

What Members Do
1 Peter 4:7-11

One hundred and two years ago, the *Titanic* sank quickly and unexpectedly in the Atlantic Ocean. But it took about 9 decades to determine the reason *why* the *Titanic* sank:

Recent in-depth research into the sinking of the *Titanic* has discovered that faulty rivets may have been the main cause for the ship's demise. It has been found out that builders of the *Titanic* were incredibly short on rivets and skilled riveters and had to ultimately settle for faulty materials in order to complete the project on time. Scientists believe that with the right quality of materials and skilled workers that the *Titanic* may have been able to withstand the impact of the iceberg without sinking into the Atlantic.

Scientists have recently recovered documents that tell tales of inferior metal used for riveting and less than skilled workers hired to install them. A modern marvel of her time, the *Titanic* was the largest passenger ship ever built, but it may have been far from the best constructed. Many documents have uncovered that much low quality slag metal was used in building the rivets in the *Titanic*. This type of metal does not hold its integrity as well in cold waters and become very brittle at extreme cold.

Archives found in regards to the Harland Wolff company of Ireland that was responsible for the *Titanic* construction states that over three million rivets needed to be used in order to construct the *Titanic*. Acting as the glue that holds the ship together, the archives also state that there was a shortage of riveters and the necessary materials to produce high quality rivets.

The archives also uncovered that there was indeed a lack of skilled riveters that were needed to complete the project. An incredibly difficult task to achieve, the rivets needed to be heated to the perfect temperature and put into place with the right number of consistent hammer strikes. Of course if the final result looked decent on the outside, shoddy craftsmanship could be easily hidden.

Only on the central hull of the ship were steel rivets used; other areas such as the stern and the bow used weaker iron rivets to hold them together. This is a mistake that would lead to tragedy in the end as the iceberg struck the bow of the *Titanic*. Scientists and engineers believe that with strong rivets and better craftsmanship that the *Titanic* could have stayed afloat long enough for rescue to arrive and may have saved many lives. ["Weak Rivets Might Have Caused the *Titanic* to Sink: www.titanicuniverse.com/weak-rivets-might-have-caused-the-titanic-to-sink/1108; see also several stories about Jennifer Hooper McCarty's book, *What Really Sank the Titanic*.]

One of the least expensive parts on the ship may have been the reason for its sinking, proving again that there are no unimportant components to any object or organization.

Over the past few weeks we've been talking about the nature of the church — and specifically about the responsibilities of the elders and deacons in the church. It might be easy to think, "let them do all the work..." But that is not the intent of God in the creation of the church. God's plan was to create an

organism in which all the members work and serve. In that sense, there is no such thing as an “ordinary” believer — we all have unique gifting and a unique position and role in the church in which God has placed us. And the church is dependent on each member fulfilling his role within the church.

The way we say it around here is, “Every member has a ministry.” That’s one of our core values.

But just what does that look like? What does each member do? Well, because each member has unique gifting and position, each member will function in a unique way. And yet there are some general principles that guide what each of us does, as Peter explains in 1 Peter 4:7ff.

While ministry in the local church is sometimes hard, it is not complicated; the basic responsibilities of each person are relatively simple. And what we will find in this passage is,

SERVICE IS ESSENTIAL.

Here, then, are three basics of ministry:

- 1. WHERE We Serve: The CONTEXT for Ministry (v. 7a)**
- 2. HOW We Serve: The NATURE of Ministry (vv. 7b-11a)**
 - ✓ PRAY for One Another (v. 7b)
 - ✓ LOVE One Another (v. 8a)
 - ✓ FORGIVE One Another (v. 8b)
 - ✓ Be HOSPITABLE to One Another (v. 9)
 - ✓ SPIRITUALLY Care for One Another (vv. 10-11a)
- 3. WHY We Serve: The PURPOSE of Ministry (v. 11b)**

1. WHERE We Serve: The CONTEXT for Ministry (v. 7a)

- In some places, there is the perception that ministry is done in idyllic circumstances — often circumstances that are detached from reality. More than one person has suggested that they thought preachers and church staff just stood around the copier humming and singing hymns all day. Nope.
- Church ministry is done the context of real life circumstances that are difficult and trying. We will see more of this in a couple of weeks, but Peter is writing to believers who have been scattered throughout Asia Minor (1:1, north and west of Israel); because they believed in Christ, they were opposed in Jerusalem and Israel and fled to other parts of the world (spreading the gospel with them).
- These believers *did not* live in peaceful places or a peaceful time (notice verse 12).
- Because of these trials, Peter stresses the need to keep the perspective that ***the end of all things is near***.
 - ✓ Now by this phrase he does not mean that their persecution is about to ***end***.
 - ✓ But he does mean that the ***end*** of human history (***all things***) on the earth is nearing; Christ is coming back to establish His kingdom and that time is near. Peter is talking about an ***end*** that is “the consummation of the ages.” The purpose of history is near to reaching its goal and intention.
 - ✓ And when Peter says Christ’s return is ***near*** he means that it is “approaching” and “impending.”
 - ✓ We call this truth the imminent return of Christ and it simply means that Christ can come back at any time and that we should always be ready for that return (Js. 5:8-9). (And don’t be concerned about the fact that it’s been 2000 years since Peter wrote this — with God that’s only two days — 2 Pt. 3:4-9). Christ’s return *is* near.
 - ✓ But even more than this, Peter is also affirming that while we live and minister in a persecuting and hostile world, what we must endure is brief in comparison to what lies ahead.
 - ✓ And, there is no trouble that can separate us from Christ’s love and return. There is no trouble that is (ultimately) lasting. We may grieve the perversity of our culture and the increasing animosity believers face, but don’t ever lose sight of the fact ***the end is near*** and at that end, the Lord will right every wrong.
 - ✓ And it also means that time is short for people to come to trust in Christ so as we see persecution increasing and the end of time looming, we should be working even harder to present the gospel to those who are lost, as Paul says (Eph. 5:15-17).
- So in light of Christ’s promised coming, Peter gives two admonitions:
 - ✓ ***be of sound judgment*** = be cool-headed, in control of mind & thoughts, in our right mind — to be master of our mind (e.g., demon possessed man in Mk. 5:15). We think with sanity and seriousness about the situations of life.

- ✓ And Peter also says, **be sober** = i.e., inwardly controlled; in full possession of faculties & feelings.
- ✓ Combined, these mean “think clearly.” Not just *think* clearly, but think clearly and believe what you think! We sin thru worry, mistrust, anxiety, etc... because we have not rightly evaluated.

“The early Christians did not say in dismay, ‘Look what the world has come to,’ but in delight, ‘Look what has come to the world.’ They saw not merely the ruin, but the Resource for the reconstruction of that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did much more abound. ...On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism, to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match.” [E. Stanley Jones, missionary to India, 1942.]

- Understand the times in which we minister. The world is opposed to us and contrary to us and does not want us or our message to prevail. But Christ is coming and He has left us here until He returns so that we might serve Him by communicating the gospel and working in particular ways in the church. As you minister, start with the end in view — Christ is coming and we will survive (Jn. 16:33).

2. HOW We Serve: The NATURE of Ministry (vv. 7b-11a)

- How will we work in this perverse world? Certainly we want to be bold with the gospel, but that’s not particularly Peter’s message in this passage. Rather, he says that because the world is contrary to the church and believers, we should conduct ourselves in particular ways with one another.
 - ✓ It’s easy to say, “the world is against us, we need to be more evangelistic.” But Peter essentially says, “the world is against us; let us care all the more for one another.” And of course that is also a testimony to the world of our love for Christ (Jn. 13:34-35).
 - ✓ How will we serve each other? In these few verses Peter identifies five particular actions we are to take on behalf of one another. These are not *all* the things that church members do, but these do provide a solid foundation of our responsibilities and actions.
- PRAY for One Another (v. 7b)
 - ✓ All of this clear thinking is **for the purpose of prayer** — to pray effectively and deeply. He is implying that one cannot pray effectively or wisely if his perception and purpose is skewed. If one is fearful and anxious and ungrateful, he will be tempted to be self-sufficient and complain and not pray.
 - ✓ So understand what the Lord is doing and pray. Why pray? Because moment-by-moment attention to God in prayer is fundamental to successful living.

- We give too little attention to praying because we have never prayed enough. “The secret of all failure is prayerlessness....Prayerlessness is a disaster.”
- So pray, because wisdom for the moment’s need comes through prayer (Js. 1:5; Prov. 3:5-6). When we pray, God gives us wisdom and conforms our minds to His and changes us.
- And while Peter doesn’t say it, our prayers should not be self-serving; we should also pray for one another; we serve one another by praying for one another (cf. also **2 Cor. 1:8-11**).

- *Col. 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;*
- *1 Th. 5:25 Brethren, pray for us.*
- *2 Th. 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;*
- *Heb. 13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.*

- LOVE One Another (v. 8a)

- ✓ **Above all** = “Before all things” — love for one another in the context of the church body is a fundamental priority; loving each other is not “extra,” it’s paramount (cf. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8).
- ✓ Peter doesn’t merely say **love one another**, but **keep fervent...** That is, you are loving well, *continue* in loving each other. And do it **fervently** — strenuously and with zeal and passion. Like a horse that is running at full speed and straining to reach the finish line, love each other with the same exertion. Work hard at loving each other (and sometimes it *is* hard work, isn’t it?).
- ✓ This is not the first time the command to love has been given: Dt. 6:5ff; Mt. 22:37-40; Jn. 13:34. Some 58x in the Epistles, believers are told to do something for one another, and the most common of those phrases is, “love one another” (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Pt. 1:22; 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12, 2 Jn. 5).
- ✓ Two implications from this often repeated command: 1) it can be hard to love (that’s why we are reminded so often to do it); 2) we can never love anyone too much. We can never defer to their preferences too much; we can never sacrifice too much; we can never serve too much; we can never forgive too often; we can never encourage too frequently. We can never speak the truth in love often enough. We can never confront sin often enough (remember that it *is* loving to confront sin, and hateful not to correct it). We can never love too much.
- ✓ Four further implications of loving each other:
 - Love can be commanded; it is a response of the will to our compassion towards another’s need.
 - Love is constant and continual (present tense).
 - Love is mutual — it is with **one another** (goes both directions).
 - Love is unhypocritical and sincere (**1:22**) — it is a genuine gift to another (also 1 Th. 4:9-10).

- FORGIVE One Another (v. 8b)
 - ✓ Of all the things we might say about love, Peter specifically also means that love includes forgiveness. To love means to forgive. To **cover sin** pictures putting sin away and out of sight so nothing of it is never seen again. Where it has been in the open and seen by all, now the sin is intentionally removed.
 - ✓ What that does not mean is that the sin is ignored and hidden and left unconfessed.
 - ✓ **Covering** pictures something that has been confessed and after confession it is forgiven.
 - In Ps. 32:5 David refers to the confession of his sin with Bathsheba three different ways and then says, “You forgave...” and the word “forgive” is the word “covered.”
 - In Ps. 85:2 the Psalmist uses parallelism to indicate that the words “forgive” and “cover” refer to the same thing.
 - In Js. 5:20 — a passage on restorative discipleship — James says that when a sinner repents and turns away from his sin, that sin is “covered” (forgiven).
 - The word “covering” in relation to sin has the idea that after He forgives a sin, God never looks at that sin to hold it against the sinner again. When it is covered it is permanently put away from His sight and He intentionally will not look at it again.
 - ✓ We have spoken many times about confession and forgiveness (e.g., Philemon). As a reminder, there are two kinds of forgiveness:
 - *Transactional forgiveness*: someone comes to confess a sin and we forgive it (refuse to ever hold it against that person again, Lk. 17:3; Prov. 17:9); that is what is in view here (even if we have to forgive 490x or more, **Mt. 18:21-22**). This is the only way God ever forgives.
 - *Heart forgiveness*: the person doesn’t confess, so we can’t transact forgiveness; but we also are ready to forgive, want to forgive, and are pursuing reconciliation (Eph. 4:32; Rom. 12:18; Mk. 11:25).
 - ✓ Love says, “I want to forgive and it is my joy to forgive no matter what it costs me.”
 - ✓ A godly and healthy church body works hard at forgiveness. We are repeatedly and strenuously (working hard at it) “covering” a variety of sins (1 Cor. 13:4-7, esp. v. 5). We are not “overlooking” sin, but we are volitionally and intentionally forgiving that sin.
 - ✓ Sin in the body of Christ does not destroy a church. Sin between a husband and a wife does not destroy a marriage. Sin between parents and children does not destroy a family. Sin between friends does not destroy a friendship. But lack of confession and forgiveness will destroy all those relationships.
 - ✓ If you love each other, forgive each other (and we see you doing this). I have *rarely* (twice?) heard someone say, “no, I won’t forgive you...” and even then, they eventually did. This is what makes relationships in the church unique testimonies of God’s grace.

- Be HOSPITABLE to One Another (v. 9)
 - ✓ In early church, there were no hotels; remember that the readers of this letter were persecuted and fled. Where would they stay? They were dependent on the hospitality of strangers.
 - ✓ To give hospitably and generously is a gift of time and energy as well as resources and it acknowledges our interdependence.
 - The word originally meant “a love of strangers” — and that’s how far this hospitality goes — to embracing strangers (which is what doctors and nurses do in their *hospital*).
 - One very familiar story of hospitality is the Good Samaritan (**Lk. 10:30-37**). He felt compassion (v. 33), he was willing to be “unclean” (v. 34), he physically sacrificed (v. 34, walking), he financially sacrificed (v. 35), and he persisted in being hospitable (v. 35b).
 - This is simply a way of saying, “I will do everything I can to meet the needs of those I’m able to meet — and I will do it with joy...”
 - A number of other “one anothers” seem to fit into this category: participate in fellowship with one another, be devoted to one another, honor one another, accept one another, greet one another with a holy kiss (hugs work, too).
 - ✓ But notice also that Peter doesn’t only talk about sacrificing for others. To truly be hospitable, our actions are done *without complaint*.
 - ✓ The word **complaint** means, “muttering.” It’s the words spoken under our breath; we may not want others to hear our complaints, but we also want to make sure we voice them (even if we are the only ones to hear the complaint).
 - ✓ Being hospitable and taking care of others needs sometimes becomes tiresome, doesn’t it? That’s where we get the “proverb” “houseguests and fish both stink after 3 days” — the longer one stays, the more difficult it is for the one providing care. But for the believer that should not be true — there are no “stinking fish” when we care for one another.
 - ✓ Many illustrations could be given of this, but one is how so many of our church body are providing hospitality for Jean McCracken in her own home; she can’t get out and is unable to do many things for herself, so you are taking care of many of her physical needs; and you are doing it with joy (though many of the tasks are often anything but pleasant). That is a sweet picture of what the body of Christ should be for one another.
 - ✓ There is one final way that members serve one another...

- SPIRITUALLY Care for One Another (vv. 10-11a)
 - ✓ Peter says, *as each one...* That is, if you are a believer, since you have the Holy Spirit residing in you and He gives spiritual gift(s) to every believer, then we should use those gifts in *serving one another*.
 - Here is something of the irony about spiritual gifts: we all have gifts, but they're not for our personal benefit — our spiritual gifts are given to us so that we can use them to serve others. So we only benefit by our spiritual gifts as we “give them away” in serving others.
 - That's why Peter says that we should serve others with our gifts *as good stewards...*
 - God has given us variegated graces — all kinds and quantities of spiritual gifts — and in whatever way He has given that to us, that is the way we should use those gifts.
 - And this is a *stewardship*. The *steward* was someone who worked in the home of a wealthy owner and cared for and managed his property as if it belonged to the steward; the steward didn't own anything, but he had responsibility for everything.
 - This is true of our spiritual gifts and ministries as well — the church belongs to Christ and the gifts belong to the Holy Spirit, but they have been entrusted to us to care for them and use them so that other members of the church are cared for.
 - ✓ These verses don't list all the different particular gifts, but refer only to the two *kinds* of spiritual gifts: *speaking* (formally and informally) and *serving*.
 - When *speaking*, be conscious that only God's Word is sufficient and able to change men's hearts, so use it: Ps. 119:50; 1 Th. 2:13; 4:18.
 - When *serving*, be aware only God's strength is able (Eph. 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:58)
 - ✓ And the reason that spiritual gifts are so important is that while we care about the outer man, what we really care about is the inner man. Ministry is ultimately about the care of the soul more than anything else (2 Cor. 4:16-18).
 - ✓ We've spoken recently about spiritual gifts so I won't belabor the point again, other than to say, if you are a believer, you have some combination of gifts, use them (and a great many of you do).

3. WHY We Serve: The PURPOSE of Ministry (v. 11b)

- The question all growing children ask more than any other is, “Why?” (Followed closely by “why not?”) The temptation for every parent is just to mindlessly (or angrily) say, “because I said so.”
- You also might wonder why all this is so important. Why God? Why do we have to do this? It's costly. It hurts — sometimes physically and often emotionally. It's humbling. It's tiring and endless. And sometimes it seems that its useless. So why? Why serve by praying and loving and forgiving and being hospitable and using our spiritual gifts?

- Serve and use your spiritual gifts because it will bring glory to God (reveal His nature to others)!
- Our goal is not self-glorification. Our goal is God-glorification (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; 10:31).
There is only one who receives the *glory* of others *forever and ever*. That is God.
- When we serve each other in this way, it says something about God.
 - ✓ Our service says that God has changed us and is changing us (and that honors Him because it means, “if God can do something like that in Terry...” — it reveals His power and authority.
 - ✓ Our service says that we live for the ultimate God and King and not for anything less than that.
 - ✓ Our vision statement at GBC is, “Shepherding God’s people by God’s grace for God’s glory.”
And when we say God’s glory, we mean —
 - *Revealing the character of God* — He is who He says He is, the sovereign God.
 - *Upholding the majesty of God* — He is good and enjoyable and better than all other things.
 - ✓ So everything we do in the church body is to this one end — to demonstrate the greatness and wonder of God. We live for Him and through Him and to Him.

CONCLUSION: What does a member do? A member serves.

And as we close, we do well to contrast the story of the *Titanic* with another story. Many workers and planners involved in building the *Titanic* cut corners; they were sloppy and didn’t care. They had “menial” tasks and they did them in a sloppily.

Consider the story of our Savior: Ps 132:11-12. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to David. He will sit on the Davidic throne for all eternity. Yet also consider this: Phil. 2:5-8. And why did Christ do that? Because the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). The King of kings is a servant. And that’s why we also joyfully serve.

That’s what all church members do — we serve, because we follow in the footsteps of the King, who also is a servant.