going to speak on Christ’s behalf, we should know who it is we represent. Jesus is the living word. Through the work of the Spirit and Scripture, we become ever more aware of God’s character and his will. Our words are mighty when we exalt the One who is the source of all power.

- How can your words be used to draw people to Christ?
- Are there Bible verses that you turn to again and again? What is it about those verses that make them so special to you?

In the latter half of verse 11 Peter shifts from our words to our actions (service). More specifically, he connects our service to the underlying motive. We are to serve, not for our own recognition or reward, but so that God is glorified. It turns out whether in word or deed, as Christ’s ambassadors, we need to know him. We need to know him to super charge our speech with his authority. We need to know him to direct all acclaim for our service to his great name. As we become more Christ-like, we draw closer to the author of our salvation and the object of our worship.

- In what ways does knowing God is the source of your strength encourage you?
- How can something good, like serving others tarnish God’s reputation?

Pray

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Dear Lord, we praise you for the gift of salvation. Create in us a new heart confident in our standing as children of God. Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds as we study God's word. Encourage us to speak and serve as ambassadors of Christ and help us to live out the commission of our Lord.

Day 5

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Friday is here! This is the day to take some time to reflect on what you've learned. Remember to take things slowly today and give some thought to how you can apply what you've learned to your daily life. Take a moment to ask the Spirit to reveal unexpected truths from God's word and shape your heart to be more like Christ's.

Reflect on what you've learned

Start by reviewing this week's verses.

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it 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.

Another way of saying "be clear minded and self-controlled" is to say, "be focused." We hear that phrase often when athletes need to perform at their highest level. I can remember a co-worker sitting beside me at the office trying to solve a difficult problem. As he wrestled with the problem, he began chanting to himself, "focus, focus, focus." With so much to distract us in this world we can easily be tempted to expend all of our time and energy on things of this world. Take a few moments to prayerfully listen to the Spirit. Has the Spirit used these passages to redirect the focus of any aspects of your life?

Make Connections

Much of the context of this week's study was in relation to our church family: our brothers and sisters in Christ. In reality, some of the most complicated relationships are the ones within our nuclear family. I have four siblings and those relationships span from close and loving to, in one case, not speaking to each other. The Spirit impressed upon my heart that the teachings from this week's study apply to our nuclear family as well.

In close family relationships there are plenty of opportunities to hurt and disappoint the ones we love the most. With the Spirit's help, we can find it in our hearts to love them deeply – a first and important step to healing and reconciliation. Let's not forget this weekend is Mother's Day. If that relationship needs mending, perhaps the lessons from this week can set you on a course to healing. If that relationship is wonderful, how could you show your mom your appreciation in an unexpected way? If like me, your mom is no longer here, is there a mother in your life that would be encouraged by a little biblical hospitality?

Pray

Take another look at 1 Peter 4:7-11. Be willing to allow the Spirit to teach you something unexpected. Are there any verses to which you are drawn? Pray that the Spirit will help you understand the significance of those verses in your life.

What's Your Next Step?

As an ambassador for Christ you have spent another week drawing closer to the source of your power and authority. In what ways has your perspective on studying God's word influenced this week? Has the Spirit convicted you in any areas regarding loving deeply? Have you considered how rendering hospitality beyond the entry to your home can be an unexpected blessing to others? Has the Spirit revealed to you any areas of your life that are still centered around you rather than your Savior? How can that be different from now on?