

## 1st Peter Chapter 4- John Karmelich

1. There was a radio commercial for an auto insurance company that went something like this: A secretary was rambling off the day's schedule to her boss. The secretary said, "You have a 9am staff meeting, a 10:30 visitation and at 2:45 you are scheduled to have a car accident".
  - a) The point of that commercial is that we never know when a car accident is going to happen. Life is full of unexpected negative things that happen to our lives.
  - b) The only thing we can control is our attitudes in preparation, during and after that event.
  - c) Does that mean I should say, "Oh, joy is me, I'm in pain from this car accident? ☺"
    - i) Of course not. God created pain as an internal warning system when something is wrong with our body. It is a signal to our brain to deal with that problem.
    - ii) I'm talking about fear. This is about the wrong attitude of, "I'm going to suffer in the near future, so therefore I am afraid". This is about thinking, "I'm in a lot of pain. God must really hate me." This is about the false idea that "I'm suffering, so therefore, there must be some sin in my past life, and so God is punishing me."
  - d) This leads us back to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. This letter is on the topic of suffering. It is about dealing with the terrible things that happen in our life whether we like them or not.
  - e) Like the "accident scheduled for 2:45 pm", we can live in fear of some event, or we can have the eternal perspective that this life will have pain and we have to accept it.
    - i) God never promises us 100% avoidance of pain and suffering in this lifetime. Sin exists in this world and therefore it affects us whether we like it or not. People are imperfect and imperfect people are going to hurt us. All we can do is control our attitude. We can't fix people.
2. Let's recap the past few chapters and see where that leads us in this lesson"
  - a) Peter then spent most of the first two chapters focusing on the external factors that cause suffering in our lives. He intermingled that with how good God is and why this happens.
  - b) Chapter 3 focuses on the "internal" factors that cause suffering. When I say "internal", I am referring to factors within the church as opposed to those suffering caused by non-believers. Internal factors include conflicts in marriage and conflicts in the church itself.
  - c) Chapter 4 goes one step further in the internal factor: Ourselves.
    - i) This chapter focuses on our attitudes. The chapter is saying, "Look, suffering in this lifetime is inevitable. Babies come out of the womb crying. It goes downhill from there. ☺ Life has its good days, but there are also tragic things that happen to us. Here is how the Christian should live especially during such tragic times."
  - d) In that sense, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is an instruction book on happiness.
    - i) Despite all of this talk about suffering, Peter is teaching, "Look folks, you can be miserable, or you can understand why God is allowing this to happen. If you comprehend that God has a plan for your life and allows all of this for a reason, it will change your internal perspective about suffering and lighten the burden."
    - ii) What I am not saying is "Throw away the aspirin honey, the bible says we are to have joy during suffering and despite our death threats, it's time to celebrate." ☺
      - a) This is about perspective during pain. Having an "eternal perspective" on life helps us to deal with whatever suffering we are facing or will face.
      - b) It is about dealing with fears. Fear can cause more stress than the pain itself. If we can have the proper perspective about what can or will happen us in life, we can be a happier.
      - c) I like the expression: "Most of the things in life we're afraid never happen." That expression does not mean your life will be void of suffering, it just means most of the things we fear don't come to pass.

- e) With that happy introduction completed, ☺ let's get on to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, Chapter 4.
3. Verse 1: Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.
- a) The sentence has a "since, then" statement. The sentence is saying, "Since this happens, we should do that".
- i) The "since" part is that Jesus suffered in his body".
- ii) The "then" part is we should have the same attitude.
- b) Does that mean we should be prepared to die like Christ?
- i) For many Christians then and now, the answer is yes. Remember that Peter was writing to a group that faced a death sentence just for believing Jesus is God.
- c) The sentence goes on to say we should "arm ourselves". The term "arming ourselves" means to be mentally prepared. Peter is teaching that we should expect suffering.
- i) Peter is saying, "Jesus had to suffer in his body. Prepare yourself for suffering."
- ii) Does that mean we go around worrying that we are going to be killed? No, that misses the point. The point is "We are going to go through suffering in life. Here (the rest of this study) is how we deal with suffering.
- d) What about those of us who don't face a death sentence for our belief, but just plain old every day suffering? ☺ The perspective is the same, although the suffering is not as severe. The point is we have to deal with pain in some points in our life.
- e) The last part of this verse says, "He who has suffered in his body is done with sin".
- i) There a number of interpretations of this phrase:
- a) It could refer to Jesus himself. After he died, there was no more sin.
- b) It could refer to a Christian after death. There is no more sin in their life.
- c) It could also refer to some particular sin that God wants to "clean up". God loves us too much to leave us alone. If there is some aspect of our lives God wants us to change, there is nothing like pain as a motivational tool to make us better person. ☺
- d) What this verse does not mean is that it is possible to live a sin-free life on this earth as long as we suffer enough. As long as we are alive, we still have to deal with the "sin problem".
- ii) Most of the recurring sin issues in our life that God wants us to eliminate require "crucifixion". For example, if someone has a substance abuse issue, it rarely goes away just by giving your life to Jesus. The physical desire has been part of one's life for a long time and our body is "not going to give up that easily". Therefore, the removal of that sin is often a slow, painful process just like crucifixion.
- a) There are some people that become born-again and miraculously, the past cravings just disappear. God bless you if that is your case and give God the glory for that miracle. My point is many still have to deal with the consequences of that past behavior for a long time and slowly, painfully "crucify" that sin.
- b) In practical terms, it means to avoid that sin. The best way to kill a sin is to leave it alone and let it die a slow painful death. Eventually the body gets used to "not having it anymore". I also encourage support groups and have others pray for you. God is also needed to fill the void missing by that sin. Which surprisingly, is the point of verse 2. ☺
4. Verse 2: As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.
- a) Peter's point is once one becomes born-again, we no longer live for our own desires. It is no longer about how to "please us", but how do we please God.

- b) Notice that Peter calls human desires evil. Peter is saying that we should live our lives to do God's will rather than for "evil" human desires.
  - c) We tend to think of evil as killing someone or hurting innocent people.
    - i) Peter here is referring to any desire that is not "God's will" as evil.
    - ii) Does that mean watching TV is evil? Can be, depends on the program. ☺
    - iii) I do believe God wants us to relax at times so we can refresh ourselves to serve Him another day. The point is if we do love God and our desire is to serve Him, our desire for other things is going to be limited.
  - d) This leads us back to one of the fundamental principals of Christianity:
    - i) We are designed by God. God created us for the purposes of spending eternity with Him. Since God loves us perfectly, He desires love for Him in return.
    - ii) That love requires a free-will decision on our part to want to love God. From God's perspective, He knows all things. Since he knows all things, God knows in advance who will choose Him and therefore God "focuses" more on those who choose Him! How do I know if God choose me? Easy, choose Him and then you'll know! ☺
    - iii) After we make that commitment, God then says to us in effect, "OK, you want to spend eternity with me? Great! I was hoping you'd say that! ☺ Now let me spend the rest of your life working on maturing you. This will hurt a little, but the results will be worth it. Trust me!"
    - iv) With all of that in mind, our "job" as Christians is to live for the will of God.
    - v) I stated in the opening of this lesson that it is about happiness and I meant it! ☺ A truly happy life is all about doing God's will for our lives. For each of us, that is different. The results of each of our individual lives of those who live for God, ultimately glorify God in all that we do.
    - vi) Peter is saying, "You want to be happy in life? Then stop living for things other than God and live to do God's will? That will bring you happiness despite any pain you are going through at any given moment.
      - a) "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV).
    - vii) Again, it does not mean giving up one's hobbies, unless those hobbies are unbiblical or are doing harm to you or to others. Often, God gives you those desires and interests. The "trick" is to combine your interests or passions with whatever God-given talents you have in order to serve God.
  - e) OK, so what is God's will for my life?
    - i) There is no one-sentence answer for that question. God's will for you is different from God's will for me. God's will does mean that one never violates a biblical principal. For example, if it never God's will for you to steal your neighbor's stuff no matter how much you've prayed about stealing it! ☺
    - ii) To put it simply, if you love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your desire is to please God, then "go do whatever you want". If you desire to please God, then your desire for other things will be limited. If you desire to please God, then you're going to regularly spend time in God's Word to find out how to please God. If you desire to please God, you're going to hang out with other Christians as they have the same goal that you do of wanting to please God.
5. Verse 3: For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.
- a) Let's summarize the list of no-no's and talk about it:
    - i) The first is debauchery. The idea is "You do things that are immoral and you can care less what is the consequences". Another comparison is "unrestrained sin."

- ii) The next term is lust. It can refer to sexual lust, but the broader term is a sinful desire for what is not rightfully yours. It violated the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house... your neighbor’s wife...his manservant... his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17 NIV)
  - iii) The next term is drunkenness. The bible never condemns drinking per se, but it speaks volumes against drunkenness. There are several places in the bible where Paul states that drunks will not get into heaven (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 6:10, Galatians 5:21).
    - a) So where does one draw the line on drinking? Personally, I keep it on the safe side and minimize it to a great degree! ☺ If you’re desire is for the joy that God gives us, why “murk it up” with things like alcohol? The answer for Christians is “I can drink all the alcohol I want. I just don’t desire it.”
  - iv) The next term issue is orgies. The modern definition is a party where everybody has group sex. The actual term is broader. It refers to parties that lead to promiscuous sexual encounters.
  - v) The next term for “carousing” is a similar idea. It is the idea of getting together so one can get drunk and do immoral things.
  - vi) The last term is “detestable idolatry”. We think of idolatry as bowing down to some man-made statue. It is better to think of idolatry as serving some other “god” other than the true God. Remember that everybody serves some sort of god. Look where people spend their free time and their spare income and you will find their god. Find people who “live for parties” or “live for weekends” and you’ll find their god. That is the idea here.
  - b) OK, John, I’ve now read this list. Are you telling me I should go to church every night and never go out for any other activity? No. ☺
    - i) Let’s get back to the basic idea of Christianity. If your desire is to serve God and live for God, how much interest do you have in these other things?
    - ii) God is not saying to you, “I want you to sit home and be a hermit and never have any fun.” God is saying to you, “I want to keep you away from things that are harmful to your life. Look at the long-term results of people who live like this and see the danger of that lifestyle.”
    - iii) If you’ve lived awhile, you know the physical affects that a sinful life has on a body. For example, I have a relative who has lived their entire adult life in mental institution due to drug usage as a teenager.
  - c) The point of this verse is simply, “What are you living for?” If you live for pleasure, you will ultimately end up “serving” pleasure. None of those things ever truly satisfies, which is why people go back for more. There is a temporary pleasure in those things, but that pleasure just drives us back for more of the same.
    - i) Paul wrote a parallel passage to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter Chapter 4 in the Book of Romans:
    - ii) “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. : (Romans 6:16-18, NIV)
6. Verse 4: They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.
- a) Let me paraphrase this verse with what others will say to you, “Hey, how come you don’t want to come out drinking with us tonight? What’s wrong with you anyway? Are you some sort of holier-than-thou person now? Are you saying you’re better than us now?”
  - b) Peter is saying to expect this kind of statements from unbelievers when you first change your lifestyle.

- c) Does this mean when I first become a Christian I have to avoid-like-the-plague any person I ever met in my life before that day? No. ☺
    - i) I do believe we need to choose carefully we spend time with and in what setting we get together with them. In hindsight, there are some people who were simply bad influences in my life and it is too tempting for me to be with them again. Others I see now and then, but again, I try to get together in “safe settings”.
    - ii) My point is simply to choose wisely one’s decisions about spending time with nonchristians. Jesus taught us to be a witness to the world, but not to be a part of it. Jesus “hung out” with non-believers. There are locations where I should not go, but to other Christians those same locations maybe a non-issue.
  - d) Being a Christian is having the faith that Jesus is Lord and you accept Jesus’ death as payment for your sins. The “double-sided coin” is that if we believe that, we change our behavior accordingly. If we believe that, we are not going to act like we did before we were saved. That is Peter’s main point. We are not saved by our actions, but our faith causes us to act accordingly.
7. Verse 5: But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
- a) Peter is saying nonchristians are going to have to give an account to God for their actions.
  - b) God is going to say to nonbelievers one day, “OK, here is My standards for right and wrong, let’s see how you lived up to them.”
  - c) There are some Christian scholars who theorize that when nonbelievers are judged, God is going to let them use their own standards of right and wrong, and then show them how they failed to live up to their own standards.
    - i) The problem with one’s one standards of right and wrong is you are making a “little god” out of yourself. You are telling God you know better than Him what is right and what is wrong as you live by your own standards.
  - d) People always wonder about those who never heard of God. I take the view that if God is perfect, God will judge all people fairly. The same idea applies to children. To be honest, I don’t worry about how God will judge the naïve. That’s God’s problem and not mine. I have enough worries about my own life. ☺ My problem is that I know God is going to judge me. I need to focus on my behavior and let God deal with other people.
  - e) Getting back to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, the idea here is, “You think these people are getting away with this stuff? Don’t worry about them. They will have to face judgment.
  - f) King David in Psalm 73 worried about the same issue:
    - i) David wrote, “For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.” (Psalm 73:3-4 NIV)
    - ii) David goes on for several verses in that Psalm complaining how those who live a life displeasing to God “get away with it”. David eventually figures this out:
    - iii) “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me, till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” (Psalm 73: 16-17 NIV)
    - iv) What’s David’s point in Psalm 73? The same as Peter’s in Chapter 4: Once you understand the eternal perspective, you are no longer jealous of those “getting away with it”. Once you understand that they will be judged for their actions, it no longer makes us jealous.
  - g) Remember the big-purpose of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, which is to deal with our suffering.
    - i) Part of our suffering comes from envy. We may say to God, “How come we have to suffer? How come those people over there are living a happy life and don’t have to deal with the pain I have to deal with? It’s not fair!” You are right. It is not fair from a human perspective. It is only fair if you understand the eternal perspective of life. Truthfully, I can only sleep well at night knowing there is a God and He will one day judge all people fairly.

8. Verse 6: For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.
- a) The sentence starts with “The gospel was preached even to those who are now dead.”
    - i) The first question is “who are “those” people?”
      - a) The answer would be those Christians who have already died.
      - b) It can’t be pre-Jesus people because they have never been “preached to”, as to the Gospel message.
  - b) Next, we get into the purpose of this verse. Luckily, Peter himself tells us what it is. He starts with “for this reason”. The question is of course, “for what reason?” The answer is the second half of the verse: “so that (1) they (Christians) might be judged according to men in regard to the body, (2) but live according to God in regard to the spirit.”
    - i) OK, what does that mean? Let’s take each phrase one at a time.
    - ii) The first is “They might be judged according to men in regard to the body.” That means that “living people” (i.e., any person, Christian or not who is still alive) can look at the recently-died Christian and study their life as a testimony for God.
      - a) There is something about the death of a person that makes anyone who knew him or her stop, and contemplate his or her life. That’s the idea here. Someone who is a nonbeliever could hear about their death and say, “You know, I knew Bob. He was a decent guy. He believed in that Jesus stuff. I didn’t always agree with him, but I have to admit he was a happy person. He was willing to die for his belief. That makes me rethink my life a little.”
      - b) Remember that God wants all people to choose Him out of their own free will. God appear to “go to any means necessary” in order to convince people of the truth of the Gospel, even to the point of allowing good Christians to die early as a “living witness” for Him. That is the idea behind Peter’s statement of “judged according to men regarding the body.”
    - iii) The second part of that statement is, “but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” Remember we are now talking about dead Christians. They are now in heaven. I think Peter’s point is “Look, those who kill Christians can only do so much. They can’t kill them because he or she will live forever. The “worse they can do” is kill the body.
    - iv) If you study the history of the Christian church, the greatest growth spurts have come during times of persecution. Persecution draws people closer to God for comfort and protection. That zeal for God draws others into the fold of believers.
      - a) Even today, if you study the places where Christians are being persecuted, (e.g., China), you will find more growth in that region than in places where Christianity is tolerated and welcomed.
      - b) I’m not saying we should encourage persecution. ☺ It is just a fact that such action does cause growth in the church.
9. Verse 7: The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.
- a) Let’s talk about the expression, “The end of all things is near.”
    - i) I don’t think Peter was one of those guys you see on busy street corners wearing a big sandwich board, saying, “Repent, the end is near”. ☺
    - ii) Peter lived his life on the expectation that Jesus could come back at any time!
    - iii) If you recall from the introduction lesson, Peter was told roughly 30 years ago (the time between 1<sup>st</sup> Peter and Jesus’ resurrection) that Peter was going to die for his belief in Jesus (Reference : John 21:18-19). Peter didn’t know the date and time, he just knew that Jesus predicted Peter’s death and lived on the belief for thirty-years-and-counting that this could happen any day.

- iv) Here's our application: We don't know when we will die. The one thing no one knows is how long one will live. Further, life goes by real fast. Ask elderly people how fast life has gone by. Therefore, for all of us, no matter how much time we have left, it is relatively short, especially compared to eternity.
- v) Second, I believe God wants us to live with the expectation that Jesus could return at any moment. That fact should also keep us on our toes.
- b) Peter's second sentence is since our time on earth is short, let us be "clear minded and self controlled so we can pray". OK, what does that mean?
  - i) First, notice Peter does not specify what to pray for, but just how to pray:
    - a) Peter doesn't say anything about praying on our knees, praying standing up, praying in groups, praying in our closet, or praying flat on our face!
    - b) Instead, Peter focuses on our mind. He starts by saying be "clear minded".
      - (1) Part of that idea is to not have our mind altered by some sort of substance. This gets back to the example of limited alcohol. It's hard to focus on God when something is altering one's brain.
      - (2) The other part of being "clear minded" is to let go of worries and anger. Give those issues to God so you can pray to Him and focus on the issues of the moment.
  - ii) Next, let's talk a little about "self-controlled". Part of that concept is intermingled with "clear-minded". For example, one needs to have enough self-control to not indulge in things that would cause us to lose focus during our prayer time.
  - iii) Christians are not saved by being self-disciplined. One cannot for example, eliminate sin in our lives by "trying harder". In such cases, we are making "little gods" out of the act of discipline. The related idea is that God does want us to change our behavior. The question is "who gets the credit" for the change in our lifestyle? If we are walking by faith that Jesus is Lord, then we do need to change our behavior accordingly. That means we trust God is working through us to change us. In that sense, there is a discipline needed for our lives.
- c) Let's think about Peter's statement in context of this chapter: Why do you think Peter stops at this point and calls us to pray?
  - i) Well for starters, the issue at hand is persecution. This causes stress. The way to deal with stress is to give it to God. Pray for God's guidance during difficult times. Pray and thank God for His love to strengthen you during rough times.
  - ii) Going back to the day Peter denied Jesus three times, many Christians fail to notice what happened the night before, and the connection of those events.
    - a) The night before the crucifixion, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to pray with him. Three times Jesus made this request and three times these three guys fell asleep during prayer time. (Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22). The next day, Peter denied Jesus three times.
    - b) For centuries, Christians have wondered that if Peter did pray with Jesus on those three requests, would that have given Peter the boldness to not deny Jesus the next day? My theory is Peter made that connection. That is why during those stressful moments Peter is encouraging others to pray.
  - iii) Prayer is the remedy to persecution, pain and stress. (No, I'm not preaching against modern medicine! If I'm in pain, yes I pray and yes I see a doctor!) This is about getting God involved in our lives. This is about telling God about one's worries and letting God be glorified for whatever happens. This is about our attitudes during the rough moments of life.

10. Verse 8: Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
- a) Why would Peter say to “love each other deeply” here? Why emphasize that now?
    - i) The answer is the same reason Peter calls us to prayer. Remember Peter is talking about how to deal with persecution and the difficult moments of life. Let’s face it, when we’re in pain, we get grumpy. ☹ Hurting people hurt people.
  - b) Sometimes the best way to get over one’s misery is to help others. During the pity-party moments, if we can go out and be of service to others, this helps to overcome our worries.
  - c) Peter is also addressing this section to other Christians to help those who are hurting.
    - i) When you see someone hurting, offer help. Christianity is designed to be a team effort. In fact, the next few verses are all about helping, comforting and supporting other believers.
  - d) Next, we have the expression, “love covers over a multitude of sins”.
    - i) This is a partial quote of Proverbs 10:12.
    - ii) Remember that pain and suffering causes stress. This causes people to (putting it lightly) “not be on their best behavior”. ☹
    - iii) The way Christians are to respond is to love them. Remember love is about putting other’s needs in front of yours.
      - a) That doesn’t mean one ignores sin within the church. This expression is about how we handle such sins. As opposed to yelling at someone for their mistakes, we are to act in a loving way, as opposed to vengeful.
    - iv) For the Christian at the time of Peter’s writing, life was stressful enough as it was. People were trying to kill them. The last thing Christians needed was to talk down to other Christians and point out their faults. The same idea applies today, especially to those who are hurting.
    - v) The verse says love covers sin. It does not say love “takes away sin”. The latter is only done through the cross. The “covering” idea is about how we should react in situations where other believers have hurt us.
11. Verse 9: Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.
- a) In that time era, there were no hotels and motels like we have today. A “motel” was a place of prostitution and where the worse part of society went for the night. Therefore, traveling Christians sought refuge in homes of other Christians. When you read of Paul’s travels in the Book of Acts, you notice the common mention of Paul seeking out Christians for places to stay.
  - b) The modern application is similar. It ties with the surrounding verses of helping one another in times of need. To summarize this whole section, “Look folks, people are hurting around here. Stop complaining about helping people, get off your butt and do something to support them!”
  - c) Jesus said “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”. (John 13:35 NIV)
    - i) What we are reading here in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is examples of how to love one another.
      - a) One example is “love covers a multitudes of sins”.
      - b) Another example is “offering hospitality to each other”.
      - c) The part about “not grumbling” has to do with our attitude!
12. Verse 10: Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> 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.
- a) Peter is saying we should use whatever spiritual gifts we have to love and support other Christians. This ultimately gives the glory to God.

- b) In a sense, we're still on the same topic of having love for one another. Now the focus is on using whatever specific talent(s) one is given in order to love one another.
- c) Remember the big-topic here is about dealing with suffering and the stress that comes along with that suffering. Yes, we need medical help to deal with the physical pain. We also need each other to comfort each other during such times.
- d) With all of that said, we now get to the specific topic, which is spiritual gifts. Every Christian has some sort of special gift(s). If you don't know yours, ask others around you. What "thing" are you better at than most people? Another clue is to examine what are you passionate about".
  - i) Peter is saying use whatever God-given talent you have to comfort others.
  - ii) From there, we get into the specific's in the rest of the Verse 11.
- e) The first part of the spiritual gift topic in Verse 11 says, "If anyone speaks".
  - i) This mainly refers to the ability to teach the word of God. I believe that includes teaching by writing as well as speaking-teaching, but that's just my ego. ☺
  - ii) It doesn't just refer to the head pastor either. It refers to Sunday school teachers as well. It also refers to those who have the gift of comforting others. Some people have a gift for saying the right words at the right time to those who are hurting.
  - iii) Does that mean that if I'm not a great speaker, I should ignore those who are hurting? ☺ No, but you can invite them to talk to someone who does! ☺ Or you can pray for God to give you the right words to say at that moment!
- f) Let's continue Verse 11: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God."
  - i) Now there is an intimidating sentence. When we speak to other Christians, we should do so as if we are speaking the very words of God. If that isn't an impossible standard to live up to, I don't know what is! ☺
  - ii) Let me remind you what James says about teachers: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1 NIV). Now there's a comforting thought! ☺ We who teach the bible are going to be judged more strictly than those who don't.
    - a) God holds teachers accountable for what they teach, and therefore judges us more strictly. This alone keeps me in prayer and in heavy research!
  - iii) So how does one speak "as if we are speaking the very words of God?"
    - a) The answer is what Jesus taught us, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26b NIV). In other words, pray to God before speaking and then trust that God is speaking through you.
    - b) For example, I begin these lessons in prayer. When I get asked bible questions, I fire up a quick prayer before answering. It is only by allowing God to work through us that we can speak "the very words of God".
    - c) We often say things and think, "Wow, that wasn't very good". The problem is our ego's want to do better. After praying, then prepare as much as possible and then teach by faith that God is working through you!
- g) Next, Peter says, "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides".
  - i) Peter divides Christian spiritual gifts into two categories, "speaking and serving".
  - ii) There are other spiritual gifts. Peter here is specifically focusing on gifts used to comfort one another and not to list all the possible spiritual gifts.
  - iii) The gift of "serving" is a behind-the-scenes gift. I heard one pastor joke that "In my 25 years of ministry, I've never had one person walk in my office and say, "How do I get the gift of administration? How do I get the gift of giving?"" ☺ Most Christians wants to have gifts that put them in the spotlight. God gives many of us gifts of helping one another in ways most Christians never see.

- iv) The good news is God sees what people don't see. You may think that just because you "only" usher or clean the church, that somehow this is less important than the pastor. In God's eye, all gifts are equally as important.
  - v) To paraphrase Peter, "Look, if you have a gift of serving one another, do it with all the strength you have in you!" To use the sports cliché, "Give it 110%!"
    - a) What's the secret to be of service with that much effort? The same answer that teachers need to teach: Prayer! Peter is saying that in effect with the last part of this sentence. Peter said, "with the strength God provides!"
  - h) What is the result? What happens when teachers prayerfully pray and people of service prayerfully are of service? The answer is the remainder of Verse 11: "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."
  - i) I've stated in earlier lessons that the main purpose of living life on earth is to "build up the body of Christ"
    - a) Paul wrote, "It was he (God) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV)
    - b) That's the Christian life in one long sentence. We are all given special gifts to help one another. Christians are all given special gifts to help "build the body of Christ". One of those gifts, called "Evangelism" is to help bring in new members. That is part of "building up the body of Christ".
  - ii) This ties back to Peter's comments at the end of Verse 11. Peter is saying "God is glorified" by all of these actions. Christians are to work as a team effort, with each teammate using whatever talents they have to support that team.
13. Verse 12: Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.
- a) Now Peter gets back to the topic of pain and suffering. Peter is saying to not be shocked when these things happen.
  - b) Nonchristians tend to blame suffering on "bad luck" or being a victim or something they did wrong. God is saying to us, "that's not it. These things are a part of your life. You have to expect them and not be surprised when they happen. I (God) allow them to happen to mature you and so you can be a witness to others when you suffer."
  - c) I've already made you suffer enough on this topic, so I'll move on. ☺
14. Verse 13: But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.
- a) Verse 13 sounds difficult: "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ". You mean I'm supposed to jump up and down with joy when I'm in pain? ☺ No.
  - b) Here is how to prayerfully "rejoice" to difficult times:
    - i) Lord, I know that you are allowing this to happen for a reason. First, I ask that you take away this suffering. If this is Your will, then give me the strength to deal with it. Give me the ability to comfort others and be a good witness in spite of what is happening. Finally and most importantly, let not this lesson be wasted. Help me to understand what you want me to learn from this situation. If this suffering is somehow designed to be a witness for others and you don't want me to know the reason, help me to accept it and still glorify You!" Amen.
    - ii) That is rejoicing during suffering. It is not artificially being happy during tough times. It is about having internal joy despite the situation around you.

- c) Let's talk about the second part of this verse: "So that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed".
- i) Let's suppose no bad thing ever happens to you. Let's suppose your making lots of money, you are free of any health risks and are generally enjoying life. All of sudden Jesus shows up and says, "It's time for the Second Coming!" Do you say to Jesus, "You know Lord, my life is pretty good right now. Can you wait a few more years? I'm having such a good time right now". ☺
- ii) One of the reasons God allows suffering in this life is so we can live with the hope of a better life. Sin exists in this world and sin causes pain. God is teaching us through history as well as our own lives that the "sin plague" is incurable, both internally and externally. Therefore, our only true comfort comes from Jesus and not what happens in this life.
15. Verse 14: If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.
- a) Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. (Matthew 5:11-12a NIV)
- b) Remember that Peter is trying to comfort those who are being persecuted. Here again, Peter is trying to get us on the eternal-perspective to comfort us.
- c) I have a friend who is a pastor. His sister-in-law hates his faith and his wife's faith in Jesus and ridicules them. He and his wife make it a point to high-five each other when that happens because they know they are blessed because of those insults. It also helps them to deal with the pain of knowing the sister is not saved. They pray for her regularly.
16. Verse 15: If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.
- a) Some people can read Peter's letter and think, "Well, Peter said I'm going to suffer no matter what. I might as well do rotten things if I'm going to suffer anyway."
- b) Another example is "If they're going to try to kill me for being a Christian, I might as well take some others with me. That will prevent them from killing others". That is the wrong idea and it won't work anyway. You can't kill the demonic forces behind those people.
- c) This is about being a Christian "witness" to the world, especially during the worse of times. The times in life when nonchristians are really going to watch you is during those tough times. They want to see if it is "worth it". They want to see if you can have internal joy despite the situations around you.
- d) Notice the bad-terms not only include murder and theft, but also being a "meddler". We've all met people who pry around in other's business where they shouldn't be. Again, the point about Peter's little list here is about being a good witness for God despite the circumstances.
17. Verse 16: However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.
- a) Verse 16 is the "internal remedy" to suffering. We should praise God in those situations.
- b) The proper reaction as a Christian is not to be ashamed of suffering. We are not to have self-pity parties and say, "Woe is me, look how I'm hurting." I'm not saying you shouldn't grieve. That is a part of any healing process. The point Peter is making is not to say, "I must have done something horrible to cause this" or "God is punishing me for some evil that I did". Peter has spent a whole chapter teaching us that God allows us to suffer to mature us and make us witnesses for Him.
- c) Peter's point is that persecution is a verification that we are saved! Do you want to make sure you're going to heaven? Get involved in Christian service and watch bad things happens to you! ☺ Remember, "If you don't believe the devil is real, try opposing him!"

- d) I should also add that expecting persecution does not mean we should be pessimistic. It is not “Woe is me, something bad will happen today because God said so”. ☺ Peter’s point is God allows this to happen for a reason and it draws us to God.
18. Verse 17: For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”
- a) OK, enough about persecution. Let’s lighten up and talk about judgment. ☺
- b) Peter’s point in Verse 17 and 18 is that all people are judged, believers and nonbelievers.
- c) Revelation Chapter 20 speaks of two judgments, a thousand years apart. The first is for believers and the second is for nonbelievers. Believe me, you want to be part of the first one. The second one is for eternal condemnation. The first one is based on one simple question, God the Father asks, “What have you done about and for my son Jesus?”
- d) Jesus says, “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.” (Matthew 16:27 NIV)
- i) The first judgment is when Jesus says to individual Christians, “I gave you the following spiritual gifts, how did you use them to help build up the church?”
- ii) The first judgment is when Jesus says to Christians, “I gave you the following opportunities to serve me. Let’s see what you did with them?”
- iii) Our eternal rewards in heaven are based on the answer to those questions!
- iv) The good news is that if we are part of this judgment, we spend eternity in heaven no matter what. Our sins were taken care of at the cross. Even the “lowest members” will get comfort through all of eternity.
- v) I think some people are simply going to enjoy heaven more than others. If you spend your lifetime here praying to God, serving God and serving other believers, the rewards will come because you have matured to a way that God wants to you.
- vi) Knowing there is a “reward system” in heaven should motivate us to strive for such rewards and I believe that’s Peter’s point here.
- e) Peter’s other point is as follows: “You’re wondering what is going to happen to those people who persecute you? Don’t worry, they’ll get theirs. God says “Vengeance is His” and He means it. We as Christians are “barely saved” only by the blood of Jesus, and not by anything special that we are doing. Don’t worry about them. Worry about you! Focus on what God has called you to do and let God deal with them!”
- i) We all know nonbelievers who are living their life the wrong way. I’m not saying we should ignore them. I pray daily for lots of people who are not saved. Peter’s point is about having proper perspective about those who are hurting you.
19. Verse 19: So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.
- a) Human suffering should draw us closer to God and now away from Him. That is Peter’s final point. Suffering can cause us to be miserable, and it is easy to take out that misery on those who are around us. God does not call on us to “fix the world”. God is saying, “Yes, I’m allowing this suffering for a reason. It is there to mature you and although you don’t understand the reasons, it is happening, ultimately for My glory.” We have to trust in that fact and cling even closer to God despite the circumstances around us.
- b) Let me end this lesson by saying I know this is a “heavy” study and can easily get us in a bad mood. Peter is trying to teach us how to have comfort when bad times hit. It is best to know this stuff prior to whatever happens so that we can be prepared.
20. Heavenly Father, as difficult as this is, we thank you for this lesson on dealing with persecution. It is easy to talk about pain and suffering when things are going well, and difficult to actually deal with it. Give us the knowledge and wisdom to prepare ourselves for what you promise will happen to all believers at some point. Help us to use whatever gifts we have to comfort others and work as a team to mature “the body of Christ”. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen!