



Keep Loving

John Seago | 1 Peter 4:7-11 | April 24, 2016

7The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. **8**Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. **9**Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11**whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Intro:

- Austin is a start up hub. We're characterized by innovators, new ideas, being on the cutting edge, and fresh solutions.
- Best city for new, small businesses, Forbes. Our entrepreneurial incubators are known around the country (Capitol Factory & Tech Stars)
- This is great to have such creativity in our city and for Christians to glorify the lord by doing something well and contributing to our culture in dynamic ways.
- However one effect of this, is that we have a high turn over rate. People get bored with a project, a company, even a church after a short time.
- We're so drawn to the new, the innovative, the fresh, that we lack perseverance. Persistence and diligence, longsuffering are not virtues of Austin right?
- While there are positives and negatives to this atmosphere, we need to examine whether its having an effect on our faith.

I. Keep Loving:

- The heart of our passage this morning, is this imperative in verse 8.
- Peter writes, "Above all, keep loving one another."
 - This is not new instruction, we see Peter continues to insist on this throughout the book.
 - 1 Peter 1:22, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart."¹
 - If you hang around City Life or other churches, you'll hear it enough, but what does this mean?
 - Well, love is not the warm fuzzy affection of being attracted to someone (how could the Bible demand us to conjure such an emotion?)
 - Neither is Love a friendship. Its not liking someone in a mutual relationship, where you have equal trade offs and complement each other.
 - **The biblical vision of love is a deep commitment to someone else's good in God and helping them achieve it.**

¹ Also see 1 Peter 3:8, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind."

- Here, we are called to “earnestly or eagerly” seek and work for one another’s good in God.
- In this context, Peter is writing to believers here, remember, a specific group of churches enduring suffering. So, “one another” means other believers, others in the church.
- This notion is not just Peter, but Jesus himself said in John 13:34-35, when talking to the disciples:
 - “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- Jesus taught this is central to our identities as Christians: Being individuals that are known by our dedication to this community of faith.
- This is not true just for Christians. God himself is a community. He exists in three persons in the Trinity who live in perfect social harmony. And scripture teaches us that he designed all human beings to be relational.
 - Tim Chester wrote, “Our primary identity is as persons-in-community, then our ability to thrive will be shaped by our involvement in a community. Life as it should be lived is life-in-community. Community is not merely an added benefit to me. It is an essential part of what it means to be human.”²
 - This view is not unique to Christians, philosophers like Martin Buber (boo-ber) and Jacques Lacan explain our identities depend upon our relational context.
 - So if you’re here this morning, not a part of our church, not a Christian, this applies to you, this is a call that reveals something deep and true about your own nature I invite you to explore with us today, too.
- **Now, the grammar in our specific passage is dynamic and distinct. Look, not just “above all love one another,” but this continual, ongoing, active notion.**
- This call is to “keep loving.” That adds an important element here that is desperately needed in our church, in our city of start ups.
 - He emphasizes ‘continue,’ ‘keep on,’ or ‘maintain’ this “love.”
 - Loving during the honeymoon phase is easier right? Loving new friends is a breeze in comparison to someone you’ve known for years, right?
 - However, after the shine wears off, maybe even in the church, its harder to love.
 - We may be good at kick-starting relationships, but not after the newness fade off.
 - Forgiving someone for being late one time is fine, but the 5th time your friend is late to lunch, I mean come on.
- However, that's part of our identity and testimony:
 - We’re called to love the unlovely, forgive the unforgivable, embrace the repulsive, include the awkward, accept the weird.³
- One question this morning, is have you gotten impatient with God’s calling to love?
 - Are you growing weary in that trying friendship with the unforgivable?
 - Are you apathetic towards that awkward city group you feel stuck in?

² Chester, Total Church, 135.

³ Chester, Total Church, 113.

- Its easy to grow weary, but our encouragement is to carry on.
- This type of persevering love stems from Christ’s love for us and it is a powerful love.
- Look at what Peter says next, “Love covers a multitude of sins”
 - This is from Proverbs 10:12: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.”
 - John Calvin makes the point that *love of self* and hatred of others “makes a fault of everything;”
 - Love of self is like the dramatic soccer player who hardly gets brushed up against and dives and rolls around in fake agony. (I should clarify, male soccer players, my wife has pointed it out to me that the women’s soccer teams do far less of those theatrics).
 - But that's how self-love looks like in community, right? Magnifying offenses, making sure no slight wrongdoing against us goes unnoticed. Its childish right?
 - But those who love one another conceal many things.
 - The one who loves others does not approve of another’s sin, but he comes alongside to reveals it in private, helps his friend turn away from the sin and look to the better way in Christ, rather than aggravating the sin by broadcasting it.⁴
 - So, this passage is not suggesting loving one another atones for sins but that it does not “stir them up” or enlarge them. Love suffers and bears all things for the benefit of others (1 Cor 13).⁵
 - A few weeks ago, talked about keeping a record of wrongs. Remember, love does not keep a list of offenses, does not keep score. It actually overlooks relational debts.⁶
 - This is freeing. I’m not forced to always keep track of whether Im in the red in my relationships, on the converse, I don’t feel guilt when someone loves me, under pressure to catch back up. Love looks away from the relational scoreboard and looks at the person your called to love.
 - Are you free from the bondage of keeping score? Embrace this love.
- We’re able to overlook offenses when we love one another, because God overlooks our sin and looks at Jesus’ love for us. Christ came and covered all of our sins, most of which we are unaware, we too have his power and love to cover others, not judging, demanding, or becoming embittered.
- Continuing to love one another is a better way.

So that is the heart of Peter’s instruction here: Keep loving one another. But he also gives us three perspectives:

1. **Why** we should keep loving one another.
2. **How** we keep loving one another.

⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter IV, Para 36.

⁵ Three other possible views here: a) it is related to James 5:20 where love helps another believer reverse the spiritual consequences of backsliding. b) it is related to Matt. 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25 where our forgiveness of others is an evidence of our being forgiven (Origen and Tertullian) c) it is related to 1 Cor. 13:7, the ability of love not to see the obvious weaknesses of fellow Christians under persecution

⁶ Clay Werner, *On the Brink*, 89.

3. **What's the purpose** of us continuing to love one another.

II. WHY?

- Peter gives us a peculiar context and reason for this imperative. Look at verse 7, the end of all things is at hand!
- I think of how the level of productivity dramatically increases the closer you are to a deadline for a paper, launching a new venture at work, or even taxes last weekend. While a month ago you watched that movie you don't really like for what, a third time, and now you're calculating whether you have enough time to eat lunch since you only have hours before your deadline. I run into this all the time when I'm right up against a deadline, thinking back on all that time I wasted. I'm sure I'm the only one.
- An encroaching deadline creates a proper sense of urgency to work, right? This is the sense that Peter opens the whole passage with.
- **This is Peter answer to WHY we should keep loving, the deadline is coming.**
- What is our deadline? "The end of all things is at hand" The last days, the phenomenal consummation of God's work in history.
 - We discussed this in chapter 1, that that future events impacts our present.
 - Peter is connecting the last days and our life now.⁷
- This is not calling us to some sort of "end of the world" fanaticism, but that we are **in the second to last stage of God's redemptive plan for creation. Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation**
- In verse 7, the way Peter writes indicates a level of certitude and that the activity is ongoing, could also read "has been drawing near." – This is in effect, already happening, but not done yet.⁸
 - This is truth. The end of all things started with Christ's ministry. He launched a new age of redemptive history when he defeated death on the cross. Amazing we're a part of this.
 - This does not mean we spend all our time staring to the heavens waiting for Jesus' return, but are called to be "self-controlled and sober-minded" as we wait for Jesus' second coming.⁹
- Peter is telling us to be prudent, to be mindful of where we are in history and to maximize the time we have. The deadline is coming up, and so we should spend our time continuing to love each other.¹⁰

III. **Next is how we keep loving one another.**¹¹

⁷ Luke 12:35-43, 17:26-27.

⁸ The Greek verb is in the perfect tense.

⁹ This is in line with Jesus' tone on earth. "Jesus [also] taught responsible living in the light of his return." Gaebelien, 246.

¹⁰ Look at verse 8, Peter said in light of the end of history, he says "Above all" keep loving one another.

-Peter is telling us the most relevant and important implication of our eschatology is our disposition towards other Christians.

-So, Peter is telling us to persevere in our loving one another with the urgency that the end is at hand!

¹¹ Using these gifts in the church do several things according to Eph 4:11-16:

- We don't just keep loving others by thinking positive thoughts, or really hoping the best for them, but actually helping them accomplish their good in God.
- This is the step from an internal disposition towards one another, to an external expression of that love.
- 1 John 3:18 tells us “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”
- So in our passage in 1 Peter, he writes in verse 10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:”
- This imperative is to serve.
 - This is counter-cultural: We are primarily consumers not servers.
 - We sell our skills and abilities, we don’t just give them away. And actually, we get upset when our gifts are not valued appropriately. When we’re underpaid or passed up for that promotion we’d be best at.
 - This call to service requires what Calvin calls “Self-Renunciation” - That in seeking to benefit one’s neighbor, we must give up all thought of ourselves and, so to speak, get out of ourselves.¹²
 - In fact, based on what we’ve already said about being created for community, this self-renunciation, is actually the only path to self-fulfillment. Thinking back to the point about our identity being “persons-in-community.”
- Peter is teaching us here, what we already know, but don’t apply to our involvement in the church: All of us, every Christian has received a gift.
 - Paul explains this in 1 Cor 12:4-7, when he writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
- Gifts have been received as varied graces:
 - I think of the band. I love running sound on Sunday mornings because I get to hear these greatly talented individuals and they’re using their abilities to lead us in worship – I can’t do that, you don't want me to try, but I can turn a few knobs on the sound board.
 - We see God’s grace “manifests itself in various ways” through our different gifts like a prism refracting light into a spectrum of vivid color.¹³
 - The church is only healthy, and accomplishing its call to edify each other and transform our city when we are all being “good stewards” of the gifts God has given us.
 - Are you being a good steward of your gifts and abilities in our community?
- This contradicts many wrong notions we may have about serving the church, I’ll name just three this morning:
 - First, some think only a few elites members (elders and deacons) are equipped to serve.
 - But verse 10 says “Each one” has received a gift to serve with.

- “Build up the body of Christ”
- Create a “unity of faith and knowledge”
- Mature us “so we may no longer be children tossed to and fro”
- “Grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter VII, Paragraph 5.

¹³ *poikiles*: “variegated”

- Everyone has a skill or ability that would benefit the church.
 - We have numerous service teams here at CLC that many of you are already on. It takes about 40 people every Sunday to put all this on.
 - Band – lead our musical worship
 - AV Team – slides and runs sound
 - Hospitality Team – welcome guests and set up studio across the hall
 - Kids Life volunteers – 14 people to care for and teach our younger attendees this morning.
 - Create and Restore Team – set up all the rooms, the decorations, chairs, and clean up after we all leave and are enjoying our lunch.
- So, even if your gift is ability to get here on Sunday morning before the service and do light manual labor. – You can serve.
- Everyone has a gift that is needed in the church, not just the few people you see up here on a Sunday morning.
- Another misconception: Gifts are received in some anointed super spiritual way.
 - Your gift could simply be a refined skill or natural talent you use in your work or hobbies.
 - We see in the apostle Paul’s that God took his rigorous academic background, and formal training in Old Testament to communicate the gospel persuasively all over ancient world.
- Last common misunderstanding is that gifts are some kind of spiritual merit badges.
 - Gifts are given to us to benefit others, not ourselves (1 Cor 12:7)
 - Saying you have a gift or way to serve the church does not reflect the righteousness or superiority of the person, they reflect God’s grace to the church.
- In Verse 11 Peter tells us that whether we teaching, preaching, or serving in another way, we should do so by means of God’s wisdom and his strength.
 - When we do this, ministry is energizing and life-giving but when we serve in our own strength, disconnected from God, working in our community becomes draining, burdensome and leads to burnout.
 - Relying on the strength God supplies, like Peter says allows us to persevere in serving each other.

B. Example of Hospitality:

- Here in verse 9, Peter does something that may seem odd. He specifically mentions hospitality that could look like just another way to serve others.
- But he lists “show hospitality” as one of the main imperatives in passage, I think its here as a test case to address two things:
 1. Hospitality represents that the church is to be a community living life together.
 - May seem pretty lame way to serve compared to preaching, teaching, playing in the band, but this is actually a central act of service in the Christian faith.
 - We see it from the very beginning in Acts 2:46-47, the very first Christians were attending the temple together and breaking bread in each others homes together.
 - And hospitality is required of church leaders (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:8), of widows (1 Tim 5:10), of all Christians (Romans 12:13: a passage also tied to love).
 2. Second, this call reminds us that we’re all called to serve other believers.

- Having people in your home, hosting them, feeding them, being hospitable: Anyone can do this.
 - You may think your house is not big enough, not nice enough, etc. – That does not matter.
 - I know for Brandy and I, the most welcome we’ve felt are in regular homes, well-lived in homes, kid-ridden homes, not some spotless mansions with flawless décor.
 - I remember eating together on Matt and Danielle Irving’s apartment floor because they didn’t have a dining table yet. – That didn’t stop them from being hospitable.
 - If you’re doing this, take heart, your love is showing Christ to others.
- Hospitality is way regular Christians can be counter-cultural. This call to show this type of hospitality was socially radical in the original cultures that this letter was sent to. Remember, foreigners and people from other social sects were not seen as equal in these family-centric, ethnic-centered societies.
- Christians are called to overcome social norms to display God’s love that has made all believers members of our heavenly father’s family.
- Also this is a tangible representation of that self-sacrifice we mentioned earlier.
 - -Look, how are we to be hospitable? Without grumbling¹⁴
- This addition implies that the call to be hospitable is a difficult one, a weighty and intrusive command.
- It is hard. Brandy and I host our city group, and there are Wednesday afternoons when we look at each other with tired look like “Well, its too late to cancel, I guess we’re doing this thing.” Its draining and demanding. Brandy has talked about how its hard for her sometimes because having people in your house week after week just breaks all the boundaries. These people come in and invade every crevasse of your life. They’re in your pantry, digging around in drawers in the kitchen, the kids shuffle Brandy’s work papers when they go upstairs to play.
 - But, we’re blessed through hosting city group. We see people open up, share their thoughts and struggles, ministered to by the truth, and we’re blessed by being able to host that, to help make that loving space come together.
- It is tough but we were created for community and to serve.
- We should open our homes, like our lives to one another. We should not treat our home as our fortress; but as a dwelling place for God’s family. Christ is your refuge.
- Try it this week. This is a tangible point of application. You don’t have wait to get trained for a team here at church or wait to be scheduled to serve on a Sunday morning. Invite each other over to live life together. Share those rhythms of everyday life that everyone has. It does not have to be gourmet meals, some friends of ours just last week came over and picked up chipotle on their way. **Expand your notion of hospitality**. – They did that because we have kids didn’t want to keep out.¹⁵

IV. To glorify of God

¹⁴ Grumbling has become a “national pastime,” but Phil 2:14-15.

¹⁵ Ties back to keeping record of wrongs: Do you track how many times you’ve hosted and have been invited to someone else’s home?

- **This last section tells us the purpose of loving by serving: to glorify God.**
- Look at verse 11, “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”
 - So yes, we were created for community, remember self-sacrifice does lead to fulfillment, but loving others is rewarding because this glorifies the Lord. When we’re living the way we were made to exist in community, the creator is glorified.
- This is the whole purpose of loving, being hospitable, and serving.
- Ephesians 4 tells us that the church is “the body of Christ” and by ministering to each other in word and in deed we “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”
 - Through the disciples and apostles, the church has been passed the very ministry of Jesus Christ.
 - In the last days (which are at hand), Christ will present his church spotless before God the Father.
 - Our love of one another is part of this bigger story about Christ and what God is doing in the world and that story takes time to unfold.
 - We’re called to press on, continue to be diligent in love and service.
- Jesus loves the church. He is the head of the church and by continuing to love one another by service, we bring him glory by displaying his diverse, immense, and overflowing grace.
 - So, in the end, our service to each other here at City Life and in churches around the world is a demonstration of worship when we tell Christ’s story.
 - We can love because of our redeemer.
- “To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”