

Cleaning House

Servival Kit, Part 7

1 Peter 4:17-18

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

As the end of the age draws near, Peter has some specific instructions. We are told much of what happens at the end, but Peter makes sure we know how to prepare. He exhorts Christians to have a specific mindset as the end draws near because of what that day will bring. First, we are to surrender to God's plan for our sanctification and purification. He is in control of molding us more into the image of His son, so we need to let Him do that work in our lives. Along with that, we should also have a feeling of pity for unbelievers who do not have a relationship with Christ. We suffer temporarily during this lifetime, but will be redeemed in eternity. For unbelievers, there is total loss as the judgment of God will be their eternity. Peter makes sure that we are ready with those proper attitudes as time moves on.

Discussion Points:

As soon as you place your faith and trust in Jesus as your savior, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit as God's child. Your status has completely changed at that point, but you are not immediately taken off the earth and into God's presence at that moment.

- Why is it that Christians are not done with their life journey as soon as they trust Jesus?
- What are some responsibilities in the life of a Christian?
- What does the Bible say about the change in a person's life after they trust Christ?
- Have you ever thought about your coming to faith in Christ as the finish line?
- How do you keep the proper perspective about how to use your life for God's glory?

Discussion Guide cont.

Peter tells his audience that judgment is coming in the end for believers and unbelievers.

- What is the difference between judgment and discipline?
- How does God's discipline as a father to Christians prepare us for judgment in the future?
- Does discipline for us in this life mean judgment will be lesser at the end?
- Since Jesus' righteousness is credited to a believer at the moment of salvation, what will final judgment be like?
- Does God discipline unbelievers during their lives on earth?
- Is all suffering related to discipline or can it come from other circumstances?

Life is difficult for believers and unbelievers even though their reasons for difficulty are often different.

- What are some of the causes of difficulty in the life of a Christian?
- What makes the life of an unbeliever difficult?

Christians, while they suffer during this lifetime because of the presence of sin and the persecution from the world, will eventually experience fulfillment and peace throughout eternity. Unbelievers deal with the consequences of sin throughout their lives on earth, but also throughout eternity because of their unbelief in Jesus.

- What does Peter say about the Christian's attitude toward the unbeliever?
- How important is sharing the gospel with unbelievers?

Gospel Connection:

Redemption is something that we all desire, but it only happens for Christians. Make no mistake, judgment is coming, but for believers in Jesus Christ, the outcome has already been announced. Because Jesus came to take the penalty for our sin and defeated sin and death on the cross and through the resurrection, He has imputed His righteousness to all those who trust in and follow Him. That means that all the sin we have been stained with is wiped clean, and the record of Jesus is what God sees when He looks on us in judgment. For that reason, there has been reconciliation between us and God that unbelievers will never experience. The judgment of God is something that should incite fear. But as a Christian, knowing that your penalty has been paid and that it is Jesus who determined your status, you'll have a peace that only Christians will ever experience.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Are you using your life in a way that honors God? Are you submitting to Him to let Him shape you?
- Pray:** Ask God help you have the right perspective on this life. Ask Him to help you see the big picture and how you fit in with His plans. Thank Him for sending Jesus to save you of your sins so that you can be in relationship with Him and no longer fear His judgment.
- Do:** Talk to unbelievers. Be bold and be willing to share the gospel when you are able to. Also, set a good example of submitting to the rule of Christ in your life.

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1 Peter 4:17-18

The Apostle Peter has announced ***The end of all things is near (1 Peter 4:7)***. Was Peter a doomsday prophet? Was he selling grain or windmills or maybe best-selling books on the coming apocalypse?

No, Peter was anticipating the coming of Christ for His church and the end of human history as we currently know it.

So what do you do in the light of the fact that we're 2,000 years nearer to the end than we were when Peter wrote this?

Peter never gave a date, wisely, and his advice is true in any culture and in every generation – including ours.

Following that announcement, Peter launches into a series of commands to help us prep, as it were, for the end of the world and we've spent the past 6 weeks tracking it all down.

His inspired advice has had nothing to do with digging bunkers, storing up food and grain, or maybe even gathering enough ammunition to keep your hungry neighbors from helping themselves as economic systems hit a major speedbump with the disappearance of millions of Christians.

So what are we supposed to do in light of the fact that the coming of Christ is nearer now than ever before? Well, Peter's counsel has had nothing to do with spending any time preparing for isolation and protection from the world around you.

Instead, he tells us in ***verse 7*** not to panic, but to stay focused and to keep praying. In ***verses 8 & 9*** Peter commands us to remain loving and available to people and their needs.

He tells us to start investing in the life of our local church through speaking or serving gifts in ***verses 10-11*** – talents and abilities and gifts that God embroidered into our lives all the way back in our mother's womb.

Then Peter made it crystal clear that our lives might even become more complicated as we live and serve a world that really doesn't want us.

In ***verses 12-13***, Peter tells us not to be surprised when trouble comes our way, but to keep on rejoicing.

But he warns us in ***verses 14-16*** that we need to make sure we're not suffering because of our own crimes and sinful attitudes, but to make sure we're suffering because we proudly and publically wear the brand name of Christ – we happen to be genuine Christians.

And he is about to remind us again that God has a purpose in suffering – and it isn't to destroy us, but to develop us.

And as the end draws near,

- Peter doesn't want us isolated from people, but invested in people.
- He doesn't want us protected from harm, but progressing in holiness.

And that means trouble will come and life will become all the more challenging and the Lord shapes us and tutors us through change.

One author put it in honest, realistic words when he wrote, "One of the most frustrating things about the Lord is that He just won't settle down. He is constantly moving us away from the places where we would prefer to stay; and moving us closer to where we do not want to go."ⁱ

Well said, and that's because Christians are not settlers, they're pilgrims. And that requires challenge and change.

Maybe you can identify right now with that first grader whose teacher wrote about what happened on the first day of school. Accustomed to going home at noon in kindergarten, Ryan was getting his things ready to leave for home when he was actually

supposed to be heading to lunch with the rest of the class. He wasn't used to that – that had never happened before in his educational experience. Linda, his teacher, asked him what he was doing. "I'm going home," he replied rather confidently.

Linda explained that, now that he was in the first grade, he would have a longer school day. "You'll go eat lunch now and then you'll come back to the room and do some more work before you go home." Ryan looked up at her in disbelief, hoping she was kidding. She wasn't. To which he put his hands on his hips and asked, "Who in the world signed me up for this program?"

Do you ever feel like that? "Who in the world signed me up for this program?" God did! He not only signed you up, He wrote the program!

You were expecting to go home, but God has you staying a little longer. There's a little more work for you to do first.

Now, Peter adds to his counsel. So let's work our way through the next two verses and make a special note of **Two Attitudes for End-time Believers**.

And the first attitude is surrender. Let's define what we mean:

1. Surrender: we cannot refuse to embrace suffering as a purifying part of God's curriculum

In other words, trials aren't electives; they are part of the core curriculum for disciple making. And Peter has already informed us that trials are not to be treated as strangers, they are to be welcomed as tutors, sent to instruct us.

Now notice *verse 17* – just the first phrase, ***For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God.***

The idea of judgment being connected to *the household of God* has caused some to assume that Peter isn't speaking about the church; he must be speaking prophetically about the destruction of the Jewish temple, which will be

destroyed in AD 70, just a few years after Peter writes this letter.

That's not a bad idea, but it would change dramatically the application of this text. The truth is, Peter hasn't changed his contextual thoughts and shifted to the unbelieving nation of Israel.

He's still referring to the church, calling it here a *household of God*. In fact, Paul wrote to the Galatians, using this same metaphor of a household – he writes; ***So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:10***

Further, Paul wrote to the Ephesian church; ***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. Ephesians 2:19***

One more – and this is even more confirming of Peter's use of the term – Paul writes; ***I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15***

Peter is referring here to the believing church, informing us that God's judgment is a part of our lives.

If you ransack the New Testament you quickly discover that judgment for the believer is vastly different than for the unbeliever.

- For the unbeliever, it leads to eternal condemnation.
- For the believer, it leads to life-long cleansing.

The Apostle Paul clarified God's judgment in the lives of the believers when he wrote to the Corinthian church; ***When we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:32a***

Discipline and disciple; being disciplined and disciplined are from the same word. Judgment, or being disciplined, is corrective; being disciplined is constructive. And both are necessary.

God cares enough about you that He gets His dust rag out . . . and His mop . . . and because of His love for the church – and every believer in it

– He simply refuses to sweep dirt in His house under the rug.ⁱⁱ Suffering is often the way God brings about spring cleaning.

And Peter is speaking of the church as a whole. He must know by now how easy it is for the church to become self-centered – to simply skate along. Maybe he’s picking up the signs from the church at Ephesus which is perhaps, even now, beginning to lose her zeal and her love for Christ.

It’s possible for any congregation to become saved, sanctified, galvanized, petrified and then fossilized.ⁱⁱⁱ

By implication, Peter wants us to know that suffering and trials and hard times are taking place

- not because we *don’t* belong to God, but because we do;
- not because God *isn’t* interested in us, but because He happens to be deeply interested in us.

Go out to the playground where a bunch of children are running around and mothers are standing there talking. As soon as some little boy gets out of line, who do you think straightens him out? The mother. The other mothers might want to, but she’s the one grabbing him by the shirt collar.

When I was growing up my neighbors never cared about my table manners or what I ate or if my clothes fit or what my report card said when I brought it home.

They didn’t care if I got an A in PE and an F in spelling. Oh, I wished I belonged to my neighbors!

But neighbors don’t walk the floor at night or spend hours washing and cleaning and feeding and praying and training and reminding and guiding – they don’t do that – a good parent does.

Parents who don’t pass judgment by disciplining their children aren’t reflecting love, they are reflecting disinterest and disregard and unconcern.

So the heavy hand of God upon us as his children isn’t to disillusion us, but to develop

us; we happen to be the children of God and He happens to be a very involved parent. (*John 1:12*)

The writer of *Hebrews* put it this way – let me paraphrase it:

Don’t shrug off God’s discipline, but don’t be crushed by it either. It’s the child He loves that He disciplines; the child He embraces, He also corrects. God is educating you; that’s why you must never drop out. He’s treating you as dear children. This trouble you’re in isn’t punishment; it is *training*; it is the normal experience of children. — Hebrews 12:7-11 The Message

And so we pray that as we face difficulties and discouragements and pain and suffering – “Lord, *make us surrender* to plans You have for us that we don’t yet know. *Change us* into what we are not yet like. *Teach us* what we don’t yet know.” We surrender.

Peter now suggests another attitude for end-time believers. Again, you’re going to have to be willing to clean house in order to embrace these attitudes.

First, surrender. Second, pity.

2. **Pity: we are to *pity* the unsaved who will experience the full measure of God’s *wrath***

Not only are we to *embrace* suffering as a purifying part of God’s curriculum, we are to *pity the unsaved* who will experience the full measure of God’s wrath.

Notice how Peter goes on now to ask us two questions – notice the first question: ***And if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4:17b***

Peter wants us to look way down the road. For those who believe the gospel, God’s judgement results in purification and ultimate glorification in Heaven.^{iv}

But the ***outcome*** of the unbeliever? Again, Peter doesn’t fill in the blanks, but the Bible does; it is everlasting judgment and punishment.

And here's Peter's point to the believer: he wants us to clean house on our attitudes. Instead of complaining how hard our lives are now and how easy people have it around us who reject the gospel – just look down the road 100 years from now – *No matter how hard life is, or has been, or can be, it is nothing in comparison to the pain and suffering of someone who refuses the gospel of God.*

Look at where they will be one day! And this produces in us Christ-like compassion and pity.

This article came across my desk this past week – a female rabbi living in Michigan wrote a book that will soon be released about what she calls *Walking the Way of the Divine Feminine*.

She begins by praising women coming forward to report sexual assault and harassment – and yes, that is wonderfully courageous, as far as your pastor is concerned.

But then she veers off the tracks and writes, “As a rabbi, I’ve become emboldened by these brave young women to speak a truth that I’ve known in my heart for a long time but have been hesitant to share. The time has come for me to step forward, too. It’s time we all acknowledge an overwhelmingly powerful source of shame and silence . . . the story that begins the Bible, the first one that we learn in Sunday school, the founding story of man and woman upheld for thousands of years by Judeo-Christian religion, is actually the story of the first sexual assault of a woman. The woman’s name is Eve. And the perpetrator [is] God.”

(If I can pull over for a moment here - if you’ve read the Genesis account, you know that it has nothing to do with sexual assault, but sin and judgement, atonement and forgiveness.)

She writes on – “Here is a young, beautiful, intelligent . . . woman living in a state of Grace. She’s hungry, so she does the most natural thing in the world and eats a piece of fruit. For following her instincts, trusting herself, and nourishing her body, she is punished. And her punishment? She will never again feel safe in her nakedness; she will never again know her body as a place of sacred sovereignty.”

(I know you’ve heard enough, but here’s her conclusion:) “This God . . . is not my God. He is a fiction, a man-made myth . . . the God I believe in is all loving . . . a source of life and healing, not shame . . .”^v

The truth is, the gospel is all about sin and shame and rebellion and an everlasting Hell – but it is also about a Savior and atonement and resurrection and forgiveness and everlasting Heaven!

“But we don’t want that! Don’t give us anything about wrath or sin; give us only a God of love.”

Beloved, did you know that there are hymnal publishers and churches today that refuse to sing the well-known Getty hymn, “In Christ Alone”? And that’s all because of those two troubling lines in it that read, Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied.^{vi}

But that’s the gospel, isn’t it? Paul uses the word *wrath* at least 15 times in describing the gospel. He writes to the Roman believers; ***For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth...Romans 1:18***

Further, Paul writes, ***But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath... Romans 2:5***

But that isn’t all there is to the gospel. Paul writes, ***Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. Romans 5:9***

Those who would reconstruct a gospel without sin and shame effectively eliminate the gospel. Why? Because a gospel without sin and shame is a gospel without a God who then will forgive sin and shame. It eliminates the reason for a dying Savior; it eliminates the need for a resurrected Savior.

So the lost are without a Savior. They refuse to obey the truth of the gospel and we have compassion on them and pity for them and a desire to reach them and pray for them and see Christ save them.

The second question Peter asks is similar, but it focuses not just on the future, but on the present. Notice *verse 18: And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?*

When Peter writes here of being saved with difficulty, he refers to the life of difficulty and hardship that accompanies salvation. He uses colloquial language as if to wipe sweat off his brow as he says, “We barely made it!”

That doesn’t mean we barely got saved and we had to work our way to Heaven. We’re not justified by faith plus suffering. We don’t earn salvation through suffering, but salvation and suffering go *hand in hand*.

Paul said a similar statement recorded in *Acts 14:22: Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

Again, that doesn’t mean we have to go through hardships in order to get into the kingdom – in order to *earn* our way in. Paul simply means that we’re not going to be able to avoid tribulations on our way there.

Peter uses the same expression: *And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved...* Peter here is referring to the kind of journey we’ll experience – and it happens to be filled with difficulty.

In fact, this same word for *difficulty* used by Peter is found in *Acts 27* where Luke records that after sailing slowly for many days because of the lack of wind, they finally – with difficulty – arrived.

That’s you and me. Like Pilgrim in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, it’s one danger after another; one trial after another; one battle after another; one test of faith after another.

Peter isn’t wanting us to ponder how difficult our journey is – in this text he’s actually wanting us to move past that and make an obvious comparison – *if our lives are difficult and we have the Savior, can you imagine someone going through life without God?*

What must it be like for an unbeliever to go through their life – through the pain and struggles of life – without the Lord?

I agree with one author who wrote, imagine,

“They have no foundation – no absolutes – no reason to go on – nothing to hold on to – no one to turn to – no way to calm their fears – no purpose for living – no peace in dying . . . no Savior.”^{vii} That’s what you can call hopelessness.

Many years ago, a Christian journal I subscribed to, *Moody Monthly* – no longer in publication – carried the story of an event that occurred in the life of a well-known surgeon living in Chicago.

Dr. Winters was awakened one morning around 1:00 am. There had been an accident and a young boy was in the hospital with conditions that Dr. Winters specialized in treating. The on-duty staff believed that he alone had the skill capable of saving that boy’s life.

He rushed out of bed, climbed into his clothes, jumped into his car and raced toward downtown Chicago. He decided to take a shortcut through a rather dangerous area, known for its gang activity. He felt the risk would be worth it and precious time could be saved.

Sure enough, as he stopped at a red light, a man ran up and opened the car door. He was wearing an old flannel shirt and a gray hat, and he literally threw the doctor out of the car yelling, “I’ve got to have your car!” Even though the doctor tried to explain, the man wouldn’t listen as he sped away.

It took Dr. Winters at least 45 minutes to get a taxi. By the time the taxi dropped him off, he had lost more than an hour. When he arrived at his station, the nurses shook their heads and sadly said, “You’re too late – the boy died 30 minutes ago.” One of the nurses said, “You’ll find the boy’s father down the hall in the chapel. He can’t understand why you never came.”

Without taking the time to explain to his staff what had happened, Dr. Winters hurried down the hallway and opened the door of the chapel and there at the front was the crumpled form of that weeping father, wearing that old flannel shirt and clutching that same gray hat.

He had literally pushed from his life the only person who could have made the difference.

To see someone push from their life the only Savior who can make an eternal difference develops in the believer the right response.

Peter knew that believers were suffering – often at the hands of an unbelieving world. And so Peter takes them – and us – through this exercise in cleaning house in order to challenge us with these two attitudes we need to cultivate as the end draws near.

Surrender – embrace God’s course in your life through His divinely ordained curriculum. His subjects include Suffering 101, Hardship 103, Testing 203, and Endurance 302. And you surrender, and register for classes, and you show up.

And then, as you compare your brief suffering with those around you who reject the gospel of God, you develop another attitude – not of revenge or anger or jealousy or covetousness or even frustration – but of **pity**.

And we could add, prayer and compassion and passion to reach them for Christ. For by rejecting Him their suffering will never end. And we, by receiving Him – our suffering will soon be transformed into glory and joy unhindered and eternal.

In the meantime, the words of an old hymn seem well-suited as we engage in house cleaning.

All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely
give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live.

I surrender all . . . I surrender all
All to Thee my Blessed Savior
I surrender all.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 02/18/2018 by Stephen Davey.

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i Craig Barnes, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, Hope Again (Word Publishers, 1996), p. 212

ii Ibid, p. 208

iii Ibid

iv D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 292

v Blog post by Ben Shapiro, February 8, 2018

vi Adapted from Richard Bewes, Under the Thorn Tree (Christian Focus, 2017), p. 65

vii Charles Swindoll, Hope Again, p. 209