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## 5 ESSENTIALS FOR COMMUNITY

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 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.

Today, as we look at our serving fair, our volunteer fair, we want to look at the larger topic of community, the broader topic of community, which is really what this paragraph is about; then under that umbrella, to look at serving. We are connecting these two ideas because they go together. In fact, as we are hoping that many of you will go to one of the tables and find a place where you can serve, where you can volunteer, we are hoping that not only does that happen, that you are moved to respond personally in that way, but that you will do it for the right reason.

You see, there are a number of ways that I could try to motivate you to do this. One way would be to tell you, "Well, everyone must do his or her part. It's your responsibility. It's my responsibility." That's one way to motivate. That's the responsibility way, or maybe better known as the guilt way. I could tell you, "Well, we can't do it without you." I could appeal for your sympathy. Maybe we could call that the practical motivation. We need you. Or, I could persuade you that this is for your own good. After all, you don't want to be a person who is turned inward. You want to be outward in your focus. You want to be giving. This is healthy. This is necessary for your own good.

All of those motivations - there is some truth in them, right? Correct? I want you to feel a little guilty if you don't help. But honestly, those motivations fall short of the heart of serving. I'm thinking of Mark 10:45, which will perhaps help us think for a moment about the heart of serving. Let me share it with you. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus Christ came to serve. He defined his own ministry in terms of serving. And he specifically gave his life as a ransom for all those who trust in him.

Now, here's what's interesting. If you look at the verse just before Mark 10:45, you look at Mark 10:44, this is what Jesus said leading into that statement: "...and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus is saying, "If you follow me, I'm going to give my life for you. My serving you will transform you. I will ransom you. I will save you from sin and death and all that opposes your soul. I will ransom you, and then you're mine, and you are going to be not just a servant, but you are going to be a part of a radical serving community." He uses the word "slave" to communicate that. We are just a bunch of radical servants, in community, serving one another because Jesus has served us. The heart of service is: "Christ has served me to save me, that I might be a part of this community that radically serves one another."

That's deeper. It's an invitation into relationship, into community that is rich - rich in experience, rich in depth. So, this paragraph talks to the Church, talks to the Church community about how to do community. Really, I call it the essentials: what's important, what's nonnegotiable in terms of how we do community.

A little bit of context here. Peter is writing to Christians who are suffering. They are experiencing persecution because they follow Jesus, because of their faith in Christ. They are scattered around, they are following Jesus, and they are experiencing persecution. There is this quality about Peter's instruction that gets down to that which is essential. He is saying, "You know, when you are suffering, when you are on the run, when you are experiencing persecution, you want to survive. You want to know what's important. You need to know what's essential." Peter is giving that kind of instruction. Here is how you live life when you are being called on to suffer, and that suffering is often directly related to your faith in Jesus Christ. He is giving that instruction, then he gets down to this paragraph. He says, "Let me talk to you about how to relate to one another, how to get along." It's a marvelous passage for us. Today we are looking at community, and within that - serving.

5 essentials - let me give them to you. Let's look at our first one.

- I. A Deadly Serious Mindset (verse 7).

We have five verses, five essentials. The first essential is found in the first verse, verse 7: A Deadly Serious Mindset. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." If you look at the actual instruction, we are called on here to

be self-controlled and sober-minded. The language for those two ideas is such that they modify one another and they form a central thought. I have described it as “A Serious Mindset.” That description begins with the word “therefore,” which points back to the first phrase: “The end of all things is at hand.” (The end of all things is near.) Here is what Peter is saying: “Everything is about to end, so get serious. This is not a joke. Be sober-minded. Practice self-control.”

Last Sunday, Father’s Day, was a wonderful day of celebration. It was a great Father’s Day for me. I got to go home and enjoy time with family -- a meal, then it was delightful. We watched golf and the NBA finals. It was scripted perfectly for Father’s Day. You get to the National Basketball Association finals, the Warriors against the Cavs, two great stories, best regular season in history. LeBron James, going back to poor Cleveland, hasn’t had a championship in 500 years or something like that. Right? Great story! Game 7! And you come down to the last two minutes, and the game is going back and forth. It’s virtually tied and you are watching, and listen: There is no game 8! In the final two minutes every pass, every dribble, every shot, every possession is life and death. You are thinking, “If my team doesn’t score now, and they score, then what happens? Then we foul, and then...” There is an urgency about it. If it seems like, “Yeah, Brian, you like basketball. You are making a big deal out of nothing.” LeBron James signed a recent contract with Nike that could be worth a billion dollars. Now, it’s not eternity, but it’s a big deal. Right?

The end of all things is at hand. The moment you were conceived, an eternal soul was brought into being. You will live forever. And what you do in this life determines forever for you. And it’s at hand! The end has begun! There is such a seriousness that Paul says, “Do this for the sake of your prayers.” That seriousness is reflected in the way you approach prayer, the regular nature of your prayer, the frequency of your prayer, the urgency of your prayer. You know that when you are in trouble, when things go bad, when you are hurting, no matter what the source of hurting, when you are really hurting and it feels like you are at the end, your prayer life improves, doesn’t it? Peter says, “Live like that. Live your life like that.”

Charles Simeon pastored a church in Cambridge, England, in the late 1700’s/early 1800’s. He was an Anglican. He got saved at Cambridge, and Cambridge was just this godless place, according to his own description. He scarcely knew a single Christian at Cambridge, and the things of God were mocked and ridiculed. He got saved there as a student, then he became the pastor of the church there associated with Cambridge.

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If you have ever been to Europe and have seen some of these old marvelous facilities, you've seen these pews, these ornate, massive structures. We have chairs and we have pews here in the States, obviously, but there the pews had doors on them and locks on the doors! Very hospitable, right? People would purchase those pews and the right to use them. The wealthy would purchase the front pews. They are not like us. They didn't get there early to get the back seats. They paid to get the front row.

So, Charles Simeon came to preach, called to the town he had gone to college in, and all the pew holders objected. "He's this guy that really believes it. He preaches the gospel and we don't want him. We want someone else." They locked the doors to all the pews and they didn't come to church. People came and they had no place to sit, so they stood in the aisles and they stood around. Simeon bought chairs to put in the aisles and the pew holders took them out and got rid of them. So he preached to people standing in the aisles for 12 years - 12 years! Why would you do that? Would you do it if it were you for 12 weeks, 12 months, much less 12 years? Would you not want to say, "If you don't want me, I'll leave"?

There was an understanding, evidently, in this man that someone had to stand in Cambridge, England, for the truth of God, that souls could be saved -- that if he just relinquished control of the church to people who really were not passionate about the things of God, indifferent to the approaching judgment of God, didn't care about what God cared about, what kind of shepherd would he be? There was a seriousness that allowed him to weather an incredible storm. He pastored there 54 years.

Somewhere in the middle of his ministry he preached a sermon where he talked about his responsibility, his accountability to God as a pastor. I'm going to read you a quote. It's a little thick, but I'll explain it just to make sure we get it. Here's what he said in the midst of that message. "Remember the nature of my office (his office as a pastor) and the care incumbent on me for the welfare of your immortal souls. Consider whatever may appear in my discourse as harsh, earnest, or alarming, not as the effects of enthusiasm, but as the rational dictates of a heart impressed with a sense, both of the value of the soul and the importance of eternity. By recollecting the awful consequences of my neglect, you will be more inclined to receive favorably any well-meant admonitions."

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Here is what he is saying. He is saying, “Do you understand what God requires of me in light of the value of your souls and eternity? If you hear me at times seem to be really animated, alarmed, even harsh -- if you understand it in light of eternity, you will see that it’s not just me being passionate, enthusiastic, but it’s actually intentional and rational. Then he called on them to consider the consequences of his neglect, if he fails to be faithful. He says, “By recollecting the awful consequences of my neglect, you will be more inclined to receive favorably my well-meant admonitions.” He is saying, “Your heart will be softer to the harder word that I give you if you think about what will happen if I don’t give it to you.”

Think about it. Do you really want to go to a doctor who won’t treat your disease because he is afraid of hurting your feelings? Giving you bad news? In the sermon Simeon used this image, and individuals who were there said that for years later God used the imprint of this word picture to speak to their hearts. He said, “Imagine a lighthouse. Outside on the jagged rocks and the approaching shore there are bodies of sailors all around, and there are grieving widows and fatherless children. They bring out the keeper of the lighthouse and after considering the evidence, there is this verdict: Asleep.” The judgment of the lighthouse keeper is for being asleep when there is serious danger approaching.

I think it’s a timely word for us, Riverside, in light of what we see and hear more and more in terms of how churches are structured and how pastors are evaluated. “He is a great communicator and he’s really funny.” That’s great. Those could be gifts and tools used by the Lord, but do we have a serious mindset for the sake of our prayers and how we understand community and the life of a church and what God calls us to? A Deadly Serious Mindset.

### II. Concealing Love (verse 8).

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” All too often we conceal our love. It may be there in our hearts, but it’s hidden. Paul tells us that the love itself is not to be hidden, but there is a kind of love that conceals the faults of others. It helps cover, brings healing, brings growth. Certainly, he has in mind Proverbs 10:12. In the New King James it reads: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.” There is a covering love, an amazing love, agape, that seeks to push through offense and deal with it in love.

This love is earnest. Loving one another earnestly is the call that Peter gives. It’s the same word that’s found in Acts Chapter 12. Do you remember the account of Acts Chapter 12? James, the

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brother of John, is in prison. Peter is in prison and James is executed. The Apostle James is put to death. It's a troubling passage. This great man of God, and Peter is there, and it's clear that that is the course he is about to travel out. So the church gathers, and in verse 5 we are told, "So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." Earnest prayer is the kind of prayer that comes before God and says, "I cannot be denied. I am going to stay in this place until God hears me, until God answers. I will not quit." There is an awareness, not just that this could happen, but this will happen if God doesn't intervene, if God doesn't answer.

That's the word used to describe our love for one another in community -- that we just won't quit. There is an urgency, there is a perseverance, there is a determination to reject bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness; recognizing hatred stirs up strife, it brings faction and division. But love, if it prevails, will bring us together in God. He tells us, "Above all." "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly."

So, church, Riverside, this is important for us. I think you do this well in many ways. We would never pretend to be perfect, but I see God's grace to love one another. If you are here and you are saying, "Well, that's not exactly my experience," I'm not for a moment holding up that we do it perfectly, but I want to affirm that there's a certain grace of God for us. I think that this point balances the first. I think Charles Simeon is a good illustration of this. He pushed through opposition. There was a seriousness about his life, and yet there was the love to persevere, the love to overcome.

One of our ministry partners, Hope Women's Centers - we have the privilege of giving them a space here in our shopping center to operate one of their women's centers. We also give some space to their corporate offices, so I always delight in hearing the testimonies that come out of Hope Women's Centers. Just recently, there was an account of a couple that came in. She believed that she was pregnant. She wanted to consider abortion, and that was her intent. She was angry, sullen. She went in and had a sonogram and the technician said to her, "Would you like to see the baby?" She kept her head down, didn't want to see the baby, told the technician: "No desire." And the boyfriend, who up until this moment had been disengaged, uninvolved, indifferent, looked up and said these words: "I want to see my baby." Immediately tears started to flow down her face. Her entire countenance changed. And she looked up at him, then she wanted to see her baby.

We can imagine what the back story is, but what I see in that moment is: Here is a man who in the moment acted like a man. Maybe he had not up until this point. Maybe he had communicated rejection, or who knows what? But there is a combination there in that moment, even if, church, even if sin got them to that moment, which I'm not making light of -- I don't know. I don't know if they were married or not. This I know: There was an expression in that moment of "Wake up! This is serious!" Emotional despondency is where we're just being swept along. I need to stop, wake up, and act in love and in seriousness. That's what characterizes us as a community, right? Life and death urgency, smothered in love. Above all, earnestly love one another. A Deadly Serious Mindset. Concealing Love.

### III. Happy Hospitality (verse 9).

"Show hospitality to one another" -- here it is -- "without grumbling." Normally when we talk about hospitality in terms of the bible, we think of opening your home and having people stay there, sleep there. In a day when there were few options -- there were not a lot of inns and places for people to stay -- it was an important ministry. It was a ministry that really helped the Church be the Church, for missionaries and workers to come, and brothers and sisters in the Lord to travel.

But evidently Peter has a larger meaning than this. He expresses the interaction of this gift. "Show hospitality to one another" -- to one another -- "without grumbling." I think it speaks of just what is required to open your home and to let people stay there. It's what's required in terms of healthy relationship -- opening your life, sharing your life, letting people in, and you taking an interest in their lives. There can be wonderful -- I'm going to call them "superficial" expressions. They are probably not so superficial, but they are things that we do together. We cultivate hobbies. We run together, we go to the gym together, we do certain things. That's an element of sharing life that's helpful, but it goes deeper than that, right? It really calls us in community to get into one another's lives and share meals and share all of our weaknesses and strengths. And it can be a challenge.

We had company last weekend stay with us, and it was delightful. They had a one-year-old and a three-year-old, and we haven't had a one-year-old and a three-year-old in our home in a long, long time. It's a lot of work, right? Delightful parents, delightful kids, and just to top it off, the kids both had fevers and runny noses. We enjoyed our time, and they left. Now we have company coming back this weekend, except this time it's just a whole passel of family. I don't know, I've lost count. Now, in one sense, I could say, "Well, there I am. I'm practicing hospitality." But I'm suggesting to

you that the spirit of it is more than that. It's more than occasionally opening your home and having people, which we should want to do.

Tim Keller quotes John Newton in a phrase that he made in a sermon. He said, "When God alters my life, I don't struggle so much, but when God alters my day, I struggle." Here's what he means by that. He means that when something big happens, I usually get it. I usually realize this is God. It may not be what I want. It may even lead me into a time of deep grieving, but I'm going to draw near to God. I'm going to see it as the hand of the Lord, and I'm going to get grace. But when God brings an interruption in my day, I don't think that way.

I was laughing because I gave this little sermonette to Beth this week. I had just read this quote and I was thinking about it. She had washed our dog. We have a dog that's just over a year old, and still very much a puppy. It's a lot of work. This dog has the gift of hair. So, she washed the dog, which is a lot of work. An hour later the dog is just making a mess of things, rolling in the grass and just completely polluted. My dear wife was not happy. I think she was angry. I was laughing and said, "You know what Newton used to say - 'God alters are lives and we're okay but he alters our day and we're not.'" She laughed and we laughed.

But, you know, it's the phone call. It's the knock on the door. It's the email, "Can you help?" It's just, you know, I've got to clean the floors, or whatever it is. Happy Hospitality -- showing hospitality without grumbling. The temptation at the end of the day, when you are filled with interruptions, a chance to practice and live out community, whether it's with your family or extended into the church, the temptation is to lay down at the end of the day and say, "Hmmmph, I got nothing done today." No, no, no. That's not true, is it? I followed the agenda that God structured for my life today. A Deadly Serious Mindset. Concealing Love. Happy Hospitality.

#### IV. Generous Service (verse 10).

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Listen, here it is: "As each has received a gift...of God's varied grace." God has gifted you. You have talents. You have treasures. You have time. God desires for you to use your talents, your treasures, your time all for his glory, all to serve other people. And he tells us that as each has received a gift, use it for what purpose? Use it to serve.

In other passages we are told that there is a gift of serving. There are some individuals who have a deep motivation to serve and to kind of contagiously excite all of us to serve. But we are not to be misled by that, because you may or may not be one of those individuals. But Peter teaches us here that no matter what our gifts are, no matter what God has given us, they are to be used to serve other people. They are to be used toward the end of blessing other people. Use it to serve. Use it to serve one another.

That's very helpful, because it instructs us that today, when you go out and you start looking at the tables, it's not ultimately about personal fulfillment. It's not just what you might be good at, or just what you enjoy doing. Certainly, those things will factor in. We are not ignorant of that. But, we are ultimately saying, "What will help other people the most?" How can I meet the need and bless and serve given the combination of what I like to do and what I am good at, recognizing that the ultimate aim here is to not just serve. Service is not the goal -- people are the goal, serving people.

So he tells us that we are to be good stewards -- that these gifts we have are an expression of God's grace. It is God's varied grace. It takes many different forms. It comes in many shapes and many sizes. You might look at someone else in the church, maybe a man your age or a woman your age, and they have certain gifts and talents. It's unhealthy for you to feel that you have to do it exactly like they do it, and to be exactly who and what they are. Forgive me and forgive us if we at times give that idea. There is a tension, right? We see people who are doing well, walking in their gift, and we give honor there because it's appropriate, but there will be your own expression of God's varied grace. Please remember you are the steward. It's God's gift and you are to manage it, to use it to help others. Your gift comes from God. It's to be used to serve others. It's God's grace.

We are going to talk a little bit more about that in this fifth and final point. Here is what we've said: It's A Deadly Serious Mindset. It's Concealing Love. It's Happy Hospitality. It's Generous Service. It is, the fifth essential for community:

V. Glorious Purpose (verse 11).

Here he keeps before us the idea of serving and adds to it the idea of speaking. He says, "...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies." I've listed this as the fifth point under the idea of Glorious Purpose. At first, you may read that first half of the verse and say, "Wow, isn't he kind of continuing the idea of

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serving here, adding to it 'speaking'? He is. But look at the next phrase: "...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." That's his main idea in the verse. In the first part of the verse, he is illustrating how to do it. His desire is that the glory of God would be the driving force behind all that you do. He wants God to be glorified in everything in your life and in the church community. Well, how do you do that?

Look at how this connects to what we have said previously. If you have a speaking gift, speak with the knowledge that you are speaking the truth of God. This is not about you entertaining, you creating a following. This is about you being faithful to deliver the message of God. If you serve, serve not in your own strength, but with the strength that God supplies. I'll say more about that in a minute, but those two points of direction are given because they will lead you to glorify God, rather than serve self or to glorify self. So, those who serve: Don't do it in your own strength. Do it in a way that glorifies God. Take it seriously. Do it all to the glory of God. Rely upon God, not your own strength.

Let's think about this for a moment. We have five essentials for community before us. The first one: A Deadly Serious Mindset - it modifies, if you will, all five. It's the lens through which we see life, and through which we put all five into practice. We understand the end is near, so it affects every part of the game, if you will, to borrow from our previous illustration. The last essential, Glorious Purpose, well that purpose informs all that we do, right? It describes or modifies all five. Everything we do we do for the love of God.

What that leaves you is these three practices right in the middle: Love, Hospitality, Serving. Loving others -- learning to cover their offenses, not to exclude them because they are sinful, broken, fractured, weak, but learn to bring healing, learn to conceal their offense, their sin. Hospitality -- opening your life, sharing your life with one another. Serving. That triad forms to us a beautiful description of the actual activity of building community. Each is essential.

When we are told to love, we are told to love above all. Hospitality is essential in that if we don't have an attitude of receiving one another, if guests come in to our sanctuary, if their first encounter with Riverside Church is to come into the service and they are given verbal and nonverbal indications that they are not welcome, or their type is not welcome here, we are failing to practice this Christian virtue of hospitality. It would, if we understood it correctly, make us more sensitive to

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those who might be prone to wonder, “Do I fit in?” Serving -- understanding that serving is used as the description of the utilization of all of our gifts.

Now we are getting the picture, right? Now we are getting a picture of community -- a rich life of relationship where, yeah, it's life and death. We are changing the world. We are changing the destiny of people forever. We are doing it through love, through hospitality, through genuine service, all for the glory of God.

Let me just end with this, if I could. How do we overcome the things that keep us from serving in order to sustain a life of service to others? Do you know I can be selfish at times? I can be selfish with my time, with my money, with my talents. In hearing a message on service, there might be some enthusiasm or a little punch that just pushes me out of that, but how do I sustain that? I can love comfort. I can love pleasure. Like many of you, there are some things I'd like to do, even if it's nothing more than sitting down and reading a book, or some form of entertainment. How do I live a life that's rich in opening myself up to others and serving others and preferring them, practicing agape -- where I am learning to find my happiness in serving them and making them happy? How do I sustain that, rather than live this shallow life of living for my own pleasure, or my own lust, or my own desire?

Then there is the obstruction of fear. What if I fail? What if I extend myself and it's not received? What if they don't like me? What if they don't want me? What if I get hurt? I've been hurt in the past. I've been hurt deeply and I just don't know that I could open my life again and risk that kind of pain. I don't think I could make it through. Now we get to the heart of community. Jesus calls us - he says the greatest among you will be the slave of all, because even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for your selfishness, for your love of pleasure and comfort, for your fear - fear of repeating the past, fear of failure, fear of rejection. He died to ransom you from all of that stuff, all of that sin - sin done to you, sin done by you. Jesus - listen to this - serves you. Jesus. Eternal Jesus.

There you are. You are in your furry bathrobe with your puffy slippers on, right? Your feet are propped up and your favorite Nicholas Sparks movie is on, gentlemen. Right? There you are. You've got your little hot tea. So comfortable, right? And your home group leader calls and says, “Hey, I've got this urgent need. Can you help me?” My slippers are on! There's a ring at the

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doorbell, right? Do you know how long it took me to get comfortable? Do you know what kind of day I've had? Now, contrast that: Father, Son, Holy Spirit perfectly happy for all of eternity past, all with no beginning, in perfect communion and fellowship. God comes to serve us and to free us from all of those things that would hold us back from knowing his love and the community that he calls us to.

So today, here is the anticlimactic application, one of them. Go to a table. Go to a table and serve from your heart. But let it be out of the rich context of: We're community, we're a family, we are building together. If you are here and you are not a part of that community -- I don't mean this local church, we would love to talk with you about that, but much more important -- do you know Jesus Christ? Has he given his life for your sin, that you might be ransomed, forgiven, saved, set free to serve as he has served you? That's what God has for you.

Let's pray.