Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

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June 8, 2008 by Steve Brandon

Living in the Last Days

1 Peter 4:7-9

1. Pray (verse 7).
2. Love One Another (verse 8).
3. Love Strangers (verse 9).

The anticipation of a future event should change your life today. If you are a student, the test tomorrow changes your life tonight. You won't spend this evening watching the television you will be studying. If you are planning on beginning a vacation early tomorrow morning, you will do plenty of packing tonight and try your hardest to get to bed early. If you have a giant project coming due at work in the next few weeks, it may mean some late nights of working overtime. If you are hosting a Bible Study this evening, it means that you will spend your hours after church today cleaning your house and arranging the furniture to accommodate those coming. If you are a child and it's Christmas Eve, you will have troubles sleeping tonight. If you are taking a blood test in the morning, you will make sure that you won't eat anything after midnight. The illustrations of this are abundant.

And if you don't anticipate the future event appropriately, it can lead to problems. It can lead to a flunked test or a missed flight or a missed sales opportunity.

We had a perfect illustration of this at our house yesterday. The story begins at least two years ago (maybe three years ago--I'm not sure). We have wonderful window in the front of our house in our bedroom. It consists of two casement windows, with a large, crescent window on top of them. Well, two (or three) years ago, we had problems with one of the casement windows. It was so long ago, that I can't quite remember what was wrong with it. I think that it broke it's hinge and almost fell down from our second story window. At that time, I took a board and screwed the window shut, that it wouldn't fall out.

Over the course of the next few months, I looked for a replacement hinge, but couldn't find anything. I also looked at replacing the entire window, but it's quite

an expense, and so, I never was two serious about it. So anyway for the past two (or three) years, we've been getting along fine at our house with only one side of our window that opens in our bedroom. But, really, I should have been working on replacing the window.

In fact, less than a week ago, I was talking with a gentleman. He mentioned how he is doing odd construction jobs for a living. I asked him if he does windows. He said that he did and so I mentioned about the window in our room and told him that I might have him out to give me a quote sometime. Well, I haven't called him yet.

This brings us to yesterday. Yvonne and almost all of my family has been gone for several days. They spent Thursday, Friday, and much of Saturday at the Illinois Christian Home Educators conference in Naperville, Illinois. (She told me that she saw some of you there.) Anyway, as she came home, the kids in the car noticed that something was wrong with the window. When she arrived at home, I was expecting a nice kiss, as we hadn't seen each other for a few days. Instead, she came rushing inside in a hurry saying, "Steve, you had better come now, or we'll have to replace that window tonight!"

I didn't know what she was talking about. But, I rushed up to our bedroom and found our window cracked and all twisted and almost falling down from our second story. Some of the wood on the window had rotted and had come off the frame. Quite frankly, it was a minor miracle that it didn't fall down. It was probably broken yesterday as some of those storms came through.

To make a long story short, both sides of our casement window are now screwed shut. I'll be making a phone call on Monday. I didn't anticipate the future correctly. And now, I'm paying for the consequences.

In our text this morning, Peter will argue the same way. The anticipation of a future event should change your life today. Your neglect of these things may have a large impact on your life. Let's consider our text before us this morning:

> 1 Peter 4:7-9
> The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Peter begins this section with an anticipation of the end of the world. Or, to use his words, "the end of all things." This idea doesn't come out of nowhere. In verse 5, Peter had mentioned that day. He spoke about the day in which the unrighteous will stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account for the wickedness that they inflicted upon God's people. Verse 5 says, "But they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

The sense in Peter's words is that the Lord is on His seat, fully clothed, fully prepared, ready to come and judge the world. And our lives ought to change in light of this fact. This is clear when you look midway through verse 7, where we see the key word, "Therefore." This word is followed by three exhortations, one in each verse. These exhortations will form the basis of my outline this morning.

You can see the call to prayer in verse 7. You can see the call to love in verse 8. You can see the call to hospitality in verse 9. Each of these actions ought to be present in our lives, because of our knowledge of the future. There is a day when "the end of all things will come" and because that day is coming, we ought to (1) Pray; (2) Love one another, and (3) Show hospitality.

In time, we will dig into each of these exhortations. But, before we get there, we need to spend a few moments on Peter's expression here, "the end of all things is near." Other translations say, "the end of all things is at hand." The idea is the same. "The end is coming."

Admittedly, Peter's mention of the end is brief. But, it's also sufficient "The end is near so live right today." At this point there's a dilemma for us. We know that the end hasn't yet come. It's been almost 2,000 years since Peter wrote these words. And, Christ hasn't come. Though Peter says, "The end of all things is near," the "end of all things" hasn't come yet.

What do you make of that? How can the end be "near" while being off some 2,000 years? Some liberal theologians would be quick to point out that this is an indication where the Scripture simply isn't true. Peter was mistaken, they say. Thus, the Bible cannot be trusted. But, I think that there is a better way.

Think about Peter when he wrote these things. He knew full well that the judgment of God wouldn't come at any moment during his lifetime. Jesus had made it clear to Peter that he would live to an old age and die a cruel death. Listen to what Peter heard from the mouth of Jesus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old,

you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go" (John 21:18). John's comments in the next verse were interpretive: "Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God" (John 21:19).

As tradition tells us, this was fulfilled when Peter was crucified upside down for his boldness in proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Peter wrote these words, he may well have realized that his death was coming soon.

And so, you ask, in what sense is it true that "the end of all things is near"? I believe that the sense is the first coming of Christ brought about the last days of the planet earth. When Paul describes what the last days are like (in 2 Timothy 3), they sure to seem to describe our present time. Since the days of Peter, we have lived on borrowed time. Any delay in the return of Christ and the eventual ending of life as we know it is the mercy of God. Later in Peter's life, he made this clear. Consider the following:

> 2 Peter 3:7-10
> By His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Do you see what Peter is saying? The day of the Lord is certainly coming. In that day, the earth will meet here end. It will be replaced by the new heavens and the new earth. The delay is the patience of God. He delays the final judgment in His patience to wait for people to repent of their sin and turn to Him. But, the delay in the day of judgment isn't merely a call for unbelievers to repent. It's also a call for believers in Christ to live rightly now.

Peter continues in 2 Peter with these words, ...

> 2 Peter 3:11-15
> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening

> the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; ...

In other words, we full well know that the day is coming in which the heavens and earth will be destroyed by burning. We know that there's a day in which God will give us who believe, the new heavens and the new earth. As we look for these things and anticipate them, Peter asks, "what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (3:11). As we know these things, Peter exhorts us to "be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (3:14).

The return of Christ and the coming judgment have ethical implications upon our lives. This is true of all prophecy. It may be that we should be encouraged at the return of Christ and hope for that day. It may be that we should repent of our sins today in light of that day. But, there is always an application to prophecy. Those who like the study of prophecy merely to know what will take place in the future have forgotten the main purpose of the prophecy in the first place.

Anyway, from Second Peter, we learn the simple lessons that are pertinent to our text: any delay in judgment is a testimony to the kindness and patience of God. As we anticipate this day, we ought to live a holy and righteous life.

Turning our attention back to 1 Peter, we see that Peter says that these things are near. Any delay has been an expression of the kindness and patience of God. But, the coming of those days brings an exhortation to live rightly. And that's what Peter does in verses 7-9. He exhorts his readers to live rightly in light of the end, because the end of all things is near. Therefore, live this way. That's why my message is entitled, "Living in the Last Days."

We are living in the last days. I'm not here telling you that Jesus is returning today. Nor am I telling you that Jesus is returning in 2008. Nor am I telling you that Jesus is returning in our generation. But, I am saying that the time is near. If anything else, it is nearer than when Peter wrote. If anything else, your days are soon to be ended. The end needs to be on your mind. And in light of this, Peter gives us three exhortations to follow. The first comes in verse 7. It's quite simple.

1. Pray (verse 7).

"Therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer" (verse 7).

Now, technically, the exhortation here isn't to pray. Technically, the exhortation here has to do with our mindset and our attitudes that leads to prayer.

Attitude #1: "be of sound judgment."

> The Greek word here is swfronew (sofroneo), which caries the idea of one who is controlled by his mind and not by his emotions.
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> The best picture of the meaning of this word comes in the gospel of Mark and chapter 5, where Mark records the trip that Jesus made into the country of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1). In that country there was a demon-possessed man who was entirely out of control! This wild-man lived among the tombs (Mark 5:2), and wandered about without any clothes on (Luke 8:27). On numerous occasions, he had been captured and bound with shackles and chains, but this man was able to tear the chains and break the shackles apart (Mark 5:3-4). Day and night, he went about screaming and gnashing himself with stones (Mark 5:5). He was so crazy, that nobody was able to pass through the graveyard on their way to the other side. They needed to go around (Matt. 8:28). The people simply avoided that place.
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> Jesus eventually cast the legion of demons out of this man and into a herd of swine that drowned in the sea of Galilee (Mark 5:9-13). When the townspeople heard what had happened, they came to the tombs to see it for themselves. And when they did, they "observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15).
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> He was "clothed and swfronew (soproneo)." He was "clothed and in sound judgment."
>
> This is the same word that Peter uses to describe our attitude when praying. We ought to be controlled in our mind when we are praying.

Attitude #2: "be of sober spirit."

In many ways, this is like the first term. It has to do with our attention to prayer. The opposite here is drunkenness. The drunk person is the one who doesn't have control of his mind. He loses perspective. He can't make right decisions. His speech doesn't come out right. That's why Proverbs 31:4 says, "It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink." The wine will inhibit a king from making proper decisions and ruling well.

On several occasions, Peter used this word in his epistle. In each instance, Peter is working hard to bring a sense of seriousness to their Christian life. The first appears in 1 Peter 1:13, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13). The trials you may be facing are difficult. Your solution is to think long and hard and serious about the reality of the hope that is set before you.

The other usage of this verb by Peter is in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Satan is on the hunt. He's looking for someone to eat. So, be on the alert. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security in your life. Disaster awaits you.

The same is true here. The realities of life are serious. It's no laughing matter. So, "be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."

When you boil each of these attitudes down to a common factor, you realize that they both have to do with being alert in prayer.

My wife told of something that took place Friday at the Home Schooling Convention that she recently attended. One of the speakers at some of the workshops was a man named Bob Schultz. I know very little about this man. I have two books on my shelf by him that I plan on reading with my son at some point, "Boyhood and Beyond: Practical Wisdom for Becoming a Man" and "Created for Work: Practical Insights for Young Men." Both of these books would be good for my son. My sister was at the convention and heard him speak and was very impressed by his humility and gentle character.

Anyway, after one of his workshops, he collapsed to the floor. I'm sure some CPR was started. Those around him couldn't find a heart beat. They called an ambulance, and he was rushed off to the hospital.

A short time later, my wife was in the vender hall, where everybody was selling their home-schooling material. Someone came over the overhead speaker and said, "I have an announcement to make. I want everyone to be quiet and listen to this announcement." The people kept right on talking and going about their business. But, the speaker persisted, "I have an announcement to make. Everyone needs to be quiet to hear this. Please be quiet. Please be quiet. I need your attention this is important. We need to have everybody listening."

After some time, the vendor hall was finally quiet. The man made an announcement of what had happened to Bob Schultz. At that point, little was known and so, he shared only a little detail. He then prayed a prayer, which Yvonne described as very desperate and sobering. Yvonne told me that the announcement had a very sobering effect upon the vendor hall. (The next day it was announced that he was in the hospital alive, but still unconscious).

Peter's words here of the end of all things being near ought to have a sobering effect upon our lives as well. When sobering news come, there is something within us that gives us reason to be alert in prayer. Both of these attitudes that Peter mentions here have to do with our being alert in prayer. It's not easy to be alert in prayer.

One of the greatest battles that I face is the battle of being alert in prayer. My mind drifts. I lose focus. I'm tired. I'm easily distracted. So was Peter. When I think about Peter praying, I think about failure.

Picture with me the night in which Jesus is betrayed. He takes His disciples with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. He tells His disciples, "Sit here wile I go over there and pray" (Matt. 26:36). And then He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me" (Matt. 26:38). And then, Jesus went a little beyond them, fell on His face and prayed with loud crying and tears to the one able to save Him from death (Heb. 5:7). Certainly, Peter was able to see the anguish of the moment. Certainly, Peter was concerned about Jesus. He had never seen his master like this before.

So, how did Peter respond? He fell asleep! In the hour of need, he failed to maintain a sober spirit. And this happened not once, not twice, but three times! Three times Jesus had told Peter to say alert as He headed off to pray. And three times Peter fell asleep.

So Peter isn't exhorting us to these things because he's the example of how to stay alert in prayer. He knows the failures and he knows the difficulties. But, here's what it is: Peter knows the importance of prayer. Peters knows the importance of maintaining a sound mind and sober spirit in the process of prayer. He knows because he has failed.

But, with the end in view, perhaps you will be sobered up to pray. Will you? As you think of your life, is it characterized by prayer. The end compels us to pray.

Let's turn to my second point this morning, which is, ...
2. Love One Another (verse 8).

This comes in verse 8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Notice first of all that there is a **priority** to Peter's words here to love one another. Peter says, "**Above all**, keep fervent in your love for one another."

In other words, keep your love for one another as the greatest priority in your life. Throughout Scripture, we see the priority of love. In Colossians 3:14, Paul put forth an entire list of Christian virtues to maintain: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. And then, he said, "Beyond all these things put on love."

The love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, demonstrates the priority of love. Paul writes, ...

> 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
> If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

With these words, Paul lifts high love. Love is more than a skilled teacher, more than an intelligent person, more than a man of faith, more than having a great concern for the poor, and more than one of great sacrifice. Without love, all of these things are nothing. Such is the priority of love.

When Jesus was asked for the greatest commandment, He said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Love for the brethren ought to be the greatest priority in your life, especially in light of the end. Is it? Do you love others in this body? May the Lord encourage you when you are doing well. And may the Lord convict your heart and halp you to change where needed.

But, not only is there a priority to Peter's words. There is also an **intensity** to Peter's words. "Above all, **keep fervent** in your love for one another" (verse 7).

This is the same fervency that is mentioned earlier in the epistle, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart" (1:22). The idea here in the Greek word is that of "stretching." "Above all, stretchingly love one another." Extend yourself. Go beyond what is comfortable. Don't merely settle for the easy and convenient thing. Do the hard thing, over and over and over with eagerness and willingness!

The apostle Paul is a great example of his stretching love. To the Thessalonians, he wrote, ...

> 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9
> But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

That's a stretching love! All of you know how much a nursing mother needs to stretch to care for her children. It's in the middle of the night feedings. It's dressing and changing and feeding. It seems as if it never stops. Such is the stretching love that Paul demonstrated to those in Thessalonica.

To the Ephesian elders, Paul demonstrated his great love as well. His love was so great for those in Ephesus that he didn't want to enter the city, because he knew that it would delay his trip to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16). So, he merely called for the elders to meet him at Miletus, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. To them he said, ...

> Acts 20:18-19, 24-25, 36-38
> "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ... But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face."
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> When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again And they were accompanying him to the ship.

That's a stretching love!

One of the best examples of stretching love takes place in the second half of Philippians, chapter 2. As you read it, I want for you to listen to Paul's great love, not only for those in Philippi, but also for his fellow workers.

> Philippians 2:19-30
> But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had

> heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

With those words. Paul's love for Timothy is evident. He is of "proven worth" to Paul, looking out for Paul's interest. Paul's love for those in Philippi is evident. He is willing to send Timothy to them. But, he can't send him yet, because he is dependent upon him at the present time. But, when the opportunity comes, Paul will be able to send him, thereby showing his love for the Philippians. Giving them something precious to Himself.

And so, Paul decided to send Epaphroditus, who had a great love for the Philippians, which Paul describes as "longing" for them. Paul then relates his history for a bit. Epaphroditus was sick and almost died in his service to Christ. When the Philippians heard about it, they were distressed, because they were so concerned about him. This distressed Epaphroditus, because they were distressed. When he comes to those in Philippi, there will be much rejoicing! That's a stretching love!

That's the way that the love for the church body ought to be. Any lack is our sin.

What I love about the apostle Paul is that his love for others wasn't only for those who loved him in return. (Even the Gentiles do that!) Paul often stretched himself to love those who weren't to fond of him. In his day, the church of Corinth had caused all sorts of grief to his soul. They were sinful and self-focused. Many had turned against Paul to follow other leaders who had had mouthed Paul. And listen to what he said, "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls." (2 Cor. 12:15) That's a stretching love!

How could he do this? They key is in the last phrase of verse 8, "because love covers a multitude of sons." Paul covered a lot of sin.

If you are looking for a hook to hang this on, the word, **humility**, is good. Verse 8 speaks of the priority, intensity, and humility of love.

As Peter wrote these words, perhaps he had Proverbs 10:12 in mind, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." Perhaps Proverbs 17:9 was in his mind as well, "He who conceals a transgression seeks love."

Quite frankly, if ever you get to the point of stretchingly loving others in the church, you will experience their sin, and, don't forget, they will experience your sin. And the only way to move forward is to let love do it's work or covering "a multitude of sins." My love for them covers their sins. Their love for me covers my sins.

But, it goes beyond this! It's not merely their sin against me that stops me from loving others. I also need to overlook my sin against them. My sin against them didn't come from nowhere. It came from a hatred towards them. In humility you need to confess your sins and put them behind you.

This is where the majority of church problems arise. Sins are committed, and love fails to cover them. As love fails, then bitterness arises. When bitterness arises, there is dis-unity in the church.

It all comes back to humility. It comes back to purity. It comes back to love. It comes back to seeking the good in others. This is the spirit of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:7, "[love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." When you are sinned against, love will bear it. Love will overcome evil with good. When you are sinned against, love will believe all things. "They know not what they do." When you are sinned against, love will hope all things. "Things are terrible now, but I trust that they will turn for the better." When you are sinned against, love will endure all things. It's hard, but I'll endure it in love.

1. Pray (verse 7); 2. Love One Another (verse 8). And finally, ...

3. Love Strangers (verse 9).

I get this from verse 9, which reads, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

When you look at those words, you might easily ask, "Where do you get 'loving strangers'?" I get it from the literal meaning of the Greek word translated here, "be hospitable." This word is a combination of two Greek words. The first is filoV (philos) which means "love." The second word is xenoV(xenos) which means

"strangers." You put these to words together and you get, filoxenoV (philoxenos) or "love of strangers." This is what this term is describing!

When we think about "hospitality," we think about having our friends over to our home. That's a good expression of love. And I encourage you in that. But, such application belongs in point #2: Love One Another, and not in point #3.

See, when Peter's listeners heard these words, they would have thought about having strangers into their home, to spend the night. In Peter's day, there weren't many hotels. And many that existed were the hotbeds of sin. But, when Christians traveled, they would try to avoid these places and take advantage of the network of Christians across the land. Through mutual acquaintances, they were able to secure lodging with other Christians, even though they were entire strangers.

This is tough. People come to town, talk with the pastor of the church and he sent them to your home. And yet, Peter exhorts them to do this, "without complaint." I can see how easy it would be to complain. Without warning, you hear a knock on your door. As you go to your door to see who it is, they request permission to spend the night. They tell you that they attend the church in Thessalonica and are on their way to Corinth. "Would you be able to provide a place to stay this evening for me and my family?"

This is tough. And yet, those of Peter's day were called to do this on a regular basis. Now, obviously, that practice isn't done today. But, there are other ways in which we are can show our love to strangers.

Perhaps the most obvious and simple and straightforward is that of welcoming visitors into the church body. Love will treat them, just as you would want to be treated as a visitor at a church. If you see somebody that you don't know, it's good to greet them, to shake their hands, to sit with them, to explain how things work at church (like with the nursery or with the children's notes).

Visiting a church is a very difficult thing. Love will seek to help others feel comfortable in the process. Perhaps there are people here in the service that you don't know very well. Look around. If you are in front, I encourage you to turn around and look. Stand up if you need to. Here is my assignment for you. Identify one person in the room who you don't know very well (perhaps not at all). I'm going to give you five minutes to try to talk with them. I thought of two questions

that you might ask them (which ought not to be too intimidating). Ask them (1) their name, and (2) if they grew up in a Christian home or not. "Don't complain!" Come back in 5 minutes. I have a story to tell you and then we'll be done. [1]

Here's my story. Last Sunday we had a visitor come to our church. His name is Patrick. One of our greeters greeted him at the door, he said "How are you doing?" He replied "Terrible. It's been one of the worst times in my life."

Several men in our congregation befriended him and asked him to stay for the service. These men loved the stranger. After the service, we had our monthly church potluck. Patrick stayed it. I was able to sit with him enough to find out what happened.

He told me that he has recently fallen on difficult times. He just left Eau Claire and was headed to Peoria. He was here in Rockford because he has some family here. However, in the process of driving down, his van broke down, on Friday. He was towed to a garage and his van was fixed by Saturday. As he continued on he got a flat tire. He said that he didn't have enough money to pay for another tow. So he called a company and asked them to bring a tire to him, which they did. However, when they arrived, they couldn't get his original tire off of the rim, so, he was towed anyway!

By this time, it was Saturday. On Sunday, he was planning to head out to Peoria. He's going west on State Street, and his brakes went out. To avoid right heading north on Bell School road. The same thing happened at Bell School when he came to Guilford, where there was a red light. To avoid the car in front of him, he turned right (into our parking lot).

This was a little after 10:00 am. He didn't know anything about the church. He hadn't taken a shower. He hadn't eaten since noon on Saturday. He commented to me on how good the food was. He also told me that my message really ministered to his soul. (My message last week was entitled, "Get Ready to Suffer" from 1 Peter 4:1-6. He was suffering all right!).

After some time, one of our deacons took him to get new brakes, spending several hours with him, until he could go on his way.

I was very encouraged by the love of strangers that were exhibited from several men in our congregation toward this stranger. May we all follow their example.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 8, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

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[1] At this point in my message, I released the people to seek out those that they didn't know. It was a good time for all. I believe that many people had an opportunity to meet those who they hadn't really known before very well.