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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 1 Corinthians 13:7
Title of sermon: Love Runs Marathons
Series: What Matters Most - #8

1 Cor. 13:7-8 (NIV) 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Yes, we are going to finish up this great series. I hope you've enjoyed it. I have loved preaching it, and we are going to spend one more time. Probably have never quite gone this slowly through a text of Scripture, and so, many of you who, when I started, said, "There's no way he's gonna spend eight weeks on one chapter." Well, we did it! Maybe you were here the first week and that's it, and you've come back -- so, you did it!

There's a gentleman -- I've never met him. I've watched videos, numerous videos of this guy. Probably my connection to Dick Hoyt was like a lot of people -- for some of you. I'm not a runner, I wish I was, but I really don't like running all that much. But, this guy's a runner. So, if you're a runner, you know Dick Hoyt. If you're in the Adults With Special Needs categories with, you know, in terms of having children, you probably know Dick Hoyt. And those are the two worlds that he has touched. Dick was a father. He's passed away just recently. He was a father of a young son who was a quadriplegic and had cerebral palsy. And one day, they were out, and there was a challenge that Dick picked up from his son Rick. And he said, "Dad, there's a young friend of mine who's struggling with leukemia, and -- with cancer -- and I want to race in this race for him, but I can't run. Dad, would you push me?" And his dad decided, kind of at a whim, "I will." He pushed his son. He was second to last in the race, but it really didn't matter. And then his son came to him and said, "Dad, when I run, I don't feel like I'm disabled." And that was enough to hook his dad. In their years together, Dick began to run, and he ran and ran and ran with his son. Over a thousand races. Thirty-two Boston marathons. He ran the entire United States, coast to coast, pushing his son. One of the most inspiring -- you can YouTube this stuff all day, and I'm telling you, your heart will be crushed and delighted all at the same time.

Why do I begin with that inspiring story to me? I can't imagine a better illustration of what we finish with. Paul is writing to this church, and he's telling them what does love look like. I'll show you what love is by what love does. What does it do? Well, it has patience. It's kind. Doesn't envy. Eight different things that he says he doesn't do. And then he finishes off with these five. But the last two, he says, "Love always hopes and it always perseveres." Or, in some of your texts it says, "It always endures." Love is a dad who enters a thousand races so that his son doesn't feel like he's disabled. Love runs 32 Boston marathons. Love runs triathlons, duathlons, or all of the other "athlons," and everything else. Why? Because he loved his son. You can get online and see YouTubes where Dick is running out of the water, and he swims, and he's tugging his son in a boat. I mean, the guy is, in my mind, kind of super-human. But he's a beautiful illustration. Love does shows us what love is.

What is it? It always hopes and it always perseveres. It always hopes. Dan Allender -- one of my favorite authors. He's a great writer, just lives up the road, up in the Seattle area. He made a statement one time when I was studying under him. Dan said that addiction is the absence of hope. When hope is removed in a person's life, addiction sets in. And whenever addiction sets in to a person's life -- no matter what that addiction is. There's a score of them. But whenever that addiction sets in, it sets in and takes root because hope has been driven out.

We live in a culture. I sat with a group of people this afternoon. Enjoyable time. Every conversation that I ever sit in these days, it goes to today's culture. And if there's anyone there of any age -- meaning, oh, my age or older -- they compare to the world that they grew up in, to the world that is now. That comparison doesn't come out good. It's a hard place to live. It's frightening. They will tell me a story of a grandson who's got an addiction. They will tell me of a family who is split that they know of. They will tell me, and they'll go on and on and on, and somewhere in the conversation, just like today -- "Pastor, is it ever going to get back to normal?" I wish I had a crystal ball I could look in. I have no idea! I seriously doubt it. Whatever normal is. But the absence of hope, the absence of optimism seems to me to be everywhere, and thus if you talk to counselors -- and I do a lot -- addiction is everywhere. Addiction is on an all-time rise. Getting into a counselor in Salem is nigh to impossible unless you're willing to wait three months. Why? Because they're all full.

Allender, I think, is right. When hope begins to get removed away, addiction rises, and that's our culture. That's the culture that Paul's writing to. Now, you wouldn't think it, because in many ways the Greeks were a lot like us -- they had everything! I mean, the Greeks had everything that you wanted. They had orders that were phenomenal. They had architecture that was stunning. They had some architecture that -- the Parthenon, that we still celebrate, this temple that is majestic. They had all kinds of individuals -- poets, writers, philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, Socrates. It's like they had everything in terms of culture and the arts, the Greeks had everything. But they also had Corinth. And Corinth was, in a sense, kind of like today. The Greeks had everything that you could imagine -- just like the United States. And yet, when you went to Corinth it was just like we're experiencing today. And in fact, in their day, if you were to say to a person, "You're a Corinthian," that was not an encouraging thing. That means you're a reprobate, probably a sexually confused individual, and you're a person who's licensed in the area of immorality. In fact, one of the local temples in Corinth boasted that they had at any given time between five and ten thousand temple prostitutes for the sailors that would come in from both seas. So, if a person said, "You're a Corinthian," it'd be kind of like, you know, if a person said, "You're a Vegas-ite," or something like that. We don't really use that term, but -- it would be kind of the similar way that we look at Vegas. We -- whatever happens in Corinth stays in Corinth. It was a place of hopelessness. It was a place of incredible licentious sin. Immorality ran the gauntlet. And then one day, there was a -- well, by his definition, a small of stature individual showed up. Of all things, this young -- well, unnamed -- oh, in his own right he was a very significant academic kind of person. But in the world of Aristotle and Socrates, Paul didn't carry much weight. But he showed up in Corinth. You wonder, why would you even go there? He went there because they had two seas on both sides of Corinth and it was a place of amazing, amazing influence, even though it was as immoral as you can imagine.

Paul shows up, and he begins to preach. In the most unlikely place. And he preaches a gospel that went something like this: If your life is miserable, and you have tried everything in the world to gain pleasure, and you're willing to acknowledge it's a dead end, I have good news for you. I have good news that there was a man by the name of Jesus Christ who died. He lived on this earth and He died, and when He died, He was a sinless man, and because of that, when He died, His life had an impact beyond anything that you could ever imagine, and three days after His death, He arose from the dead. What's the purpose of His life? Death and resurrection? He can give you meaning in life. He can give you hope. He can change your life."

He preached that message in Corinth, and people listened. They bought it. They took it in. It so changed them that when Paul was writing to them, he made this statement -- comes to you in 1 Corinthians chapter 6: "Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God, and such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God you were changed." Why does Paul say love always hopes? It's because love knows Christ. And if you know Christ, you always have

hope. You can walk into the darkest, most disgusting city, one that is absolutely given to sensual sin, and you can walk in there with all of the confidence in the world, that the most debased individual in that city can have their life completely cleansed, washed, sanctified, justified, and changed forever. You see, there's a reason to always hope. There's always a reason to have optimism. There's always a reason, if you're a letter writer, to sign at the bottom of it, "The best is yet to come." There's always a reason! Why? Because the resurrection happened. Because Christ actually lived. Because love actually took on the form of a man, a man who left Heaven and came to earth, and in the incarnation, God took on flesh, and God was Jesus Christ, and He lived this life, and He actually can come into a person's heart and completely change them. And that includes you. It does. That's why love always hopes. It's not because it's an optimist. Not because it's a person who lives with a glass half full. That has nothing to do with hope -- not biblical hope. That's a person who's fun to be around, but the reality is, a person who always sees life as a glass half full can't change a reprobate heart. Can't wash me clean. You can have Niagara coming out of your mouth, and you can't wash a dirty soul. You can't. The only thing that will change you -- and Paul knows that love, Paul met that love. He met that love on a day when he was confronted by Jesus Christ himself, blinded and sent away to be trained. He met that person. And this individual, who had spent his adult life seeing to the murder of Christians, was washed. He was sanctified. He was justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. My friends, there's always reason to hope.

I was talking with a lady. She was telling me she'd like to come to church but she's married to an atheist. Well, that's usually a problem. Because he always plans everything on a Sunday morning. As I was having a conversation with her, she said, "He's too smart for his own good." That's one way to look at it. Or maybe his pride has gotten in the way. But the reality is, when I left her, I said, "I'm going to pray for you. But most of all, I'm going to pray for your husband, because it's not too late. And God can change him." You see, there's always hope. There's always hope because Christ rose from the dead. And people can have hope. And you can have hope.

Moms come to me all the time. "My son got off the wrong track." And they speak of what he could be. And I'll never dash their dreams. Why? Because love always hopes. It's not being naïve. It's not sticking your head in the sand. It's not being an eternal optimist. It's a person who's been washed and cleansed and sanctified, and knows that if it can happen to me, it can happen to you. Love always hopes. And love always endures. I'll be candid with you -- it's not easy to preach this. Not being a pastor in the United States. It's really not. It's not easy to preach this because, to be quite honest with you, who really qualifies to preach about the theology of suffering? Not me. Not when the apostle Paul says this about his life. "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes, less one. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys and danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness and danger at sea. There's danger from false brothers and toil and hardship through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." My friends, I don't feel qualified to speak on a theology of suffering. I don't feel qualified when you can go around the world today and you can talk to Muslims who, when they converted to Christ, they lost everything. In fact, there are more conversions to Christ who have actually gone back to Islam than Muslims who have endured, because it's hard. I don't feel qualified to speak on it, because anywhere you put your finger on a map of the world -- virtually anywhere -- other than maybe the United States, you're going to talk to pastors and Christians who are being persecuted. They're the ones who should speak for us. Love always endures.

I don't feel qualified, because I'm a pastor living in probably the easiest country in the world to be a Christian. I know we think it's gotten bad -- it's not good compared to when I started pastoring. I know there are pastors that are kind of my heros, and I have no idea how Chuck Swindoll is still preaching at 86. I have no idea how Charles Stanley made it to 88. I have no idea -- there's a pastor up the river, up the Columbia, that is 91 and he's still preaching. I have no idea how those guys did that. Maybe they should speak about it. Love endures.

If I had my say, or my way, I'd fly in some missionaries that I know. They went to the hardest country in the world to preach the gospel. They went to a country -- when I was with them, you would drive into the city. I went into a community. It was a half a million people. Five hundred thousand people, and statistically there were two Christians in that city. Man, I could find two Christians within a mile of my house. You let me count my mother and my wife, and -- shoo, I don't have to go very far at all. And I would talk to you about these missionaries who have labored year after year after year with few converts -- and they endured. And they stayed the course. I might talk to you about Horvash, who, when I baptized her at 16, her dad ripped his clothing, kicked her out of the family, wrote her out of the will -- forbid her from talking to anyone, including her sisters and brothers. It didn't deter Horvash. She walked with Christ, she graduated from high school living in somebody else's home. She went to college and she graduated, and she's still walking with Christ. Love endures. Why? Paul answers his own question. In 2 Corinthians 5, he says, "It is Christ's love that compels me." When Paul woke up in the morning, and he was so bloody his friends didn't recognize him, Christ's love compelled him. When he was lifted up as a god one day and brutally beaten and left on the side of the road for dead the next day, what got him out of that ditch and caused him to go back to those communities time and time again? He said, "Christ's love compels me." I don't feel at all like telling you to endure. But Horvash does. My missionary friends do. And those who die for Christ do. Love endures. When it's kicked in the head, it gets back up. When it is lied to, it doesn't hold onto that lie forever -- it forgives. When something is flaunted in front of your face of their success and your demise, one doesn't remember that and hold onto it and is filled with jealousy -- love endures. When hope deferred makes the heart sick and you prayed for something and God doesn't give it to you, and you wanted to be a mother, but God, for whatever reason, decided that you weren't going to be, and you kind of really don't like Mother's Day, and I don't blame you at all. But love endures. It doesn't harden its heart, it doesn't get angry. When some system supposedly that is going to bring justice to children, it doesn't bring justice and it seems like it makes decisions that are as insanely driven as you could ever imagine -- and you're tempted to throw off all discretion and let them have it with your own words! Love endures.

Who's qualified to say this? Not pastors in America, to be quite honest with you. Paul is. "I received at the hands of the Jews 40 lashes less one -- five times." And so, we finish. How do we finish? We have to ask ourselves a question. Do we believe in love? Not an emotional feeling, but do I believe that God has called me and you to love? What is love? Paul shows us what love does. And maybe a way to drive this home is to make this really personal. I'm not going to put myself out there and you'll think, "Oh, gosh, he's got it all together." No. No. I put myself out there, but I ask you -- as I read and I put my name in this, how about if you put your name in there? And as we read along and there's a blank, how about you insert your name, and you change the pronouns to match you, and you ask yourself the question -- as we go through this, "God, is that me?" You might just have to look at today. Was that me today? Or maybe this week -- was that me? Let's try it. When it comes up in the screen, it'll start off with my name. You'll see it up there, but the reality is, I don't want you to speak my name -- that's me! I want you to use your name. And I want you to insert a pronoun that matches you. Let's read this together, you using your name, I'll use mine.

"Mark Hanke is patient, and he is kind. Mark doesn't envy, and he doesn't boast. He's not proud. Mark isn't rude. He's not self-seeking, and he's not easily angered, and he keeps no record of the wrongs done against him. Mark doesn't delight in evil, but he rejoices whenever truth is found. He always tries to protect, he always trusts, he always hopes, and he always perseveres."

To be honest with you, you read that and it's humbling, isn't it? It is. But the reality is, that's what love does. And that's God's invitation for you and me. Let's do it again -- stand with me. But this time I want you to hear your voice. I want you to hear you. I don't want you to say it in your mind -- I want you to declare it, and as you declare it, you're not saying you do it perfectly. My stars, if anyone had to say it

perfectly, I'd have to shut up! What you're saying is, "God, this is me. This is what I want to believe." You put your name in, I'll read mine, but say it out loud. I want to hear you. Let's read it together.

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