

What Is Your Default?

What is your definition of a dumpster fire? Atlanta Braves were a mockery of a baseball team, easily the worst team in 70s and 80s. Ted Turner purchased them, put them on his own TV network and they were a disaster. Until Bobby Cox took over as manager in 1990. Together with GM John Schuerholz, Cox built a dynasty. 15 Division titles and 1 World Series championship. Listening to an interview from Braves star pitcher Tom Glavine, who was asked what made Bobby Cox special. "You could tell that Bobby Cox loved people." It wasn't always cupcakes and butterflies, Bobby could yell and scream, he was ejected a major league record 158 times. But Bobby Cox loved his players. And they knew it and they would play their hearts out for him.

Wouldn't you like it to be said about you, "He/she loved people". Just resonates. John 13:35 That people would know us by our love. That's a great embodiment of this concept of loving well that we have been focusing on as a congregation. I hope that you have taken advantage of the opportunity that the 40 Days of Love study provided us to love well.

Why is loving well important? Oswald Chambers My Utmost for His Highest – We are not sanctified for ourselves. We are sanctified so that God can take out His Redemptive Plan through us. That redemptive plan is carried out by loving well. There is no substitute.

In the 40 Days of Love study, Rick Warren reveals to us that loving well is a learned response. It's not intuitive. That gives me hope. It means that you and I can cultivate a love like Jesus. Like any learned response, it comes from recognizing what love looks like, and then repeating it over and over until it becomes your "go to" response...your default.

Your default is an involuntary response to a given external stimulation. It is how you are currently programmed. If I suddenly yelled "Duck", some of you would drop and cover your heads, some of you would look up to see what's coming. Those are defaults. If it was going to be cold outside today, most of you would default to a long pants and a jacket to wear. **And defaults can be reset.** I love soft drinks, but when I needed to lose weight I had to switch to diets. Now diet soft drinks are my default. Today, if someone has one minute of unoccupied time, they immediately reach for their smart phone. That was not the default 10 years ago.

1st Cor 13:7 reveals to us the defaults for loving well. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Always, siempre. Default. Our default love response is to protect, trust, hope and persevere. That short passage just resonates within in me. But it doesn't always come out of my. My defaults are not aligned so well with this passage. But that can change. It is changing. Let's explore these together to see what adjustments we can make to love well.

Always protects. What does protection look like when we think about loving well? It's not about wrapping our loved ones up in bubble wrap so they can't get hurt. Jesus didn't do that. He didn't hide the disciples from the world, instead, he sent them out into the world and sometimes they got hurt. So how does love protect? Well love protects by avoiding unnecessary risks. Ricky Jones' (co-worker) death changed my driving habits. I avoiding two lane high speed roads as much as possible, especially at night. Love avoids giving someone too much responsibility too fast. Instead, love shoulders the load as the person comes up to capability. Always protecting means setting appropriate boundaries. Not allowing access to things that can harm us due to a lack of understanding or ability to control and

restrain. Setting appropriate boundaries and responsibility sets are critical default modes for loving well as a parent. Think about when you were first learning to drive. You were operating a fully capable car, but you started first with just learning to put it in gear, to drive down slow residential streets with an instructor, learning to park, to change lanes, to signal at intersections. Then gradually moving to faster roads as you could safely control the car. Loving well doesn't hand you the keys and say good luck. Loving well monitors and guides who we are in relationship with, what types of shows we have access too, what music we listen. Those we are in relationship with may not appreciate the boundaries and limited responsibilities initially, but later it will bear fruit.

Protecting speaks on behalf of those who do not have a voice. Protecting is standing up and taking action against abortion and oppression. Protecting is defending the rights of the widow, the orphan, the alien. Protecting is investing in ministries that provide relief to those who do not have the ability to support themselves. Compassion International, Samaritan's Purse, True To Life Ministries, River of Hope, Pregnancy Help Center. Protecting is meeting the needs of the least of these. Protecting always asks "How can I help?"

Always protects also means defending the ones we love, backing them up, and giving them grace. When we were having our home built the timeframe for completion started dragging out. First it was to happen before Christmas, and then just after New Years, then first of February came and we were still not in the house. We were in a very temporary living condition, 1300 sq ft house out at beach with long commutes to school and work each day and it was stressful, especially for Wendi as mom for the family. Wendi was expressing her concerns to me as we were driving back from the construction site one evening. They were very valid concerns and she was unhappy that the builder did not seem to be taking her seriously or moving at the pace necessary, and I did not protect her. Instead I was offering up excuses for the builder to try to justify why it kept taking longer. I will remember this moment for as long as I live, we were crossing the top of the Surfside bridge and Wendi looked at me and said that I give the builder much more grace than I give her. Wow, that cut right through me. She was right. I was not defending her, making it clear to the builder just what sort of situation we were in and that he need to drive completion now. The next day I set up a meeting with the builder and laid things out clearly and we were moved in within 2 weeks. That situation could have been avoided if I had had Wendi's back initially as things began to slide, if I had taken the time to listen how impactful these delays were on her and on my kids. Always protecting means always looking out for the best interest of those you care about and placing those interest ahead of yourself.

Love always trusts. This is an area of continual growth for me. I can be a bit of a control freak and exert my opinions as constraints on others around me. That is not trust and that is not love. Wendi feels freedoms to do or act in areas that I feel are more black and white. Without going into detail on what those are, I would subtly and sometimes not so subtly let her know I did not approve of those things. I did not consult with God, I acted out of my default which is to control to ensure there is nothing out of line so no one gets into trouble and ultimately so my life is not inconvenienced. That is the reality of it. I was squeezing joy out of Wendi's life and replacing it with condemnation. Wendi revealed to me how much this was hurting her and it caused a moment of deep regret in me. Through a difficult conversation the Lord revealed I was not trusting her relationship with Him. I was not believing that she had a mature walk with the Lord and that she was taking those things before Him in the very same way that I take my ways and my actions before Him. My default was not only wrong, it was stifling. I began in that moment to trust the relationship Wendi has with Christ. To not only give her freedoms, but to

take some of my own internal “black and white” frustrations to her to get her perspective. This has led to a new level of admiration I have for my wife and to a new level of dialogue with God about how I can feel the same level of freedom Wendi does. I have since been applying this spiritual relationship trust with my kids and have seen some amazing results as well. Instead of always defaulting to “this is what the Bible says” when there is a disturbance in the peace, I default to a trust that they know what the Bible says and thus there must be something else worth understanding that is driving the current crisis. This enables me to talk with them, find out how they are really processing the given situation, seeking to learn what factors are in play and helping them find the right actions they need to take. Now Brooklyn sits down and tells me about her day, we talk about much deeper fears and concerns. It’s not always perfect, but it always ends with a hug. Always trusting means letting others wrestle with God and with issues in their lives without trying to influence the outcome or their actions based on your own constraints and controls.

Always trusts means always believing those you love are making a good faith effort. It means when those around you reach an impasse, your default response is not telling them to just try harder. An always trusting default believes they have tried hard and there is some other difficulty that must be overcome. And always trusting is willing to explore to find out what that real difficulty is and helping them overcome that.

Always trusting is willing to delegate authority and empowering growth based on potential, not on proven results. What if we only extend responsibility and opportunity to those around us who have proven they can do it? What happens? There is no growth, there is no joy, there is no transformational experiences. Jesus was not like that. Jesus knew all of the disciples shortcomings, Jesus knew they were bound to mess up, overreact, be critical, etc but he sent them out in his authority anyway. And what happened? People repented, they were delivered from oppression, and they were healed. In the same way, without reservation, Jesus hands the full keys of the kingdom to everyone who places their faith and trust in him. Do you hand your trust out in the same way to those you love? Do invest in them, empower them, release them to do great things because of their potential...or do they have to prove themselves worthy first? On this point I’m going to leave you with something that Rick Warren stated and is still echoing in my mind – Do you love them because of who they are or because of what they do?

Love always hopes. Always hopes means always believing for the best. Hope is speaking in the prophetic – speaking of that which is not as though it were. Hope does not dwell on past experiences or the current results. Hope says I believe you can do it. I believe you can change. Hope says that we are better than our recent mistakes and that tomorrow will be different than today. God does not base his belief in us based on our successes and failures. Instead God bases his belief in us on the transformational blood of Jesus and power of the Holy Spirit and that when we are walking in those there is nothing we cannot do! And we need to impart that same hope to those around us. Hope believes in the willing spirit inside someone and exudes them to keep moving forward.

Love always hopes. Amazing example of hope In John 8 with the woman caught in adultery. Let him without sin cast the first stone. Crowd leaves. Jesus looks at the woman and asked her, “Woman, where are they now? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. Hope always encourages without qualification. Hope has no “buts”, no “however’s”, no “when you”. Hope always extends a hand without judging. How does your default compare to Jesus’? Do your words liberate or condemn?

To offer hope at this level, consistently and without qualification, we have to overcome our own personal bias. There are people in society, even people in our circle of influence, which we marginalize or devalue because of how they look, their race, their occupation, where they live, who they vote for, the car they drive, what sports team they like, etc. This personal bias immediately immobilizes our desire to extend the love of Christ. The Bible Story of the Good Samaritan is a great example of this. People walked by a wounded and dying man because they viewed him as unclean, unworthy, or inconvenient. People of God walked by a person in obvious, critical need because of a personal bias. Each of us have personal bias that clouds our view of the **real condition** of people around us. And that bias keeps us from loving them. I had a personal bias that viewed a particular role in my group as very menial, basic. Because I did not value the role, and that translated to my attitude towards the person in that role. The person could sense it. Word got back to me indirectly and it really moved me. Made immediate changes to my attitude and my actions. All people are worthy of God's love, and thus all people are worthy of me loving them. If you get nothing more today from me than this point, please, please, please ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the personal bias that is keeping you from loving well.

Love always perseveres. Hope opens the door to perseverance. Hope says I believe you can grow. And persevering means watching our reactions to individuals as they experience this growth. Perseverance allows room for failure and be willing to help clean up the mess. As people grow, they rarely get things right the first time, there are raw emotions and there are problems and circumstances that have to be corrected and restored. If we react to these moments with frustration or anger, those we are supposed to be loving will shut down, or rage back and the desire for growth can be stunted. But if we react with patience and encouragement, they are willing to try again and will not only succeed but surpass what we thought was possible. Persevering offers a safe place for people to express their fears and their frustrations without minimizing them. Persevering shows genuine concern and provides the support to get back going again.

Perseverance offers forgiveness. Perseverance rejects the desire to get even. Perseverance repays evil with good. Perseverance repeats this as long as it is needed. Perseverance is "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".

Perseverance is the Cross. Perseverance is For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son. Whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Today, here in this worship service there are some who need to experience the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Your empty, spent, tired of running, tired of trying, tired of no relief. You are hungry to experience the release that comes from giving your life over to one who cares deeply for you. If that's you, I want you to join me in the amazing and yet simple and altogether eternal opportunity to know the life that is truly life. You are in the right place to make it happen right now. Jesus Christ died that your sins would be forgiven, eternally separated from you. And he rose again that you may have new power for living here on earth and eternal life with him when he dies. We call that salvation. To experience salvation you surrender your life to Jesus and follow him as your leader and forgiver. We can accomplish that right now in prayer. Join me.