

Introduction:

- In 2006, Peggy Noonan, famed conservative political correspondent and columnist, wrote a moving piece for the Wall Street Journal titled, "The Sounds That Still Echo From 9/11". Below are some of those messages, and more...
 - Flight 93 flight attendant Ceecee Lyles, 33 years old, in an answering-machine message to her husband, "Please tell my children that I love them very much. I'm sorry, baby. I wish I could see your face again."
 - Fire Capt. Walter Hynes on his wife's voicemail just before rolling out of Ladder Company 13 heading toward the Towers, "Honey, it's real bad," he said. "I don't know if we'll make it out. I want to tell you that I love you and I love the kids."
 - Moises Rivas, 29, a chef at Windows on the World, the renowned restaurant at the top of the North Tower, reached his stepdaughter Linda Barragan, who relayed his message to his wife, "... he said not to worry, he is OK. He said, Mami, he loves you no matter what happens. He loves you. That's it."
 - International trade consultant Melissa Harrington Hughes, 31, also stuck in one of the towers, called her father Bob Harrington at home in Massachusetts at 8:55 am, nine minutes after the first plane struck the North Tower. He tried to calm her and told her he loved her. "She said, 'I love you too, Dad' and she said, 'You have to do me a favor. You have to call Sean and tell him where I am and tell him that I love him.'" Twelve minutes later, at 9:07 am, Melissa was able to make a second call to her newlywed husband Sean, who was asleep in San Francisco, and leave a message. "Sean, it's me," she said in her message. "I just wanted to let you know I love you and I'm stuck in this building in New York. There's a lot of smoke and I just wanted to let you know that I will love you always." Love is one of the most powerful forces on earth...it moves the human heart.
- **1 John 4:19, We love Him because He first loved us.** NKJV
- That has to be one of the most powerful passages of scripture in the Bible to preach from. It shows us a God who loves, is love, and initiates love.
- Real love forgets self. Real love knows no danger. Real love doesn't count the cost. The Bible says, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

I. God Love First

A. Greek, *Protos*=signifies the "first" in space, time, number, or rank. (from Theological Dictionary of the New Testament) The most common usage is first in time, number, or rank.

1. God was the first to love us/to establish His love—before we were sinners.

a) In the first place. In the beginning. He had love on his mind when He set out to create man. He was looking for one who would be the object of His affections.

Eph 1:4 **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world** NKJV. 1 Peter 1:19-20 **a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world.** NKJV

b) This was before all others or any others.

2. God was the first to initiate loving us when we were undeserving of love/unlovable.
 - a) In preference to something else.
 - b) Rom 5:8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** NKJV
 3. God is always the first to loves us, when we fail, fall or sin. First in time, first in preference, first in rank.
- B. Greek, *Agapesen*, Loved. This is a third person aorist active indicative verb
1. This simply means that God completed an action in the past that continues into the present and this activity/action does not diminish, change or wane. Before the foundation of the world he loved us. It continued even when we were separated from Him by sin. *Agape*
 - a) It is often described as an unconditional love. That is true but it is more. **It is a love that comes from the heart that looks past all the outward and inward 'uglies' and chooses by an act of the will motivated from the heart to love.**
 - b) IE. The closest illustration I have is a parent who continues to love a child in spite of their rebellion, poor life choices, and failures. It is the picture of the parent who must stand in righteousness, making just decisions regarding that child all the while your heart goes out to them, breaks for them and desires the best for them.
- C. God is Love. 1 John 4:8, 16 both say that God is love. John the Apostle defines God as love.
1. 1 John 4:8 **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.** NKJV
 2. 1 John 4:16 **And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.** NKJV
 3. God established His heart towards us in the beginning before creation.
 4. God has kept His heart for us even when we were in sin.
 5. God initiated His love for us by sending us His son.

II. He Has Always Been the Initiator of Love

- A. Gen. 3:21 Right after God kicks Adam and Eve out of the house he is there to make sure they are covered. God initiates loving them! He covers their nakedness.
- B. God repeatedly returns to Israel and Judah demonstrating his love to a people who are unthankful, and undeserving. The end of the story. They return and love God because He loves them. Hosea buys prostitute and loves her and she in return loves him back. Hos 3:5 **Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.** NKJV
- C. John 3:16-17 **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** NKJV
 - i. God gave his Son.
 - ii. God sent his Son to demonstrate his love. Rom 5:8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** NKJV
- D. Go and sin no more.

- i. Jesus initiated loving the man at the pool Bethesda John 5:5-ff
 - ii. Jesus initiated loving the woman caught in adultery.
 - iii. He tells both to go and sin no more imply that that is the condition he found them in.
 - a. Jesus is not afraid of sin. Sin cannot make love dirty.
 - b. Jesus is there to change both the outward and the inward parts of this man by loving him.
- E. Ie. When I was running from God he was initiating His love toward me.
- i. The stars at night spoke to me of His majesty. Stars just do not happen. All creation declares His glory.
 - ii. The Marshall Tucker Band, performing in concert, in a stadium filled with orange glows, smoky haze and funny smells became the mouth piece of God.
 - iii. A Christian girl in my class just simply caused me to see life through God's eyes.
 - iv. At my worse, God visited me and revealed himself to me! Three weeks later I am born again.

III. We love him because he first loved us.

- A. Ie. I was like a love sick teenager when I first got saved. I could not get enough of God. I was up early before any were stirring in the dorm and had an hour of prayer in before the first person came into the prayer chapel. I was up late in the chapel when others were in bed. I read God's word constantly. I could not get enough. My friends were Jesus freaks like me. We lived to touch others with the love God. We would go to Chicago and minister in the malls, on the streets. Janet and another friend of ours actually spent a few nights in Chicago with the homeless. We were in the detention centers, prisons, bars, etc touching people with the love of God.
1. God's will is to strengthen the response of our heart to Him in love.
 2. His love is the incentive, the motive, and moral cause of our love.
- B. Those who experience the love of God, give love back to God first, this evokes an out-pouring and an awakening of love in our hearts for us that overflows to others. You cannot do the second command without doing the first command.
1. Jesus took the initiative and set a demoniac free. The demoniac of Mark 5 wanted to follow Jesus. Mark 5:18-20 **he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." 20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.** NKJV
 2. Jesus took the initiative and set others free from demons, sicknesses, and boring life routines. Luke 8:1-3 **And the twelve were with Him, 2 and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities – Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons , 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.** NKJV

3. On the cross, He cried out—taking the initiative—“Father forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.” He is still praying that prayer today!

Conclusion:

Of the messages, Ms. Noonan observes:

- Something terrible had happened. **Life was reduced to its essentials.** Time was short. People said what counted, what mattered. It has been noted that there is no record of anyone calling to say, "I never liked you," or, "You hurt my feelings." No one negotiated past grievances or said, "Vote for Smith." Amazingly -- or not -- there is no record of anyone damning the terrorists or saying, "I hate them." **No one said anything unneeded, extraneous or small. Crisis is a great editor.**
- “These were people saying, essentially, in spite of my imminent death, **my thoughts are on you, and on love.** A psychiatrist said of the people on the planes and in the towers were 'accepting the inevitable' and taking care of 'unfinished business.'" They address what needs doing.”
- How about you? If all you had left were a few moments and a cell phone, what would your concerns boil down to? Who would you call? What would you say? How would crisis edit your life?