

Sermon Growth Guide

July 25, 2021

What Great Love - Love In Action

1 John 3:11-24

Key Verse: 1 John 3:18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.”

Big Idea: God’s love requires sacrificial action for the good of others as we reflect the love of Jesus in a broken world.



Foundations

This passage is a strong reminder of what it means to love like Jesus. When Jesus loved us, He gave everything away for our sake. He gave away the privilege (though not the reality) of being God and He suffered humiliation to the point of an excruciating death.

Love that talks a good game but does not follow through is empty and even harmful. As well, we use the same word for our love for ice cream that we do for our children. Talking about love, saying we love, and actually loving are different things. When I say love ice cream, I mean that I really like how it makes me feel. But when John tells us to love like Jesus, that kind of love is about others, not me.

In fact, John tells us that it is not really our love that we pour out on others. It is the love of God being given to the world through us because God himself resides in us. Pastor Tim quotes Bob Goff, who said that Christians who love this way “give away love like they’re made of it.”

C.S. Lewis, in *The Screwtape Letters*, puts it this way: “God really does want to fill the universe with little replicas of himself. We want cattle who can finally become food. He wants servants who can become sons. We want to suck in; he wants to give out. We are empty and want to be filled; he is full and flows over.” How will you love?

Understanding God’s Word

Read verses 23-24. According to these verses, what is the key to being able to love sacrificially, giving boldly of ourselves like Jesus gave His life for us?

What role does the Holy Spirit play as we seek to love others and why is the Spirit’s work important to you?

Applying God’s Word

To love like this requires sacrifice and that means giving up something that we think is essential for our lives. To be able to do that, we need confidence that our needs will be met and that comes only from trusting that the Lord will supply our needs. This means not only our physical needs but also our emotional and spiritual needs. Giving sacrificially may not mean going to death or emptying our bank account. But it may mean that for the good of the community, we let someone else talk while we listen. It may mean giving up power, prestige, or status for the sake of someone else’s good. What are some things you could let go of for the good of others and the health of the community?

Witnessing God’s Word

We live in a divided and increasingly hate-filled world. Is there a specific circumstance in which you can you show the world Jesus’ way of love this week?

We are continuing our series on 1 John called **What Great Love**, with the key verse, 1 John 3:1, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1) God’s love changes us. We don’t just want to know it; we want to feel it. And when we do, it changes who we are and how we go about our lives. I want to pick up right where we left off as we continue in this chapter. At verse 10 last week, we came to this summation and it all resolves to this: Love God and love neighbor. That picks right up in our passage this morning. “For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11). Love. Love is the message. Love is the point of the message. It isn’t too much to say, the aim of the Gospel is the creation and strengthening of love. The great love of God sends love into action. Love is not just a feeling; it’s an active thing. So, today we want to talk about **Love In Action**.

So, how are you doing at loving your neighbor? That’s a hard question. I know it’s important. Jesus said it, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. ... Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31). So to measure how I’m doing at following Jesus is to measure one thing, how am I doing at love? I ask myself that and immediately jump to assessing my feelings. Love is an emotion, right? How are you doing at loving your neighbor? You might think, “Well, I’m not doing so good. You mean the person who lives next to me? That neighbor? Well, he never respects the property line, their yard is a mess, their dog’s always barking, she never says hello to me when we’re putting the trash out, and, frankly, whenever we’re pulling out on a Sunday to go to church, they’re loading up bikes or golf clubs or something! No, I don’t think I love my neighbor all that much!” This is the challenge church, “Love your

neighbor” means love your neighbor! But here’s the thing, the command to love your neighbor is not about drumming up warm sentiments or emotional fuzzies. Love is an emotion, but it is an emotion that expresses itself in action. Love, in this instance, is a call to action. **Love in Action**. If we think love is only about drumming up warm sentiments toward people we don’t like, we will fail. We’ll give up. Sometimes it’s impossible. Listen, sometimes it’s hard to drum up warm sentiments about God. That’s true. But love, the command to love, the call to love, it is a call to action; action that will change the world.

Let’s walk this through. “For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11). The message, the Gospel, is love. Then it jumps to Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve’s first two sons from Genesis 4. Don’t be like Cain. As soon as there were two, one killed the other. Cain killed Abel. What this is saying is right at the root of humanity, at the deep roots of the human story and in our own story, the switch is thrown one way or another. Am I hate or am I love? Am I devoted to death, or will I stand for life? Am I selfish, and self-interested, and putting my own needs above all those around me? Ultimately, in the final sense, this means that everyone else is less important than I am, everyone else is less than I am, less human. What John, and other scriptures, are saying is that this selfish posture is ultimately murderous. You can’t murder someone without thinking they are less worthy to live than you are. Now, you can think they are less worthy without murdering them! Yes! That’s common. But the point is, the posture, the selfish, self-interested posture—this is the way that leads to destruction. Am I selfish, or am I selfless? Am I devoted to putting others before myself? The switch gets thrown very early on, at the very root. The Gospel says, from the beginning the message is love.

But I don’t like that guy. But I don’t have warm fuzzies for my neighbor. Well, what

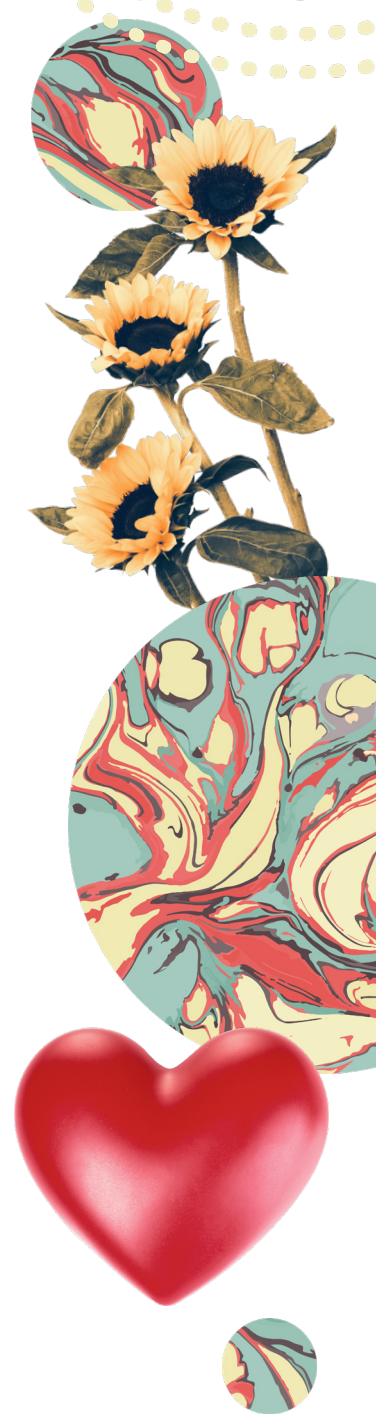


is love anyway? “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16). Love isn’t about cultivating warm fuzzies. It is about service and selfless sacrifice. What if we replaced the word “love” with “sacrificially serve”? How are you doing at sacrificially serving your neighbor? What’s the last time you found a way to help or bless your neighbor at the expense of your own comfort or desires? It’s been inspiring to watch how our Life Groups have found ways to bless their neighbors during COVID. One Life Group put on a driveway lemonade and pie party. Another helped a kid put on an outdoor recital when theirs was cancelled. Lots of drive-by graduation celebrations and acts of kindness this year. Little things can have a big impact. I heard once of a dad driving home with his two boys who saw that the trashcans were all out and a snowstorm was starting. “We’re going to love on our street boys,” he said. He drove them down the street and had them run along pulling all the cans up to the houses. Small stuff, right? For one widow, who could not have gotten the job done alone, it made a huge difference and started a new relationship. “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

And what do all these actions do? Well, they sweeten the world up a bit, don’t they? They make a neighborhood a better place to live, build community and tie hearts together. At times that seems like enough of an end in itself. To love simply for love’s sake. But John wants us to see more. He raises the stakes. To fail to do it, this says, is murder! The lines are drawn very sharply. It’s either hate which is murder or love which is God’s offer of eternal life. How can it be murder? Because the actions preach a message, the message is the Gospel, and without the Gospel people are perishing. Look, what we are called to do is to present the message, the Gospel, the news that there is a God in heaven who loves you so much He sent His Son to save you. Without this

message, people are left in darkness and pitched toward death. Remember John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Good news. Good news. And it goes on to explain, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:17-18).

The Gospel is presented, not just in word but also in deed, in action. To stop sharing Jesus with those around us, to stop trying to share the message in word and deed, is to accept, to resign, to consign them to the death sentence. Separated from Christ, excluded from the promise, without hope and without God in the world, and walking toward hell. Either we believe these things or we don’t. If the love of God in Jesus Christ has made a difference in your life, if Christ has saved you, then, to turn away from your neighbor who knows nothing of the love of Jesus... “For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11). The message is love. It comes in word and deed. “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). We are not measuring warm fuzzies. We are measuring acts of selfless service in demonstration of the love of Jesus and in representation of the message of the Gospel. We don’t do these things as a product of our sentiments toward others. You might not like them at all, frankly, and they sure don’t like you! Look, “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). They might not like you and your little religious business at all! That’s not why you sacrifice for them. You do it to love like Jesus. That’s one of our seven values at First Pres, “Love Like Jesus: Live for others even when it takes sacrifice.” We present the Gospel in word



and deed, action and truth. It's a high challenge.

What is that Gospel? "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (1 John 3:18). Listen, you are not going to be able to love like Jesus until you believe in Jesus. You need to be connected to Jesus. The image here is of love flowing from God into you until you are brimming, overflowing with His love. Not your love, His love. And it flows through you toward your neighbor, toward those you don't like that much even, toward those who despise you—that's what Jesus did. That's what we are called to do. "Jesus laid his life down; we ought to," says John. We ought to do the same. You can't do that unless you are plugged in to Jesus. His love can't flow through you unless you are connected, piped in, to the source of love in Jesus. You can't love like Jesus until you believe.

One more point, though. Because the other way this derails is actually something we do to ourselves, and John sees it; this Scripture knows it. We disqualify ourselves from helping others by disregarding our own value. Watch this: "This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (1 John 3:19-20). If our hearts condemn us. We condemn ourselves. "Oh, I think I'm going to do it. I think I'm going to find a way to make a sacrifice to love my neighbor. I'm going to bake those brownies, offer to help with that garden, ask what I can pray for on their behalf... Nah. What am I thinking? Who am I? I'm no blessing. I'm no gift. Look at my life!" Love stops. Love derails. Love gets stifled. Even when you condemn yourself, when your own heart speaks devaluing words to you, that's not who gets to say. God gets to say. God gets to say. God is greater than our hearts. God knows everything. And God says, "I

chose you; I put you right there, in that person's life, next door, in that class, in that party, in that office, you're not there by accident. I put you there. You're the one I wanted. You see the need. You see the opportunity. My love is all pooled up in a reservoir in your heart. You are the one I sent to let it out." Connect to Jesus. Don't disqualify yourself. Love. Put love in action.

Bob Goff is kind of the Christian emissary of love right now. His first book, *Love Does*, is full of stories of just loving people beyond all boundaries and what God unleashed. His second book is called *Everybody Always*. What if we stopped drawing lines? What if we stopped disqualifying ourselves from being loving and stopped disqualifying those around us from being loved? What if God's people stepped out of church and into the world and just loved everybody always? Love includes truth. Love includes wisdom. But what if? What if we gave love away like we were made of it? Love like Jesus.

You can't love like Jesus unless you are connected to Jesus. You can't have His love flow freely through you until you connect to that love personally, fully. I want to pray with you and invite you to pray. The connection with Jesus must be your heart connected to His heart. Jesus made this connection possible. He removed every obstacle. You can be forgiven and redeemed and fully connected. All it takes is risking a relationship with God; risking feeling the love of God. It begins with prayer and that's what I want to ask you to do right now. Follow along with me, all across the church, every voice, nobody prays alone, let's begin a life of love with Jesus, let's restore our commitment to Jesus, let's pray: *"Lord; I have been without you too long; I have lived apart from you too long; I want to know your love; I want to love like Jesus; Please reach me with your love; Please connect my heart to yours; Thank you for forgiving me; Restore my life into your purposes; in Jesus Name. Amen."*

