

1 Peter 4:7-11

In [our last session](#), we saw how 700+ small boats and their (mostly) civilian captains bravely entered into the Second World War at the battle of Dunkirk. Why did this extraordinary thing happen? It is obvious that Dunkirk was an extraordinary day for the common, ordinary person. Think of it: These small boat captains were not given a lot of training. They didn't have advanced time to think about what was ahead or the dangers they might face. They simply and willingly entered the war and lent their lives and their boats to this rescue mission.

Likewise, at this key moment in the life of Hillcrest Chapel, we need people who have any size boat that will float and carry people. We need people who will take a risk and join a massive rescue operation, too. The victims of our war are not as easily seen, but on the shoreline of our cities/world are many people in desperate need of a spiritual armada of small ships to come and rescue them. If we take the challenge, we will not only save lives, but assure our future health as well. If we don't save lives now, we will seriously impact our future and damage who we are as a church.

I am calling us all to launch our boats and enter into a new phase of our lives together, asking that we all work together as a church to rescue a city, a county, a country, a world for Christ. If we translate this rescue mission even further to our lives, we need to know how we might be *a dynamic force of people, filled with the Spirit, meeting people's needs in Jesus' Name* —wherever we find ourselves. (That's our mission statement.)

What does that mean today? A subtitle to our session might be, "What actions and attitudes do we put into our small boats so we can be effective?" What are we each being called to do? What do we say and pray? What are the attitudes we must have? First Peter 4:7-11 answers these questions for us in splendid fashion. In a very concentrated way, Peter give us our priorities for challenging times.

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Written by Bob Stone

Peter addresses this first epistle to the Christians who resided in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, in Asia Minor. These provinces are probably listed in the order that the messenger, Silvanus (5:12) was to follow in delivering the letters to the churches. Some scholars think that Peter was addressing Christians, especially Jewish Christians, who had been disbursed to these provinces as a result of Nero's fanatical persecutions. But 1 Peter is a letter of triumphant suffering, stretching actions. In fact, seven different words are used for the suffering/stretching moments in this letter.

In spite of the circumstances, however, Peter declares there is great hope and meaning in the midst of their challenging and stretching days. In chapter 4, vv 7-11, he advocates a number of priorities because the end of all things is near. We might apply it by asking, *When we live in extraordinary times, what are our priorities?*

7] The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8] Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9] Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10] Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 11] If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

What does he mean by, "The end of all things is near?"

What is the definition of "end?" It means the fulfillment or completion of something. It can mean the ending of something bad; or the arrival of something good; a complete, or perfect state. What does "the end of all things is near" mean in this context if we understand what was going on in the lives of the original recipients of this letter? There are at least four possibilities.

1. The Christian faces the possibility of death at any time—2 Cor. 5:1-10.
2. His suffering will end in the near future.

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3. The Lord may come at any moment—1 Pet. 4:1-6.
4. The opportunity for expanded ministry may end or be lessened soon.

It is the last two possibilities which motivate me.

- I am motivated by the possibility of the end of days being closer now than ever before. (In other words, if we read the signs, Jesus' return may be close.)
- I am also motivated by the possible ending or lessening of the strategic opportunity our church has to reach people for Christ. Because of God's timetable, we may never have the same window of opportunity to rescue and help people that we will in the next 16 months, so we must take advantage of it.

With this end in mind, Peter gives the saints of his day and ours a challenge for involvement in priority action. In Peter's day, the easy thing for the stretched saint to do would be to cower in a corner under the weight of the persecution and suffering, and just hold on until it all came to an end.

In our day, the easy thing to do if we see people in great need, is to think other believers (those with bigger and better prepared boats) should meet the challenge. But Peter has something for every believer in mind, a great summary of what should be the heart and actions of a growing church.

Look at what he says:

What are the priorities when the end of all things is near?

One of the four priorities we're going to talk about has to do with our relationship to God—*praying*. The other three have to do with one another—*loving others, being hospitable* and *using our gifts to serve*.

Today I want to consecrate on the first priority and next time, the other three.

The first priority is to pray.

v. 7—*"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so you can pray."* This is a very instructive verse. Verse 7 tells us the obstacles to our prayers—especially if we are in a stretching or challenging situation—are a fuzzy mind and a lack of self-control.

In fact, whether we're under persecution, experiencing ease, or being challenged, two things will often keep us from prayer, and Peter gives us the solutions.

Clear minded: to be sober, of sound mind; to think and act discreetly, to use sound

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judgment and moderation, to not be in a frenzy or fearful—2 Cor. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:7. Have you ever known a time when you were so distracted you couldn't pray? Maybe you were so anxious or fearful about something, you just couldn't concentrate when you began to pray! Since 9/11/01, the war in Afghanistan, the anthrax scare and the downturn in our economy, many of us are not praying as we want to, or should, because we are fearful or so focused on the latest news that we can't find the time or the inclination to pray.

Beyond that, even in the normal circumstances, we might find our minds wandering or distracted when we should be praying. Where do you think those thoughts come from? Certainly being overly focused on the negative elements in our life can cause us to be distracted. (As we said last time, life is as we perceive it.) But also, we must be aware that the enemy of our souls will seek to delude our prayer potential with anxious thoughts, tempting diversions and enticements; it is a tactic of his to keep our minds cluttered/distracted.

Think with me: what is the biggest problem you have in your life right now? As a result of that problem, are you having a hard time concentrating on the Lord and other people's needs? Is the focus of your concentration driving you away from prayer, or to it? Peter calls this lack of concentration a fuzzy mind, or *not* being "clear minded," and he says it will keep us from prayer and needed action.

Self-control: In the Greek language it means to watch, to be sober, abstinent, especially as to wine—2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 4:7. Peter says this self-control is also an absolute necessity if we are going to pray. When a person is facing a big challenge in his/her life or is sorrowful because of persecution or tragedy, what are some common ways to deal with the stress or challenge?

The tendency is to drown problems in some mind-altering experience; and that can include an intoxicating substance, a media frenzy, excessive sports activities, or even shopping. We try to escape our problems or challenges, even if just for a moment. The

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means of intoxication or coping are everywhere, and the results are the same. Our escapes (the solutions to our stress) have a shelf life—they don't last. They never come through with their promises of relief. Even if we do receive any relief in our escapes, it is temporary; and eventually we can become dependent, even addicted to our favorite escapes!

The tragedy today is, the church world has a lot of Christians so caught up in their own escapes, they are not praying as they should and are unprepared or unwilling to help others be rescued from their difficulties. I'm not minimizing the troubles or stress that some of us might be facing, because I know many in this church have a lot to handle right now. Some are facing pressures that are so overwhelming, we just want some kind of relief, any kind of relief! (I know what that is like, I spent two years and about 70,000 miles in a car. It was a hellish time for me.)

On the other hand, others are simply bored and hope their escape mechanisms or activities will give them the joy they crave. Some haven't even understood until now that they are trying to escape. Here is the downside, however. If we don't handle our pressures or even our boredom properly, we'll get hit twice: once by the problem and second by the improper way we handle the problems we have. The sad result is, we pray very little!

What will keep us from these distractions to prayer? There are two possibilities:

We need to pray so we can pray. "Oh, that's helpful advice, Bob. How long did you think about that?" Well, I have thought about it for a long time, and this is what I have discovered: in order to get a clear mind, we have to push beyond the clutter of our minds and pray anyway! This is the only way it works for me; I make myself pray so I can be clear minded. As soon as I make that step, my mind gets clearer and I can pray more! It's when I am immersed in prayer that I have a clear mind.

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So, fuzzy thinking and distracted people, we know what to do now: We must press beyond the clutter and by faith, pray for a clear mind—a focused heart.

In addition, there is another method to overcome fuzzy minds and a lack of self-control;

We have to trick our minds, by filling them up with information that will overwhelm the clutter, the distractions. (We control ourselves so we will be self-controlled.) What does that entail? Think about it. What information do you know is more powerful than our distraction, if we concentrate on it? If you have ever taken yourself by the back of the neck and said: "I don't care how you feel, I want you to study the Scripture," then you know what I am talking about; you know the answer.

I am not an expert in many things, but I am in this; take my word for it. Some might think I just study with ease every week; maybe I float on some spiritual cloud, and God and I talk in an uninterrupted fashion. Not! Listen, I am just like everyone—my mind gets cluttered/undisciplined too. My life has a lot of potential distraction, stress and pain in it, so I have to tell myself every week, "It doesn't matter how you feel, Bob Stone, or what is on your plate; you don't have the luxury to mope or be down; get with it and study!"

Do you know what happens? By disciplining myself, I become self-disciplined. The result is, I get perspective on my troubles and my mind gets clearer. I have essentially force fed myself, and as a result, have overwhelmed my anxious or troubled thoughts... with some positive, mind-enriching content. The aftermath of this kind of self-disciplined study

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is that I will be able to pray.

Would you like it if it was easy to pray? Well, it isn't because the stakes are so high! When we do get our minds clear and uncluttered, notice what kinds of prayer will follow?

- All kinds of prayer, on all occasions—Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1-4.
- Continual prayer—1 Thess. 5:16-18.

Prayer for extended periods—Matt. 6:5-15; 4:1-2; Mark 4:35-39.

Prayer throughout the day—1 Thess. 5:17.

Prayer for everyone—Eph. 5:18c; 1 Tim. 2:1-2.

Prayer through Scripture... with the Psalmist; with Paul; with devotional books

Prayer that is systematic and regular (even having a prayer list)

- Thanksgiving—1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:4b; 5:20; Phil. 4:6.

When should we start? Remember, these kinds of prayer are necessary to keep us from being intoxicated with our private escapes; and to enable us, in turn, to help others escape from their trials and troubles. We need to begin **now**, so we need to work on having uncluttered and self-controlled minds now. We need to start now so we can pray as well as apply the rest of I Peter 4:7-11.

All of the actions called for in I Peter are preceded by prayer. There will be no love, hospitality and service to others if we fail to get clear minded, self-disciplined and pray.

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It is striking to me how, both in Scripture and in the present-day examples of extraordinary accomplishments, almost always they are stories about prayer. There is something about launching your boat and getting into the action beyond your comfort zone that turns people into intense pray-ers. The new recruits are aware that they cannot accomplish things without God's help.

Can you imagine how these small boat captains prayed as they began their trip across the English Channel? Even if they weren't believers before they launched their boats, by the time they approached Dunkirk and heard the shelling, and saw the trapped and wounded soldiers before them... those small boat captains were praying, "Oh, God, help us!"

(Quote adapted from: *If You Want to Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out of The Boat* by John Ortberg, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001, pp. 91-94.)

Author John Ortberg tells the story of the impact of a person who entered into the adventure of prayer.

He says: "One of my favorite adventures in prayer involves Doug Coe, who has a ministry in Washington, D.C., that mostly involves people in politics and statecraft. Doug became acquainted with Bob, an insurance salesman, who was completely unconnected with any

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government circles. Bob became a Christian and began to meet with Doug to learn about his new faith.

One day Bob came in all excited about a statement in the Bible where Jesus says, "Ask whatever you will in my name, and you shall receive it."

"Is that really true?" Bob demanded. Doug explained, "Well, it's not a blank check. You have to take it in context of the teachings of the whole Scripture on prayer. But yes—it really is true. Jesus really does answer prayer."

"Great!" Bob said. "Then I gotta start praying for something. I think I'll pray for Africa."

"That's kind of a broad target. Why don't you narrow it down to one country?" Doug advised.

"All right. I'll pray for Kenya."

"Do you know anyone in Kenya?" Doug asked. "No."

"Ever been to Kenya?" "No." Bob just wanted to pray for Kenya. So Doug made an unusual arrangement. He challenged Bob to pray every day for six months for Kenya. If Bob would do that and nothing extraordinary happened, Doug would pay him five hundred dollars. But if something remarkable did happen, Bob would pay Doug five hundred dollars. And if Bob did not pray every day, the whole deal was off.

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It was a pretty unusual prayer program, but then Doug is a creative guy. Bob began to pray, and for a long while nothing happened. Then one night he was at a dinner in Washington. The people around the table explained what they did for a living. One woman said she helped run an orphanage in Kenya—the largest of its kind. Bob saw five hundred dollars suddenly sprout wings and begin to fly away. But he could not keep quiet.

Bob roared to life. He had not said much up to this point, and now he pounded her relentlessly with question after question. "You're obviously very interested in my country," the woman said to Bob, overwhelmed by his sudden barrage of questions. "You've been to Kenya before?"

"No."

"You know someone in Kenya?"

"No."

"Then how do you happen to be so curious?"

"Well, someone is kind of paying me five hundred dollars to pray..."

She asked Bob if he would like to come visit Kenya and tour the orphanage. Bob was so eager to go, he would have left that very night if he could. When Bob arrived in Kenya, he was appalled by the poverty and the lack of basic health care. Upon returning to Washington, he couldn't get this place out of his mind. He began to write to large pharmaceutical companies, describing to them the vast need he had seen. He reminded

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them that every year they would throw away large amounts of medical supplies that went unsold. "Why not send them to this place in Kenya?" he asked. And some of them did.

This orphanage received more than a million dollars' worth of medical supplies. The woman called Bob up and said, "Bob, this is amazing! We've had the most phenomenal gifts because of the letters you wrote. We would like to fly you back over and have a big party. Will you come?"

So Bob flew back to Kenya. While he was there, the president of Kenya came to the celebration, because it was the largest orphanage in the country, and offered to take Bob on a tour of Nairobi, the capital city. In the course of the tour they saw a prison. Bob asked about a group of prisoners there. "They're political prisoners," he was told.

"That's a bad idea," Bob said brightly. "You should let them out." Bob finished the tour and flew back home. Sometime later, Bob received a phone call from the State Department of the United States government:

"Is this Bob?" "Yes."

"Were you recently in Kenya?" "Yes."

"Did you make any statements to the president about political prisoners?"

"Yes!"

"What did you say?"

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"I told him he should let them out."

The State Department official explained that the department had been working for years to get the release of these prisoners, to no avail. Normal diplomatic channels and political maneuverings had led to a dead end. But now the prisoners had been released, and the State Department was told it had been largely because of...Bob. So the government was calling to say thanks.

Several months later, the president of Kenya made a phone call to Bob. He was going to rearrange his government and select a new cabinet. Would Bob be willing to fly over and pray for him for three days while he worked on this very important task? So Bob—who was not politically connected at all—boarded a plane once more and flew back to Kenya, where he prayed and asked God to give wisdom for the leader of the nation as he selected his government.

All this happened because one man launched his boat and prayed in it!

So how about you? What are you praying for? I'm going to give you the

If you will give it six months to pray for what I am going to ask you, I'll make you a deal; I am going to ask you to pray every day for six months for Hillcrest Chapel. If you pray every day for six months and nothing extraordinary happens, email or write me. I won't promise you five hundred dollars, but I might either give you a refund of your tithes for a month, or I'll shave my beard—it hasn't been shaved off in over 25 years!

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If to the contrary, something extraordinary does happen, you have to write and tell me what has happened as you have prayed every day for this church. Let me put the B.O.B. challenge in perspective—I want to make it clear, launching our boat in the water and praying for 6 months is not about some great thing we will do. In fact, by ourself we can do nothing of eternal value. Launching our boat in the sea of God's will is about what God longs to do with us by His power and grace.

But first we have to get our boat wet—even if we don't know the final outcome in advance!

Some might say, "Well, Bob, why do I have to have my prayers concentrate on Hillcrest? Why can't I pray about something more exotic or exciting?" My answer is, Hillcrest is an armada of small ships that is accomplishing so much that I don't think we have a full understanding as to how strategic consistent prayer for this church might be.

I'm not going to be shy about the opportunities we have before us anymore. In the past, I have been quiet or even hidden some of our opportunities or challenges. No more! I am so convinced that once you begin to pray about Hillcrest, God will begin to show you an extraordinary picture of our church—much like He did Bob as he prayed for Kenya.

Your prayer will open up your heart to see what I believe is one of the greatest seasons of opportunity our church has ever known. (If you are not praying, you won't see it.) If you could just see what I see and feel what I feel, I think you would be motivated. Sometimes the things closest to us miss the attention they deserve because other needs or ministries look more attractive.

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." The idea was that we should be aware of God's presence, obey His Word and wherever we find ourselves, we shouldn't leave easily. We

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should give our prayer, love, hospitality and service!

Because community life is hard...

Because authentic friendship is hard...

Because patience in working with others is hard...

Because faithfulness is hard...

leaving or looking at other opportunities will always look more attractive in the short run. But over the long haul, being uncommitted, easily leaving, will produce people who live a pattern of giving up easily and are not satisfied. The application 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 boat and venture out into untested territory with our church community.

It is in our church community 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 has a praying captain on board.

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So over the next six months, here are some of the markers we will be praying for along the way:

- We are praying we will reach (win and/or disciple) another 100 new people and in the next 16 months, 250 to 1,000 people.
- We are praying we will start our building program and have the resources to complete it!
- We are praying we will have continued good response to our Legacy campaign.
- We are praying we will be able to launch a 12-month presentation of the ministries and opportunities of Hillcrest Chapel.
- We are praying for our Christmas and Easter presentations.
- We are praying for our 15 outreach Sundays or activities in 2002.
- We are praying for our short term missions teams.
- We are praying we will be able to maintain and grow our Faith Promise activities.
- We are praying we'll see a very complete picture of Hillcrest Chapel's mission and goals as we complete our comprehensive plan.
- We are praying about expanding every program and ministry here at Hillcrest Chapel.

So let's launch our boats and take

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

We need to B.O.B.—We all need to **Bring Our Boats** to the shoreline.

We need to B.O.B.—We all need to **Board Our Boats** and launch them!

That's the B.O.B. challenge.

Application

Let's B.O.B.—**Batten our Boats** and apply this teaching even more directly:

1. How would you describe your faith these days? What might help you get to know God better?
2. What is one step you could take today to expand your "spiritual comfort zone"?
3. What about B.O.B.? What's one area of our church life, one need that's bigger than yourself, that you would be willing to pray for over the next six months?