

Everyone Carries!

A sermon based on 1 Peter 4:8-11 - ***Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so 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.***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was rather comical! I think it was for their 25th wedding anniversary (it was some wedding anniversary), but a good college friend of ours, her and her siblings, for their parents' wedding anniversary, made a video. They made a video where the kids took turns pretending to be their parents, acting out these specific situations where they would mimic one of their parent's signature phrases, characteristics, or actions.

There was one little scene that sticks in my mind, all these years later. They had just gotten home from the grocery store, the kids are booking it into the house, and the "dad" says, "Hold up! Everyone carries!"

What do you think he meant? 6 kids (right, Becky, six kids??), probably lots of bags of groceries, and every one of them was expected to grab a load and carry it inside. That's what it meant to be part of that family. Everyone shouldered a little responsibility. Everyone had a job. Everyone pitched in. Everyone carried.

I'm sure the same is true for you family. It might take on a different form, but I'm certain everyone shoulders a little responsibility, everyone has a job, everyone pitches in, everyone carries, right?

Well, what about this family? Does that – should that – translate over to this family? And we are family – we just got done seeing that in one of our sermons a couple of weeks ago. In personal conversations, congregational forums, listening sessions, you've said as much...we are family here at Light of the World, and we want to be a better family.

So, everyone carries, right? Where you've found your niche here. You've latched on to a team or group. You're making the effort to be actively involved here...to be part of the team.

At least, that's the expectation, isn't it? And it's not only mine. In a section with the header, "Living for God," Peter shares God's encouragement and his expectation for every one of us, ***"Above all, love (that's the key) each other deeply...Offer hospitality (which is important) to one another without grumbling."*** And here's where he gets to the heart of the matter, ***"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."***

What does that mean?

“The Council members we elected, they’re the ones who get to be these “faithful stewards of God’s grace.” They’ll take care of everything.” No.

Only those who are over the age of twenty (or maybe 40) should be expected to get involved here. No

“I’ve only been a member here for like a year, so I still have some time to hang back and coast.” No.

“Well, that’s what we’re paying you to do, Pastor. Anything that’s church-related, that’s all you.” No.

Look again at verse 10, **“Each of you.”** Meaning every person, every one of you; there are no restrictions. **“Should use.”** Meaning God’s expectation is that you’re doing something here. **“Whatever gift you have received.”** Meaning you’ve received gifts – that’s already taken place; you have talents and abilities. **“To serve others.”** Meaning God’s given you these gifts and abilities not for selfish but for service. And, **“as faithful stewards of God’s grace.”** Meaning this is how you live for God; this is how you demonstrate your faith in Jesus; this is how you get to share the greatest thing worth sharing – God’s grace...by using your gifts, talents, and abilities, including using them here.

So, again, to summarize this section, everyone carries.

Or do they? Do you?

With today being our Volunteer Sunday, I want you to take a couple seconds and think about how you support this family with your hands, with your time and your talents. You can write those ways down if you’d like, but I’d like for you to at least have it in mind.

Now, let’s check out a few phrases here and do an evaluation of the service work you do.

Verse 9 begins, **“Offer hospitality.”** That word, hospitality, in the Greek, means having a “love for strangers.” I think a lot of you do that. I certainly don’t want to downplay the importance of getting involved in our community, using your gifts there, and showing to those people outside our church. That’s wonderful.

Romans 12(:13) add this, though, **“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”** What do you think that means? Care about people outside the church, yes, but care about God’s people here. Care about your family here.

Seems obvious, yes, but think about this. The family readiness group on post needs helpers for this event, a community charitable organization you’re connected with is asking you to volunteer this many hours on these specific days, your friend or neighbor down the street needs some assistance with a project their working on, and often, we’re like, “Yes, sign me up! I’ll be there!” No hesitation.

Your family here has a specific project, work-day, or event we need some helpers for – maybe we even put out a sign-up sheet, and I’ll tell you, I don’t sense the same eagerness. There’s a lot more hesitation, “Well, let me check my schedule to make sure I’m not doing anything else.” I’ve even heard something along the lines of “I don’t know what I’m doing yet, but I’ll probably be busy.” Is that hospitality?

What is it?! What is it? I get it. Your times is limited. Your time is precious. It feels like now, more than ever, there’s so much more pulling at us, trying to carve out huge chunks of our time. But do you ever stop to think about those who are doing a fair amount of work here...where they could be, what they could be doing, what they might be giving up to be here to serve?

Verse 9 continues, **“Offer hospitality...without grumbling.”** So, it’s not just the act of service but also the attitude accompanying the service. Raise your hand if you’ve never grumbled when asked to help out here. Or huffed and said it like this, “Fine!” Or complained later on. Or rolled your eyes. Or drove home, thinking, “I really wish they wouldn’t have asked me. I have so many other things I want to do.” Or even listlessly dragged yourself as you helped out with the project. I can’t even raise my hand there. I’m sorry, but that’s been me before, too.

What about verse 10, **“As faithful stewards of God’s grace”?** “Faithful.” You know, I remember a few nights when Mara was younger and she would wake up in the middle of the night screaming – she was hungry or needed a diaper change or needed to be rocked back to sleep – and I pretended to be sound asleep because I was so tired and couldn’t be bothered to wake up to be a dad. That wasn’t faithful.

What about here? What about you? “Pastor (or one of the leaders) are on the phone (or are texting), and I know what they’re going to ask me to do. So I won’t answer...at least not for a while.”

“I can claim I never saw the sign-up sheet, or ‘I thought I signed up,’ when I know I didn’t.”

Or, on the other side, when we as leaders start thinking, “They indicated – either to me personally or on their Time & Talents survey – that they would do this. They should sign up. Why should I take time to reach out to them to ask?”

Is that faithful?

Or, finally, hear again how Peter begins our verses, **“Above all, love each other deeply.”** At the heart of service to God and his family here...is love. In the Greek, the word isn’t “deeply.” It’s “persevering,” or “eager” or “earnest.” So, have an eager love, the kind of love that only Jesus could have for the unloveable. When it comes to using your gifts, show love. Reflect the same, loving attitude of Jesus.

Do you? I think you know the answer. No. Not always. Not perfectly. Certainly not like Jesus. Certainly not an “everyone carries,” not like Jesus.

So, thank Jesus! Because, where we falter in our service to our Savior, he didn’t. Just think about what God calls us to be stewards of...his grace.

You know about his grace. You’ve heard about his grace. Now hear about it again!

God’s grace is ours because of Jesus’ service. I think, when it comes to that, the book of Philippians lays out Jesus’ loving service so well, **“Jesus...being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant....He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8).**

Jesus, who is God, loves us and cares about us sinful servants so much, that in spite of us (remember last week, that’s love) he lived and died and rose. When it came to the weight of sin which should have been ours to carry, Jesus carried it instead. Jesus carried it all instead. Jesus carried it all to the cross in our stead.

He didn’t even get the chance to volunteer. No, God commanded him.

And he obeyed. In love. For you. For family. So you would never have to carry that burden again. Never again. That’s love. That’s Jesus loving us deeply even though we don’t deserve it. That’s grace.

Again, thank Jesus for sharing that with us. Thank Jesus for allowing us to share that with others...yes, others out there, but even more so, especially others right here.

Fellow servants, listen to how 1 Peter 4:1,2 begins, ***“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves with the same attitude...He does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires but for the will of God.”***

How’s that for motivation? How’s that for guidance?

Because what freedom there is in seeing that my purpose in life is to serve! It gives worth and dignity and purpose to our lives to see ourselves as Christ’s partners. Right? Every Christian is part of the human network God uses to distribute his love and grace.

So, now, I get to look at whatever skills and abilities I have and dedicate them to serving God and meeting other people’s needs, and I can trust my Father that he’ll send people to help me in my needs.

Isn’t that a blessings, how we get to see how our ministry is not just what happens on Sunday mornings or just what Pastor does on his visits or in his classes. Our ministry here is carried on by every member here as we witness, encourage, rebuke, and pray with, for the people in our lives...and as we serve.

As we serve. How will you serve? How will you carry?

First off, I thank God for you. I thank God for partners, fellow stewards of God’s grace who freely give of their time and talents to volunteer, to serve. You make this ministry go. You might not see that, but you do. Thank God for you!

But again, none of us are perfect in our service. How can we improve?

This is the start...hearing God’s Word – the tough message of where we’ve failed but also the healing message of Jesus’ success on the cross for us...the message that motivates. But not only that, but God, through his Word, provides the strength for service. When you feel weary or worn out, you can always go to him for spiritual recharging. And I promise I’ll continue to administer God’s grace to you...to encourage and to enable you for a life of service.

And what comes next is a bit more practical. There are the Time & Talent surveys. A little over half of you have filled those out. Thank you! What might seem like a simple exercise enables us to put you into positions here where you’re gifts will be utilized and maximized. And we’ll work on doing that...which means, if you said you would be willing to mow the church lawn, don’t be surprised...don’t be mad if one of our maintenance guys calls and asks you to help out. Remember, you’re the one who indicated your willingness to help and serve!

And, then – this one is important - stop looking for reasons to say “no,” and try thinking about reasons to say “yes.”

Think about it. Which is easier? “Hey, would you mind helping out with this project at church?”

“Yeah, of course.” “You’re my family”

“I love you.”

“I love my church.”

“I love my Savior.”

“My Savior loves me.”

“I have proficiency in this.”

“What better thing could I be doing?”

Now, try the “no.” “Well, I don’t know. I mean, I’ll have to check and see what’s going on. I definitely want to take a little bit of time to think about it.”

That’s harder, right? Because you can’t just say “I don’t want to,” that would sound conceited, even though that’s exactly what my sinful nature wants.

But, you’re not motivated by your sinful nature but by your Savior. And he gives us every reason to say yes. He gives every one of us every reason to say yes. Everyone can carry. From the older member who thinks, “I put in my time, what good can I be now?” to the younger child who might barely be Sunday School age...everyone carries.

Right, the older members might not be able to swing a hammer or run the vacuum, but they can be part of the prayer group, provide treats, serve as mentors and encourager to the younger ladies. Kids, can you clean up after yourselves when you’re done with treats or pick up the quiet bags after worship? Yeah, you can.

It doesn’t seem like a lot. But what is the blessing? Not only are we sharing God’s grace. Better yet, Peter says, **“In all things God [is] praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory for ever and ever.”** Ultimately, when you serve, God is praised and glorified. Which means there’s no greater work than that.

Everyone carries! It’s not a novel idea, but it is a struggle. For many of us, this kind of service to Jesus and his family here is a struggle.

But now, we are equipped. We have our motivation – God’s grace through Jesus. We have our encouragement – this is how we get to give glory to God. And we all have our gifts – lovingly gifted to us by God for the purpose of serving him and others.

And now, we serve.

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