

1 Peter 4:7-11

Today I want to return to our series entitled, [Attitudes and Actions of a Growing Church](#), and its subseries, "Priorities For Extraordinary Times" from 1 Peter 4:7-11. In our last session on the subject, I focused on 1 Peter 4:7: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."

In 1 Peter 4:7 I noted 4 priorities for extraordinary times:

- praying
- loving others
- practicing hospitality, and
- serving with our gifts in mind.

I concluded the first session on this passage with the [B.O.B. challenge](#). Because the Second World War Battle of Dunkirk is our example, I talked about the story of the 700+ small ships manned by civilians, but nonetheless instrumental in rescuing 375,000 soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. With this illustration in mind and due to the extraordinary times we live in as a church and as a nation, we need to take on what we are calling "

the B.O.B. challenge"

:

We need to B.O.B. We all need to **Board Our Boats** and launch them, filled with the elements we find here in 1 Peter 4:7-11—prayer, love, hospitality and our gifts.

The B.O.B. challenge's first expression was to fill our boats with prayer. As a dedicated community, I have asked us to pray for the ministries of Hillcrest Chapel every day for six months. As we do, the challenge is to expect God to do extraordinary things during that time. If you have forgotten about the challenge over the holidays or haven't taken it on yet, I want to encourage you to start again, or begin for the first time today. I want to challenge us to pray that we will accomplish all God has in mind for us to do this year.

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Written by Bob Stone

Some might say, "Why should I concentrate on Hillcrest Chapel"? Let me answer by giving a quote. Someone once asked a desert father named Abba Anthony, "What must one do to please God?" The first two pieces of advice were expected: always be aware of God's presence and always obey God's Word. But the third was surprising: "Wherever you find yourself—do not easily leave."

Here's the reason this quote applies to church communities:

- community life is hard
- authentic friendship is hard
- patience in working with others is hard
- faithfulness is hard.

Leaving or looking at other opportunities will always seem more attractive in the short run, but over the long haul, being uncommitted or easily leaving will produce people who consistently give up easily and are not satisfied. The application, then, is "do not easily leave" or overlook a prayer focus on Hillcrest Chapel. If you attend here, this is your Body!

Growth happens when we seek or exert effort where we are planted, rather than seeking out exotic opportunities or interests. If we give up in difficult circumstances, it always leads to wandering in the desert. Growth happens when we decide to be faithful wherever we may find ourselves.

We will mature and find fulfillment when we launch our boats and venture out into untested territory with our church community. It is in our church community, in fact, that we will discover real life and joy. If we apply Dunkirk again, great things can be accomplished with an armada of small ships that have praying captains on board.

The first priority (for extraordinary times) is to pray —v. 7

With verse 7 in mind, looking back at 1 Peter we see:

The second priority is to love one another.

1 Peter 4:8—*"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."* (See 1 Peter 1:22 as a prerequisite.)

What does it mean to love like this? There are four kinds of love possible:

1. Warm, cuddly, fuzzy love
2. Sexual love - eros
3. Love for a friend that is reciprocal—phileo
4. God's love (*agape*):

The Greek word *agape* was absent of depth until the New Testament writers redeemed it and used it. The word means love in its fullest conceivable form. It implies self-denial and being compassionately devoted to its object. The greatest example of this is, of course, our Lord—1 John 3:16.

Peter says we are to love like this—deeply. The word "deeply" has an interesting meaning. It means stretching out as a runner stretches at the end of a race, so to love "deeply" means we are to do the following:

- be stretched out.
- extend ourselves to the maximum in meeting the needs of others.
- seek another person's highest good

If we apply the Dunkirk example to this definition, it means we launch our little boats (our lives) into ministry and cross unknown territory in order to rescue someone in great need. The deepest kind of love is described for us in this classic passage, 1 Corinthians 13:1ff.

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1] If I speak in the tongues [or languages] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2] If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3] If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4] Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5] It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6] Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7] It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8] Love never fails.

No matter how many times I hear this passage, I'm in awe. Think of a world where people loved like this. Think of what it would be like if a church consistently exhibited this kind of love. On my first ministry assignment about 35 years ago, I still remember how I felt as I walked into Christ Memorial Church at Poulsbo, Washington. I was nervous, but that soon dissipated as I entered the foyer of the church. The love of that congregation was so obvious and tangible I could have cut it with a knife. It almost took my breath away. Think of the impact that would flow to those who don't know Christ if they could feel and experience a love like this.

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Let's go through each of these descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13 and see how love should be played out in our actions. Here we have two positive expressions of love (patience and kindness) followed by eight verbs expressing what love is *not* like or does not do; and then it is wrapped up with five positive expressions of what love *is*.

As far as I'm concerned, this is the hallowed ground of the sacred Scriptures.

Think with me how this love would affect a local church/our church.

Let's begin in first 4. The first description of love is:

Love is patient—v. 4; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12; 2 Cor. 6:6.

This is not limp, but rather *patient perseverance*, even in the event of injury received. Think of a church with that kind of stretched-out love that patiently perseveres with those around them! It is difficult to improve on the King James translation, "suffereth long" (suffers long).

Love is kind—v. 4.

It is the active complement of patience. It means active goodness towards a fellow believer, on their behalf. If we put "patient" and "kind" together, it means God's loving patience is demonstrated by holding back His wrath toward our rebellion; and His kindness is found in the vast expressions of God's mercy. The implication is obvious to the church: this is how His people are to act toward each other.

These two positive expressions are followed by seven verbs that show how love **does not** behave (just the opposite of the Corinthians).

Love does not envy—v. 4.

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This means it does not earnestly desire, nor is it involved in rivalry. (See Acts 7:9; 17:5; James 4:2.) In the church it means real love is not in competition for position or to gain favor from others. It seeks just the opposite, how we might best serve others.

Love does not boast—v. 4.

In other words, love "does not behave as a braggard, or a windbag." In other words, there is no desire to call attention to one's self with gifts or actions. It is not possible to boast and love at the same time—one action wants others to think highly of them; and the other cares for none of that, only the good of the church community as a whole. (This word is not used anywhere else in the New Testament.)

Love is not proud—v. 4.

It means "is not puffed up" and carries the overtone of arrogance. For Paul there seems to be no greater sin than to be arrogant. All the way through his writings, his description of the church is of those who lovingly humble themselves.

Love is not rude—v. 5.

This means love does not behave shamefully or disgracefully. Christian love cares too much for the rest of the community to behave rudely. It has good manners and shows grace.

Love is not self-seeking—v. 5.

It does not seek its own; it does not believe that "finding one's self" is the highest good; it is not focused on self-gain, self-justification, or self-worth. To the contrary, it seeks the good of one's neighbor, even an enemy—Phil. 2:4.

Love is not easily angered—v. 5.

The NIV really does sum up the meaning of the word. This kind of godly love is not easily angered. In other words, it is a further expression of patience than is expressed in the beginning of this list.

When I began my ministry at Hillcrest Chapel, my family and I would often go out to eat

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after church on Sunday night with a bunch of people. I was usually pretty tired and silly after a long day of ministry, but it was a good time for me to wind down after the day. Well, one night while one man was praying for the meal, I reached over and poured sugar into another guy's Coke. Should I have done it? Probably not! Was it irreverent? Yes! But one of the people present also had his eyes open during the prayer. When this person saw what I did, he became very offended and almost left the church because of this "sugar in the Coke" incident.

I didn't say much at the time, but what I should have said was, "Lighten up a little and dial down the reaction. Love is not easily angered." It is tragic to me, but in some churches are those who get very uptight about minor things. That anger will sometimes split churches and cause undo stress and pain. Real love has a sense of humor, too, and does not get uptight easily.

Love keeps no record of wrongs—v. 5.

Love "does not think on it or dwell on wrongs:" the evil or wrong done by others. There is no list! One who loves does not take notice of the evil done against him/her, in the sense that no records are kept while waiting for God or another person to settle the score. (See Luke 23:34.)

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth—v. 10.

The person full of Christian love rejoices in behavior that reflects the gospel, i.e., victories gained, forgiveness offered, every act of kindness. Such a person refuses to take delight in evil or gossip, e.g., the fall of a brother or sister, someone else's misdeeds.

Love stands on the side of the truth/gospel and looks for mercy and justice for everyone, including those with whom they may disagree. Further, it means love has vital content. It doesn't just accept anything that comes along; it evaluates content and actions, and rejects evil while at the same time acknowledging and rejoicing in the truth.

That's what love is not.

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Then we have a sort of staccato of verbs, bringing the description of love to a summary conclusion. Each verb is accompanied by "all things." The first and fourth deal with present circumstances, the second and the third with the future. This is what love always does—v. 7. (Never say "always" except when it comes to love.)

Love always protects.

This means "to cover," or "roof over." In other words, love protects and bears what descends upon it.

Love always trusts.

It maintains its faith in others. Yes, it has spiritual discernment but continues to believe the best. This kind of love sees it far better to be hurt than to be skeptical. It trusts God on behalf of the one they love.

Love always hopes.

Love looks for the ultimate triumph of truth and never loses that hope. Love hopes to the end that God will show mercy on another person's behalf.

Love always perseveres.

It has tenacity in the present and confidence in the future that enables it to live in every kind of circumstance and pour itself out on behalf of others.

Love never fails—v. 8.

Obviously with a love as we have described, it will not let anyone down; it will never come to an end; it is never defeated; it is never brought to the ground. It persists, even when rejected.

People sometimes say this paragraph best describes the life and ministry of Jesus, so we could substitute His name for the noun "love" and describe our Lord in a personal way. But we shouldn't miss the point of Paul's exhortation: that it would be best to capture the application of this passage by putting our name in the place of love.

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Let's do that. Put your name in the blank and think with me how powerful and effective a church would be that loved like this:

_____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast, _____ is not proud. _____ is not rude, _____ is not self-seeking, _____ is not easily angered, _____ keeps no record of wrongs. _____ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

_____ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

It's convicting to read it like that, but it is the love 1 Peter 4:8 is calling us to! If Jesus enables us to love like this, think of the impact we would have and the people who would be rescued!

So the following question is easily answered:

Why should we love like that?

There is further motivation! Beyond what we have already seen in 1 Corinthians 13, two powerful reasons are stated elsewhere in Scripture. **First, we who know God's love stretched out from the cross, should be happy to give that same love to others—1 John 3:14-17.**

It's only fair; it's right to give to others what we have received from God. We are not without sin, yet we've received God's love. We are continually confessing our sins, but are constantly being forgiven—1 John 1:8-10. How amazing the love shown to us. How overwhelmed we should be. If we're not, we haven't plumbed the depths of how sinful and needy we are and will find it difficult to love as we should: *"...he who has been forgiven little, loves little"* —Lk. 7:47b.

On the other hand, if we do see the great forgiveness and love shown us, the opposite of Luke 7:47 is also true: *"he who has been forgiven much loves much."*

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Second, we should love like this because people are going to hurt us, even sin against us and this love will keep us from being destroyed by those hurts—Hebrews 12:15.

In other words, just like God loves us in spite of our sin, we shouldn't allow the shortcomings and failures of others to keep us from loving them. Real love keeps on loving, forgiving and accepting—Rom. 15:1-7; James 5:19-20. If our love is rejected, however, God's love will give us the resources and the inclination to not let that rejection destroy or embitter us—Hebrews 12:15.

Beyond those reasons, Peter gives us a wonderful and exciting promise that becomes a powerful motivation and reason to love like this:

Above all, we are to love each other deeply, "...because love covers over a multitude of sins"—v. 8.

When we love like this, we allow the object of our love to grow and mature too. The word "cover" means "to hide." (Do you remember the word "protects" from 1 Corinthians 13? The meaning here is similar. This obviously doesn't mean we overlook sin. Our love doesn't atone for the sins of others, either. Love does, however, enable us to stretch to cover, hide and forget those sins that have been confessed and repented of. This love helps us to forgive one another rapidly when issues arise between us.

How else can we operate in a community of believers where we're all human and we all have a past? Even within the church, we have failed each other and sinned miserably. What can keep us together, serving the Lord? It is this fervent, stretching love that is willing to cover over past sins and mistakes and grant forgiveness. It's a love that forgets.

It is my observation that most people who have a major failure eventually leave their local church immediately after their fall or as soon as they get strong and are healing. Sometimes it is because they are embarrassed and mistakenly think that everyone knows about their failure. Sometimes they can't forget their failure and are ashamed. Other times they leave because the love in that particular church does not stretch to cover over their sin and failure. In other words, the church people do not forget and constantly hold the failure before their fallen friend, not willing to trust him/her in the future. So to survive and thrive, a person feels he/she has to leave in order to get a fresh start and grow.

One of my best friends in this church recently moved to another city after spending 26 years here at Hillcrest Chapel. During his time here he had a couple of major failures, but he didn't run; he "did not easily leave." He did what was necessary to get healed and then

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as he was healing, got into our support system and groups. Eventually he led several of our support groups. As he became stronger, it was interesting to see how his gifts emerged again, and soon he was leading many people to the Lord and also teaching others to do the same here at Hillcrest and at other churches. His faith also thrived at work, and soon he was leading a support group made up of people in his profession from all over the city. He is responsible for leading more people to the Lord than anyone else in this church. That's what happens when love covers over a multitude of sins. The person covered has a chance to grow, mature and thrive in the church.

Therefore, as we look around at the members of our church, we should remember their past failures and ours only slightly, because God's love is covering over a multitude of our sins and their sins. I hope we're granting that "stretched out love" to each other.

There's another reason we need to love deeply and cover over a multitude of sins that is not in the text.

Finally, we should love each other deeply because of the enormous benefit it is to us.

What we have said is enough, of course, because it is a command—not an option—to love others deeply. Let me go to another reason to love others deeply that you may not have thought about. This is sort of the icing on the cake, the chocolate in your mocha, the topping on your vanilla ice cream, the strawberries on your shortcake, or the chocolate chips in your chocolate chip cookies. I think you get the idea.

For some of you this reason will cause you to think long and hard about the return you will receive from loving others. Yes, Scripture says we are to love God with all our heart and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This is the summary of all that Scripture calls us to do. But in addition, loving others is also the *healthiest* thing for us to do, according to current research.

The consequences of not loving others—ignoring, overlooking, or disobeying this command in 1 Pet. 4:8—can be very serious to our health. If we disconnect with people and God, then there are some shocking ramifications/implications. Did you know even our physical bodies are affected when we don't have healthy relationships? Current research shows if we don't love deeply and have healthy relationships(see studies listed in *Food and Love*

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, pp. 88-94)...

- we are more likely to turn to unhealthy food, experiences and other mind-altering concoctions to fill the holes in our heart
- we are more likely to have a weakened immune system
- we are more susceptible to illness and disease
- we greatly increase our chances of developing a life-threatening or fatal disease such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease
- Our bodies do not function smoothly and all systems tend to function ineffectively
- we are more apt to have chronic mental and physical health problems
- In other words, God created us for relationship

In the book *Food and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001, p. 90), author Gary Smalley reports about the Alameda Isolation Study in which the study concluded that...

people who are isolated from meaningful relationships had a greater risk of death. The study was of 7,000 men and women living in Alameda County; and it discovered "people who lacked social and community ties...who had little contact with family and friends, and were not members of churches or other groups were two to three times more likely to die than the people who had healthy relationships."

Researchers followed people in the study for 17 years and the results were the same.

"This association between social and community ties and premature death was found to be independent of and a more powerful predictor of health and longevity than age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, self-reported physical health status, and health practices such as smoking, alcoholic beverage consumption, overeating, physical activity, and utilization of preventive health services as well as a cumulative index of health practices. Those who lacked social ties were at increased risk of dying from coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, respiratory diseases, gastrointestinal diseases, and all other causes of death"—Dean Ornish, *Love and Survival* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 42.

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Ornish summarizes this connection. He says,

"When you feel loved and nurtured, cared for, supported and intimate, you are much more likely to be happier and healthier. You have a much lower risk of getting sick, and if you do, you have a much greater chance of survival."

He continues,

"The research found that feelings of being loved and emotionally supported were more important predictors of the severity of coronary artery blockages than the number of relationships a person had. Equally important, this effect is independent of diet, smoking, exercise, cholesterol, family history, genetics, and other standard risk factors.

"People who actively give and receive love from other people are three to five times less likely to contract serious or fatal health problems. These diseases include increased risk of heart attack, stroke, infectious diseases, many types of cancer, allergies, arthritis, tuberculosis, autoimmune diseases, low birth rate, low Apgar scores, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, and so on" (pp. 92-93).

Is it possible the reason most of us do not have the kind of relationships we have always wanted is because we are unwilling to let go of our self-centered attitudes and grasp the concept of oneness with another person? What will help us to apply this research and the Scripture to our church?

A small group offers us the opportunity to develop the kind of relationships that will help us achieve spiritual and even physical health. I want to encourage you to be a part of a small group that will offer you an opportunity to share feelings and concerns, provide accountability, develop social ties and enhance your relational skills. This small group can be a Bible study, a couples' group, a ministry team, a task force or a support group. As long as the qualities I just mentioned are a part of it, a small group can be extremely valuable.

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There are three ways you can get involved in a small group at Hillcrest Chapel if you aren't a part of one.

- fill out the Communication Card in the bulletin and let the office know of your need,
- go to the Small Group Board in the foyer off the sanctuary, where a variety of small groups are listed,

You have heard the **BOB** challenge from 1 Peter 4:7—to pray every day for six months for Hillcrest Chapel. (By the way, we're already receiving some wonderful stories. Thank you for boarding our boat and filling it with prayer.) I would like to conclude today with another challenge we will call the **LOVE** challenge.

As we fill our lives/boats with prayer, we need to add love. As we float into a world where friend and foe alike need to be loved and we need to love, I want to present you with

Love others deeply. 1 Pet. 4:8—*"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*

Open wide your hearts to others—risk! 2 Cor. 6:13—*"As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also."*

Verbalize your love with words that are encouraging and uplifting and that show you value the one you love. Eph. 4:29—*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*
(See also 5:2.)

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Engage others in small groups and other relational circles on a regular basis. Acts 2:46—
Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

Let me conclude with this story. This week I took a walk to town and walked through an area where a group of men were working on a rope for a large net. I like walking by this area because often fishermen are working on their nets; and this mending of nets is an illustration of the same word used in Scripture to describe what a pastor is to do—to mend/equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11). So in a sense, the fishermen are illustrating what I am to be doing as a pastor. Their work is encouraging and even instructive to me. It's interesting, when Jesus called some of His disciples, He found them working/mending their nets, too.

As I approached these men I noticed that the rope they were working on stretched out for about 100 yards. On one end of the net was a group of men interacting, talking, singing and even dancing to the music they were playing from a CD in their car. When I walked by they waved and talked with me while continuing their work. They seemed to be working hard, but this was definitely a happy, interactive group. I'm not sure of their ethnicity, but they were all the same nationality.

On the other end of the rope was a group of Americans. They, too, had a car with American style music blaring. The difference was that they were not interacting with one another; they were focused on their work and definitely looked like the work was a chore, even boring. They were focused, and isolated from the other workers and not outwardly responding to their music.

I know it's a stretch, but the rope reminded me of the ends of the spectrum you find in the church world. There are some church communities where people are interacting, enjoying the worship and conscious of those who are near. Their love is obvious and infectious. On the other end of the spectrum/rope is the part of the church that is austere and isolated, enduring their church experience, but certainly not interacting or enjoying those around them. How sad it is, because they are not experiencing the stretched-out love 1 Peter 4:8 is calling for.

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If I were an outsider, someone who is not a member of the church, which end of the rope do you think I would be drawn to? My prayer is that we as a church will take the **LOVE** challenge and see our love stretch to cover a multitude of sins in our lives and those who need to be rescued from their sins!

Sources used:

1. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).
2. *New International Bible Commentary*, F.F. Bruce, general editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).
3. *Food and Love*, Gary Smalley (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001).
4. *If You Want to Walk On Water*, John Ortberg, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).