

# Serve the Church

1 Peter 4:7-11

I would summarize the message of the world in three phrases:

- Believe in yourself!
- Follow your heart!
- It's all about YOU!



I don't need to prove this because it's everywhere, but I can't resist sharing a few memes with you in addition to this cute little unicorn. Google any of these phrases and you'll find hundreds of these inspirational images.

***Believe in Yourself***



***Follow Your Heart!***





These are the messages of our culture today. We may laugh at how silly they look and sound when you present them in this way, but all of us are influenced by these ways of thinking and acting.



- You may not believe in rainbows and unicorns, but ***we all trust in ourselves*** way more than we ought to and lean way too heavily on our own understanding. In all of our ways we acknowledge ourselves and determine to set our own path.
- You may be more of a thinker than a feeler, but ***we all have desires that war in our hearts*** and if we don't learn to fight them, they will drag us away into sin and slavery.
- You may not think your life is all about you, but we all have this thing called the *flesh* that makes our own "needs" and desires front and center. Whether you feel good about yourself or you feel bad about yourself - ***the gravitational center of our lives is OURSELVES.***

This passage in 1 Peter 4 challenges us to make **three movements**, away from selfishness and into service. ***That is the cure for the selfishness that plagues us - SERVICE.*** Serving enables us to

move from believing in ourselves to trusting in God's plan; from following our own sinful hearts to playing our assigned role in the church and from focusing on ourselves to living completely for the glory of God.

### **The Cure for Selfishness is Service**

|                       |                                    |               |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Believe in Yourself → | Trust in God's Plan                | Our Plans     |
| Follow Your Heart →   | Play your Part in God's Church     | Our Practices |
| It's all about You →  | Give up everything for God's Glory | Our Purpose   |

The first movement is a reorientation of our PLANS - showing we trust God and His plan more than we believe in ourselves and our own plans. The second is a reorientation of our PRACTICES - changing our behaviors from doing whatever we want to intentionally serving one another in the church. The third is a reorientation of our overall PURPOSE in life. By default we live for ourselves - for our own pleasure, comfort and glory. We must deliberately fight that selfishness and choose - every day - to live for God's glory instead of our own; to seek His will instead of our own; to build his kingdom instead of our own.

First, let's adjust our plans to line them up with God's plans.

### **Movement #1 - Our Plans**

Believe in Yourself → ***Trust in God's Plan***

***"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded, for the sake of your prayers." 1 Peter 4:7***

***Our tendency is to design our lives around our own plans because deep down we all believe in ourselves way too much.***

- "What do you want to do today?" Whenever we have free time, isn't that the question?
- "What do you want to do this weekend?"
- "What do you want to do this summer?"
- "What are your plans for the fall?"
- "What are your goals for your family or your business?"
- What's your 5 year or 10 year plan?

This isn't always wrong but it is certainly a danger to watch closely because it reveals the depths of our self-reliance and the weakness of our God-reliance.

In the Old Testament, with major decisions, God's people would "inquire of the Lord." How often do we inquire of the Lord? How often do we just rush on ahead, trusting blindly in our own plans?

Listen to God's Word: "**The end of all things is at hand.**" That was written almost 2,000 years ago. If it was true in Peter's day, how much more true is it today? God is at work in history, accomplishing His great plan of salvation. Therefore we have only two options in our lives: to orient around our own plans - to "believe in ourselves" - or to orient around God's plans - ***to trust in His plans instead of in our own*** - to join in His work instead of trying to work things out on our own.

Peter's command for us, based on this truth that the end of history is nearly upon us is to *"be self-controlled and sober-minded."* As followers of Jesus we must learn to DISTRUST our own plans and DISCIPLINE our deep seated selfishness and self-reliance. The truth is that we believe very deeply in ourselves - and we shouldn't.

The reality is that we should not believe in ourselves, **we should DISCIPLINE ourselves**. Parents, you don't need to BELIEVE in your kids more - you need to soberly recognize that they are wretchedly selfish sinners and lovingly DISCIPLINE them. Trust me and trust the Bible - you DO know better than they do because you've been a sinner so much longer.

Pastor Colin Smith tells a story about one of his ***teenage sons who wanted to go to a party***. Colin asked what would happen at this party and it didn't sound very good. But his son wanted to go and pressed him on it saying, ***"Come on Dad, don't you trust me?"*** Colin immediately responded, "Of course I DON'T TRUST YOU!" Then he paused and added, "I wouldn't trust MYSELF in a situation like that!"

Our problem is not that we DON'T believe in ourselves enough, it's that we trust ourselves way too much. Like Pastor Colin we should say to each other and to our own hearts, "Of course I don't trust you!"

We don't need to trust ourselves more, ***we need to learn to DISTRUST our own hearts***. We need to be suspicious of our own plans and learn to entrust ourselves completely to God and HIS PLANS. Be self-controlled not self-indulgent. Be sober-minded not ruled by your own thoughts and feelings.

Just as we know better than our kids, so **God knows so much better than us**. His ways are infinitely above our ways because his thoughts are infinitely above our thoughts. He sees the whole picture, edge to edge, we see a few pixels. ***He sees the whole story***, from beginning to end, we see a few sentences.

So **we need to reorient our plans to match up with His plans**. We need to stop believing so much in ourselves and learn to TRUST IN THE LORD with all of our hearts - lining up all we believe and do with God's Word. This is why Peter ties this point TO OUR PRAYERS. Do you ever wonder why so often God does not answer our prayers the way we think he ought to?

The reason is in James 4 -

***"Your passions are at war within you... You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."*** James 4:1-3

Brothers and sisters, **our problems are not OUTSIDE of us, they are right here INSIDE of us**. It is not what we eat or touch, or who we hang out with that makes us unclean before God it is what comes bubbling up from inside of us and comes spewing out of our mouths - that is what makes us unclean. We must learn to identify the selfish plans of our proud, hard, selfish hearts and SUBMIT them to the desires and plans of God.

- **We pray for COMFORT** and blessing - **God calls us to SACRIFICE** our comforts and material blessings for the sake of His mission in the world.
- **We pray for SAFETY** and protection - **God calls us to RISK**, to courageously and intentionally jeopardize our safety to bring the Gospel where it has not yet been heard.
- **We pray for OURSELVES** and the things we think we NEED - **God calls us to pray for OTHERS** and consider what they need.

Then we wonder why so many of our prayers go unanswered. We want to spend what we get on our passions. We want to feed our own desires because we trust so completely in our selfish, sinful hearts.

### **Movement #1 - Our Plans**

Believe in Yourself → **Trust in God's Plan**

*"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded, for the sake of your prayers." 1 Peter 4:7*

Praise the Lord, **there is a cure for this disease of selfishness**. The cure is a heart committed to SERVING the Lord not ourselves - replacing our faith in ourselves with a wholehearted confidence in GOD. **We are HIS servants**. He is the King. He has a plan and we are His to direct. It is not for us to call the shots and give the orders, but for us to hear from our Commander and race forward in joyful, courageous obedience.

**"The end of all things is at hand."** Do you believe that God is directing all of history to its appointed ending? Or do you believe your sinful heart that this world is all there is and this life is what it's all about and deep down you know better than God?

**"Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded."** Do we do this? Do we discipline our sinful desires and thoughts or do we coddle them and feed them because deep down we believe in ourselves way too much?

- The reality of believing in yourself can present in two ways. Some of us are excessively **self-confident** because we believe how great we are.
- Others of us are excessively **self-deprecating** because we believe that little voice in our heads that tells us how terrible we are.
- Either way you are believing YOURSELF - whether you believe you are amazing or you believe you are awful.
- Take those thoughts, feelings and beliefs and submit them to GOD's voice, to God's WORD. Be self-controlled, not self-indulgent. Be sober-minded not self-minded.

**"For the sake of your prayers."** The only way God will answer our prayers is when OUR WILL lines up with HIS WILL. It's just like an electric current. When you break the circuit, the power can't flow. But when you restore the connection by lining up the power lines and linking them together, the power flows immediately through. Submit your will to God's. Line up your plans with His good plan. Then you will see God begin answering your prayers and working powerfully through you!

Our first movement is from believing in ourselves to trusting in God and His plans. Second, we need to move from following our own hearts to actively serving in the church.

### **Movement #2 - Our Practices**

Follow your Heart → ***Play your Part in God's Church***

***"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." 1 Peter 4:8-9***

Think about ***the default setting of the human heart***. Do you more naturally think of the needs of others or of your own needs and desires? We are ALWAYS most aware of the thoughts, desires and needs of ONE and only One person - ourselves. You are most aware of YOU. I am most aware of ME. There is no escaping that reality - it is the human condition.

This is why we need at least a dozen direct commands in the New Testament to LOVE ONE ANOTHER, like the one here in 1 Peter 4. If we naturally loved and served each other the Bible would just instruct us to FOLLOW OUR HEARTS. Instead, the Bible tells us -

***"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9***  
***"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." James 1:14***

Oh, brothers and sisters, **don't follow your heart**, follow the Bible. Don't trust yourself - trust God and His Word. Naturally you will love and serve yourself and the evil desires that dwell in your heart. Only supernaturally will you learn to be self-controlled and submit your desires and plans to those of the Lord. Only supernaturally will you begin to live a life of love and service to others.

***Our desires are like unruly toddlers*** - if left unchecked, they will take over. My nephew was a terror when he was two years old. One day we were trying to persuade him to come with us and he put his hands on his hips like Superman and said, ***"I do what I want."*** That is the default setting of the human heart.

Often in my life I feel that toddler welling up inside me and the desire to put my hands on my hips and say, "I do what I want." ***There is a selfish toddler in all of our hearts*** and if we follow him, he will take over. We all desperately want to obey our own sinful hearts because we trust so much in ourselves. As we learn to trust in God's plans for us we not only DISTRUST our own hearts but we DISCIPLINE that selfish heart, being self-controlled and sober-minded. That is the movement at the heart level of trust.

Then our faith leads to action as we move from a self-focused lifestyle to one seeking to love and serve others. Look again at v.10:

### **Movement #2 - Our Practices**

Follow your Heart → ***Play your Part in God's Church***

***"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." 1 Peter 4:10***

**Peter could not state this more strongly.** ABOVE ALL, he says, “keep loving one another EARNESTLY.” Do you hear the emphasis here? Whatever else you do, above all of that - this is the most important thing - not just to love one another but to KEEP ON loving one another - EARNESTLY, sincerely, zealously, enduringly.

Why? Because “love covers a multitude of sins.” This is exactly what we need - for the multitude of our sins to be covered somehow. And that is exactly what Jesus Christ provided - **a covering for all of those sins**. Our sinful hearts were filled and overflowing with selfishness and evil but through His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection Jesus provided a COVERING for sin - a covering of blood.

When we love each other we provide that same kind of grace covering for each other. **Our love, like Jesus’ love, covers one another’s sins.**

- **Apply this to your marriage.** No husband or wife is perfect. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly - that commitment to each other will cover the multitude of each of your sins.
- **Apply this to your friendships.** No Christian is perfect. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly - that commitment will cover over each of your impatience, insensitivity and pride.
- **Apply this to your church leaders.** No pastor or elder is perfect. But if we keep loving each other earnestly it will cover over our weaknesses, blind-spots, failures and disappointments.

Brothers and sisters, let’s not follow our hearts, let’s discipline our hearts and ask God to replace our selfishness with love. When we see how the love of Christ covered the multitude of our sins it should move us to **apply that same grace** and mercy and kindness and love to one another.

Similarly, think of **the hospitality Jesus showed us** - welcoming us into relationship with Him and inviting us into His home forever. Just as we have been welcomed, we should welcome and embrace one another - without any grumbling or complaining. We grumble and fuss because we WANT our own way, our own comfort. We don’t want to adjust our experience to accommodate for the preferences of others. That is anti-love - to insist on your own way. Love adjusts. It welcomes. It serves. Look at verse 10.

## **Movement #2 - Our Practices**

Follow your Heart → **Play your Part in God’s Church**

**“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”**

**1 Peter 4:10**

**We are STEWARDS of GRACE** - God’s grace. The word for GIFTS is charismata - a variation of the word grace. Your spiritual gift as a believer is a gift of God’s grace - it is a grace-gift. The gifts we have been given are not for our own blessing and fulfillment but for the building up of the church and the advancement of the Kingdom. We are STEWARDS not owners. We are managers, not executives - and we’re not even middle managers - we are low level, entry level workers.

So let’s not follow our selfish sinful hearts into the pursuit of our own comforts and pleasures. Let’s follow the clear commands of Scripture into a life of service and kingdom ministry. If you belong to Jesus then you have received a gift. Go back to the **Serve the Church** series this summer to read, watch or listen to those messages that dealt extensively with the different kinds of gifts.



***This is the cure to selfishness - SERVICE.*** How can we get our minds off of ourselves and our own desires and “needs”? First by remembering how Jesus has served us. Then by serving other people. This is a basic principle of recovery and counseling. When you get caught up in your own issues one of the best things you can do is serve another person.

- Meet up with a friend not to talk about YOUR problems but to listen to what’s going on in their life. It will change your perspective and remind you that everyone has challenges - “everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about” (we saw this quote on the wall of a pediatric hospital unit earlier this year).
- Go **visit an elderly person** - one of our shut-ins or someone in a nursing home. Listen to their story. Suddenly your aches and pains won’t feel so severe and your losses won’t seem so exceptional.
- Go to the **Oasis pregnancy center** and sit down with a pregnant teenager. Suddenly your problems won’t seem so overwhelming to you.
- Go to the hospital and volunteer in the **surgical waiting room**. Suddenly your issues won’t seem quite so awful.

Discover your spiritual gifts and then USE THEM to serve in the church. This is why God gave us spiritual gifts: to build up the BODY - the church!

### **The Gifts are Primarily to Build up the Church**

*“Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” 1 Corinthians 14:12*

Paul expounds this in detail in 1 Corinthians 12, he teaches on it in Romans 12. And he mentions it again in Ephesians 4:

### **The Gifts are Primarily to Build up the Church**

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-12*

This is why God gave gifts to believers - to build up the body of Christ - to strengthen the local church. My job as your pastor and our job as elders overseeing the church here at Oakwood is to EQUIP all of you saints for the work of ministry, “for building up the body of Christ.”

So this is me doing my job, ok? Hear the Word of the Lord through Paul and right here in 1 Peter 4:

### **Movement #2 - Our Practices**

Follow your Heart → ***Play your Part in God’s Church***

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” 1 Peter 4:10*

You have a spiritual gift - a supernatural enablement from the Holy Spirit of God who lives in your heart. It may be giving or working with your hands; it may be compassion or mercy for people; it may be wisdom and discernment for counseling; it may be generosity and sacrificial giving; it may be



speaking truth or teaching the Bible; it may be praying in faith and encouraging others to trust in the Lord (and not in themselves). Your gift may be music and leading in worship. It may be working with kids or teenagers. There are lots of different kinds of gifts.

The point is that you HAVE a spiritual gift - so USE IT to serve one another. Play YOUR PART in God's Church. Listen to the rest of verse 10:

***“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.” 1 Peter 4:10-11***

When we trust in God's plan and commit to play the part He has assigned to us, we speak with God's own authority and we serve with God's own power. Again, it's like an electrical circuit. On our own, apart from God, we are powerless. But when we align with God's plan; when we submit our desires to God's - we become conduits of God's power.

Know that your default setting - just like mine - will be to follow your heart into complacency, comfort and the pursuit of the pleasures and achievements of this world. So **DO NOT FOLLOW YOUR HEART**. Trust in the Lord and Follow the Holy Spirit to obey God's Word when it exhorts you to SERVE others here in the church. As you serve in the church you will see the Lord work through you in special ways.

We are stewards of the manifold graces of God. He is infinitely creative and has poured out His Spirit on different people in different ways. We praise God for the diversity of gifts here at Oakwood - and we know that the gifts He has given us are sufficient for the work He has called us to.

***Have you found your role here at Oakwood?*** Dave Dorsey or I would be thrilled to sit down with you to talk about this. Meet with your small group leader and ask what they see in you. Check in with a ministry leader to learn what it might look like to serve in their area. If you're not sure what your gift is, try something out.

- Shadow someone in our media / technology ministry in back.
- Sit in on a TreeHouse class - the kids don't bite (very often).
- Check out our PowerHouse Student Ministry.
- Ask Mike about our First Impressions team.
- Ask JoAnne about our Hospitality team.
- Ask Lisa about helping to prepare for communion once a month.
- Talk with Marcos about our worship ministry.

Each of us HAS received a gift. You are a steward of God's grace. Use your gift to serve here at Oakwood.

Finally - one more movement we need to make.

### **Movement #3 - Our Purpose**

It's All About You → ***Give up Everything for God's Glory***

*“Use it to serve one another... in order that **in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**” 1 Peter 4:11*

We started at the heart level of faith. We trust in ourselves and that is why we follow our hearts into all kinds of selfishness and sin. And that reveals **our ultimate purpose in life is to make things all about us**. The world celebrates this - naming things like “me time” and exhorting people to pursue “self-actualization” and their own personal essence. The code of conduct today is “be who you are.” The worst thing anyone could do would be to suppress your self-expression and your constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness.

It’s all about you. Trust in yourself, follow your heart and that will be the banner that hangs over your casket. She lived a life that was all about her. He lived completely for himself. His own plans, his own desires, his own GLORY. This is the highest level - the level of what is ultimate, what everything - in the end - is all about.

Is your life, if you are totally honest and boil it all down, all about YOU? Or **can you truly say that you live each day for the glory of God?**

Again, Peter’s words are very emphatic. *“In order that **IN EVERYTHING** God may be glorified.”* Can we really say that in our lives? Do we honor God **IN EVERYTHING** that we think, say and do? Does every area of Oakwood give God maximum glory - or are there ministries we have neglected because not everyone is fully engaged?

We know the truth of the second half of the verse: *“to Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.”* **God deserves our unending praise**. He deserves our wholehearted devotion and unquestioning obedience. As we learned a couple of weeks ago, God should be the object of our joy and delight. We honor Him best when we enjoy Him most.

God IS the fountain of life. **He is the source of all joy, purpose, power, peace and love**. Therefore He deserves to be acknowledged, appreciated and enjoyed as Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Restorer of all things. *“To him belong glory and dominion forever.”*

One important way that we glorify God is by obeying His command to love and serve one another in the local church. Jesus said that his love language is obedience - “Anyone who loves me will obey my commands” (John 14:23). Sometimes the command to glorify God can feel abstract and unattainable. But in this context it is very practical and concrete. If you want to glorify God, here are three shifts to make in your thinking and acting.

1. Move from believing in yourself to **trusting completely** in God and His plan.
2. Move from following your own heart to following God’s commands and **play your part** in the local church. Find a place of ministry.
3. And move from making life all about you and **give everything you have** - all that you are - for the glory of God.
  - a. Surrender your plans.
  - b. Surrender your desires.
  - c. For sure repent of your sins.

- d. Repent of your selfishness.
- e. Bring all of yourself to the Lord and commit it all in service to Him.

### **The Cure for Selfishness is Jesus**

**“In order that in everything God may be glorified *through Jesus Christ.*” 1 Peter 4:11**

The focal point of everything is Jesus. ***HE is the cure for our selfishness.*** When we were lost in our sin, trusting completely in ourselves, following our own hearts into sin after sin and making everything all about us - that is when he came to die for us. It was not when we were so pretty and impressive - but while we were still sinners that Christ died for us.

***Jesus the King came as a servant.*** He lived the life of a humble, sacrificial servant. That was the centerpiece of God’s great plan of salvation the Bible calls us to trust in. Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross. Believe the gospel and be cured of your selfishness. Let Jesus take away your old selfish, sinful heart and give you a new heart where His Spirit reigns. Let Jesus continue to serve you by washing away that selfishness and replacing it with a life given to service, “in order that in everything God may be glorified *through Jesus Christ.*”

***Jesus is the creator*** and the co-architect of the plan of salvation along with God the Father and in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. We can trust Him completely.

***Jesus is the Savior*** who accomplished the great plan of salvation through his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. His death covered the multitude of our sins and his resurrection broke the power of sin over us. His Spirit gave us a new heart and lives in us - guiding us to follow Him instead of following our old, sinful flesh and empowering us to serve one another in the church of which Jesus is the head and we are the body.

Jesus is the one through whom all things were made and ***for whom all things were made.*** This whole story is about Him and for His infinite and unending glory. Our ultimate purpose and our daily pursuit is to bring glory to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ***“To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”***

All of us are oriented toward ourselves and our own desires and plans. Jesus came to set us free from that - ***to recalibrate our lives with a new True North*** - a life fully devoted to the glory of God by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and devoting ourselves to building up His church.

Let’s pray with the confident assurance that ***Jesus is building His Church*** - person by person and stone by stone - and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.