

HOW TO BE A BETTER LOVER

1 JOHN 3:16-18

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

A young couple - two High School sweethearts were talking on the phone. The boy said to his girlfriend, “Baby, just to be by your side...”

I’d swim for miles in shark-infested waters.

I’d hike under a blistering sun across the scorching desert.

I’d hack my way through the thickest jungle.

I’d brave the attack of vicious animals.

I’d scale the tallest peaks, and descend the steepest slopes.

I’d sail through the fiercest winds.

I’d plunge to the bottom of the deepest ocean.

I’d climb on the wings of an eagle and soar through the sky to be by your side... Baby, I’d do anything just to be with you – *and if there’s nothing on TV this afternoon, I might just drive over to your house...*”

You get the feeling this boy was just blowing smoke. He was buttering up his babe... His meager actions betrayed his tall talk. But this also happens to Christians – *our actions can also betray our talk.*

We claim to know the love of God... We say we love others... We even desire to share God's love with people around us... but true love is more than words. John explains that real love is exhibited **“in deed and in truth.”**

This morning, I'm going to help you in every area of life... *spiritually, domestically, and professionally – at church, at home, and on the job...*

A psychiatrist charges big bucks for the assistance I'm about to provide you. Today you'll learn how to improve every relationship in your life...

Is your marriage on the skids? This morning, I'll help you turn it around.

Maybe you've been running out of patience with a toddler? Listen carefully, because I'm about to prescribe the cure for your agitations.

Perhaps you're having trouble connecting with a teenager? Here's how to break down walls and open up lines of communication.

Do you have a conflict with a neighbor, or coworker, or church member? I'm going to explain how you can overcome friction in a friendship.

Today, I'm going explain how our church can win the world for Jesus!

Right now – right this second - I'm going to give you the solution to all these dilemmas and more... Write it down... In fact, if you have a Bible it's already written down... Here's extremely valuable advice...

Verse 18 **“Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”** *If you want to change your life for the better – then be a better lover!*

In John 13:35 Jesus told His disciples the world would know we're His followers if we have love for one another. Love is a believer's birthmark.

Jesus didn't say we'd be distinguished by our *Christian T-shirts*, or *the fish that's on our bumper*, or *the Bible we carry*, or *how many hours we pray*, or *how much of the Scripture we know*, or *how often we serve...*

No, Jesus said we would catch the eye of this unbelieving world, and draw people to Himself, when we reached out in love to one another...

Greek writer, Lucian, lived in the late 2nd century AD. He wrote of the Church in his day, **“It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator, Jesus, has put it in their hearts that they are brethren.”**

Lucian was on the outside of the Church looking in, but a man named *“Tertullian”*, a church leader at the time, was on the inside looking out.

He wrote, “It is our care for the helpless - our practice of loving-kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. They say, ‘Look how they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another.’”

Throughout the history of Christianity love has remained its hallmark.

Jesus loved us enough to lay down his life for us - now He wants you and me to love Him enough to lay down our lives for one another.

John 3:16 is by far the most famous verse in the Bible. It’s familiar to believers and unbelievers alike. Signs proclaiming “*John 3:16*” appear anywhere and everywhere. Tim Tebow writes it on his eye black.

The day after Tebow wrote the verse under his eyes in the national championship game there were 90,000 hits on Google for John 3:16.

People who know nothing else about the Bible can quote John 3:16... “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.”

But today’s text, **1 John 3:16** is also a vital verse. In fact, the two verses are so interrelated it’s appropriate they carry the same biblical address.

John 3:16 says God loves us enough to give His only Son. *1 John 3:16* tells us, that since He does, we ought to

give ourselves to one another in love. The key to the success in this church is our belief in both 316s.

Years ago I ran across a list entitled, *“The Best of the Worst Country-Western Song Titles”*. Here are some of the great love songs of all time.

“I’ve got the hungries for your love and I’m waiting in your welfare line.”

“My John Deere was breaking your field, while your Dear John was breaking my heart...” “My wife ran off with my best friend, and I sure do miss him...” Here’s one for the teenagers in the crowd, *“They may put me in prison, but they can’t stop my face from breaking out.”*

But there was one song title that really grabbed me. It fits the theme in 1 John 3. Here’s the lyric, *“I fell in a pile of you, and got love all over me.”*

Here’s my question, *If I fell in a pile of you would I get love all over me?*

If a person starved for love - maybe a refugee from a dysfunctional family, or an abusive background - walked into our church, and fell into a pile of us... would he or she walk out covered in love?

I hope our church is known for our love for one another?

This morning I want to discuss, *“How to be a Better Lover.”* And I have three points... **what love is** – **how love thinks** – and **what love does**...

First, let's understand **what love is**. Verse 16 tells us, **“By this we know love, (here's love's definition...) because He laid down His life for us.”**

If you want to know what true love is, then make a close, careful study of the sacrifice of Jesus. To behold undiluted love, look to the cross. The ultimate illustration of real love is our Lord Jesus hanging on that tree.

I'm sure Jesus didn't *feel* like having spikes driven through his wrists and feet. It didn't *feel* comfortable having a crown of thorns pierce His brow. You don't get warm fuzzies from being tortured and executed.

But the cross shows us that real love has very little to do with feelings and fuzzies. Love is all about commitment and endurance and sacrifice.

Once an Eskimo boy said to his girlfriend, **“Sweetheart, I pushed my dog team 100 miles through ice and snow just to see you today and tell you I love you...”** The Eskimo girl responded, **“Aw, that's a lot of mush.”**

Love is more than emotional mush - a *gush of hormones*, or a *rush of adrenalin*. Tina Turner had a hit song in which she wondered, **“What's love got to do with it?”** She belittles love as a **“second-hand emotion.”**

Obviously, poor Tina doesn't know the love of Jesus. Real love is more than a feeling or an emotion - it's a deep, abiding, caring commitment.

Look at Jesus on the cross, and you'll see four traits of true love...

First, for love to be meaningful it has to be **voluntary**.

Understand, it wasn't the Romans that nailed Jesus to the cross... nor was it the jealous Jewish leaders who engineered His death sentence... nor the angry mob who called for the release of Barabbas... nor an indifferent governor named Pilate... nor Caiaphas, the High Priest... nor even the legionnaire who held the hammer and the nails...

Jesus Himself submitted to the will of God and gave His body freely as a sacrifice. He could've called 10,000 angels to His rescue, but chose not to... *Jesus didn't have His life taken from Him - He offered it willingly!*

It reminds me of the engaged couple who came to the pastor for some premarital counseling. As they filled out the questionnaire they got to the line that asked, "**Are you entering this marriage of your own free will?**"

The boy stalled... After a few seconds the girl jabbed him in the ribs, and whispered, "**Put down, yes**". Love that's coerced is not love at all.

God could've made us relational robots - programmed us with desired responses. Instead God chose to let us choose. Love for God would be pointless if it didn't flow from our hearts... if we didn't desire to love.

The same is true with our love for each other. It has to be voluntary. It's said, "**Love never asks how much *must* I do, but how much *may* I do.**"

True love is also **unselfish**. Verse 16 says Jesus *laid down His life*. Love is laying it down - not picking it up. It's giving - not just receiving.

It's been said, "Love begins when a person believes another person's needs are as important as his own." Love not only lays down its life – but it lays down its rights, comforts, time, attention, energy...for another person.

Have you ever spent serious time in the ICU waiting room at a hospital?

Though it's usually under sad circumstances, the ICU waiting room marks a marvelous exception to human nature. You hear comments...

"I hope your husband makes it? *We're praying your son will walk again?* I'd give anything if I could swap places with that little girl!" No one worries about themselves in an ICU waiting room. They care about the patients and each other. No one is rude. Everyone thinks of the other person.

In the Intensive Care waiting room racial and class distinctions melt away. A person is a father first - a black man, or white man second.

The roofer loves his wife as much as the college professor loves his wife. Everyone who waits in that room pulls for everyone else.

Folks in the ICU are on the same team.

My prayer is that our church develops the same sense of community - and compassion - and caring as you find in the ICU waiting room.

In reality, life is a waiting room. We're waiting on Jesus to return, and we're pulling for the sick, the injured, the hurting around us to make it!

Love cares about other people. Real love is an *unselfish love*.

True love is also **sacrificial**. We often say, "**God's grace is free, but it's not cheap.**" Love cost Jesus His life. The cross reveals that love is costly.

Once, a daughter came to her mom for advice... The girl's boyfriend was so determined to make a good impression he kept buying her expensive presents. The boy drew a modest salary, and the girl was concerned he was spending money beyond his means.

She asked her mom, "**What can I do to stop Jim from spending so much money on me?**" Without hesitation her mother replied, "*Marry him.*"

It's sad that after marriage both spouses, the husband and wife, tend to stop making sacrifices for each other. Sacrifice is what love is all about.

It reminds me of a story from the life of David. One day in a moment of whimsical reflection he sighed, "**Oh, that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem.**" Bethlehem was David's hometown.

At the time Bethlehem was occupied by the hated Philistines. David and his men were camping miles away. There was plenty of water in David's camp. It wasn't a serious request. David was just day-dreaming.

But three of his men heard him - and wanting to show their leader how much they loved him - they traveled to Bethlehem, slipped past the guards, drew out water from the well, and brought it back for David to take a drink.

David poured it on the ground. He felt unworthy of such amazing love.

True love operates on a strange logic. It buys gifts it can't afford - puts out effort even when it's tired - takes the call even when it's inconvenient.

Love risks danger and spares no expense. Real love is willing to make a sacrifice! Genuine love is extravagant and costly – it's a *sacrificial love*.

And true love is also **unconditional**. Romans 5:8 tells us, “**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***” Notice, Jesus went to the cross long before you and I decided we'd even give Him the time of day. Jesus made the first move.

Love initiates. It doesn't wait for another person to love first.

Real love is unconditional.

Robertson McQuilken was President of Columbia Bible College when his wife came down with Alzhiemers. When Muriel's disease progressed, McQuilken gave up his prestigious position to stay at home, and take care of his wife himself. It was an extraordinary example of love.

I read where McQuilken commented, "Love is said to evaporate if the relationship is not mutual - if it's not physical, if the other person doesn't communicate, or if one party doesn't carry his or her share of the load.

When I hear the litany of essentials for a happy marriage, I count off what my beloved can no longer contribute, and then I contemplate how truly mysterious my love for her is." McQuilken's love for his wife was unconditional. *Real love always is!* Its love with no strings attached.

This is **what love is...** *voluntary, unselfish, sacrificial, unconditional...* Is your life – is our church – marked by this kind of love? *If not, why not?*

Notice too, **how love thinks...** Read the last half of verse 16, "And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Since Jesus laid down His life for me - I show my love for Him by laying down my life for other people. A Christian's love is tied to the cross. It's where love starts.

I love you, because Jesus first loved me – and the more I receive of His love for me the more love I'll have to give to you. This is how love thinks.

Usually a shadow casts a darkness - it blocks out light - but *there's a shadow that illuminates... it's the shadow of the cross*. In the shadow of Jesus' sacrifice light pours in – the issues of life become crystal clear...

I see myself... the depth of my corruption that warranted such a hideous punishment... Yet I also calculate the value I've obtained. If such a heavy price was paid I must be loved and wanted. At the cross I *feel the love!*

Love thinks in light of the cross. Call it “**cross-think.**”

If Jesus can go to the cross for me, I can toss the ball around with the kids after work, even though I've come home completely exhausted...

If Jesus went to the cross, I can cook a pan of lasagna to take to a needy family... If Jesus went to the cross I can sacrifice a little spending money to help a person who lost his job... If Jesus went to the cross, I can go out of my way to spend time with a teenager nobody else cares about...

When you think of the cross all things are possible. If Jesus went to the cross, *you* can even vacuum the living room floor for *your* wife.

You can... and I suppose, I can too!

This is how love thinks – *it cross-thinks*. But in verses 17-18 we're told **what love does**... “**Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in**

him?” Love does 3 things: **sees needs... feels needs... meets needs.**

First, **love sees needs.** Real love has eyes. John tells us, **“Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need”**. *Selfishness has a mouth* – it likes to eat. *Envy has an ear* – it takes in the latest gossip. *Pride has a nose* – it stays stuck in the air. *But love has a set of eyes* that enable us to see the needs around us. *Love looks!*

And this was Jesus. One of the amazing qualities our Lord possessed was the uncanny ability to pick needy people out of a crowd.

He saw Zacchaeus way up in a sycamore tree, and called him to come down. Jesus ate dinner at Zacchaeus' house, and the man was saved.

John 9:1 tells us, **“As Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.”** Folks walked by this beggar daily - several times a day – but never saw him. Everyone looked right at him, but no one ever *saw him*.

But Jesus never passed anywhere that He wasn't looking for needs to meet. Jesus saw this blind man, and later restored his vision.

It proves that love has eyes. Love sees what others miss.

How many blind men and women do we pass by? Yet don't we possess the light of God's Word that can open

their spiritual eyes? I wonder how many sinners like Zacchaeus have we left *up a tree* – or *out on a limb* – because we *passed by* without even knowing they were *close by*.

Love opens our eyes to the needs of the people around us.

So many people today are in desperate situations... and not just *economically*, but *morally, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally*.

The word “*lost*”... has never been more appropriate to describe people without Jesus. There’s a whole generation in crisis. How many people have we let slipped through the cracks - or left up a tree?

One Sunday an envelope was dropped in the offering box. There was no name... but on the flap were written these words, “*Pray for me – I desperately want to end my life. I am so unhappy. Thank you.*”

It grieves me to think I may’ve passed by that person that morning, and failed to see them. It’s scary, that we can be oblivious to such desperate needs and not see... It’s love that opens our eyes and makes us see.

And here’s what’s even scarier - this can happen under your own roof.

What about the needs in our own home... *In the life of your spouse? In the heart and mind of your kids?* While

passing in and out of our own house we can become blind to the needs within our own families.

It's amazing to me, I have no problem discerning when the grass needs to be mowed, and I can usually tell when the garbage should go out - but why am I so slow in recognizing when my wife and kids are suffering emotionally – or when they're on the edge spiritually?

God wants us to live with our eyes wide open. *Love sees needs.*

But what else does love do? **Love feels needs.** Love doesn't simply meet needs in a cold, calculated, assembly-line fashion. Love is tender.

We watch the news where helicopters are freighting pallets of supplies to the earthquake victims in Haiti. They drop the pallets in a open zone, and needy people rush in and start picking off the supplies they need.

We're glad the supplies are getting to people, but there's something missing... we're putting food in people's mouths, but their suffering is so much greater. These people need compassion and empathy... *not just food for the stomach, but healing for the heart... not just clothes for the body, but warmth for the soul...* Love feels needs.

Look again at verse 17, **“Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”** Implied is that *God's love prohibits a shut heart.*

As long as the love of God abides in me it'll keep prying my heart open. I'll not only see the needs around me I'll stay empathetic to those needs.

I may not always be able to meet a need. God may even lead me to not meet certain needs. But He never wants me to shut up my heart to a need.

When I turn a cold shoulder – or stone-wall a legitimate need - if I ever stop caring for the hurting person I'll eventually stop feeling altogether...

And if I stop feeling I'll stop seeing... And if I stop seeing I'll end up with the throngs of folks who go trudge through life with their heads down, their eyes closed, and even worse their hearts hard... caring only about three people: *me, myself, and I*. I don't want to be a embittered, cold old man.

Love feels needs. I ran across a statement that speaks volumes. It's about true friendship. "From now on there will be such an oneness between us – that when one weeps the other will taste salt."

Real love tastes the salt of the person who weeps.

Once a mentally-impaired child was playing with the bottles stacked on the pharmacy shelf. The store manager saw him, rushed over, and rebuked him, "Young man put those bottles down this instant."

The little boy was unmoved. He continued to play with the bottles.

About that time his big sister appeared, and surmised the situation. She walked up to her autistic brother, and whispered in his ear. Immediately he put the bottles back in place. She told to the manager, “**My brother doesn’t understand when you talk to him in a mean way. I just love it into him.**”

True love never ignores the truth - but neither does it beat a person over the head with it. Real love - *loves it into them*. It feels, empathizes, cares...

Finally, **love meets needs**. It *sees needs - feels needs - meets needs*.

John says it so well, verse 18, “**My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**” Real love isn’t content to talk about what it’ll do... *it just does!* It’s always ready to roll up its shirtsleeves and jump into action. Love always comes with elbow grease and giddy-up.

John says, “**Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?**” If I’ve got the goods, and you have a need – love’s first impulse will always be to meet that need. The desire will be to do something.

Now, there have been times when I was ready to give, but God *shut up my wallet* – or *shut down the opportunity* for some reason. There have been times when I went to give and God said “*no*” to my impulse.

Sometimes our attempts to help can make matter worse. This is why we need wisdom. God might say “no.” But there should never be a time when *I say no* - and shut up my heart to the need at hand. If *I got the goods* and *you got a need* - then God wants me *to want to meet your need!*

Once, an exhausted dad came home on a Friday and collapsed in the lazy boy. He had a newspaper in hand. He just wanted unwind and relax. Not long, just a minute or two of R&R... when up walked his little boy...

His son just stood there and looked at his dad. Finally he said, “Daddy, I love you.” From behind his paper the father muttered, “I love you too, son.”

The little guy said it again, “Daddy, I love you.” This time dad reached around his paper and patted him on the head, “I love you too, son.”

Finally the little boy dove into his father’s lap - ripping and crumbling the paper. After regaining his balance, dad said, “Son, why in the world did you do that?” The boy answered, “Daddy, I love you so much I just had to do something about it!” And this is true of real love. *When love sees a need it has to do something about it!* Love meets needs.

Realize what I mean when I say “*love meets needs*”... Love doesn’t just do what’s convenient or comfortable for me... Love doesn’t work loved ones into my schedule. It works my schedule around people I love.

Real love tries to love in the way a person wants or needs to be loved.

It does me no good to feed a man that needs shelter – or find shelter for a man who needs food. Love is felt strongest when it's aimed at a need.

Some men like working around the house – and you think you're telling your wife you love her. Maybe you are, *but then again maybe you're not!*

Instead of another trip to Home Depot perhaps she'd prefer something from the florist. She wants to know you treasure her – not the house.

And ladies, you can purchase your husband a whole greenhouse full of flowers, but speaking on behalf of most husbands here today... there's a lot better way for you to communicate to your husband that you love him.

Sometimes we try to show love, but the other person doesn't perceive it as such because we misapply our efforts. Our sacrifice goes wasted. Your act of love is irrelevant if it doesn't scratch the itch of the person you love.

Real love expresses itself according to *their need* not *my convenience*.

There's a Christian song that contains the following line, "If you want to lead me to Jesus you better find another way. Your life is speaking so loud I can't hear a word you say." I hope no one ever says that about me... *that my*

actions have betrayed my words. What a sad indictment that would be.

It's so easy to talk about love... all the while there's harshness in our voice... a judgmental look on our face... a mean pounding in our step...

Jesus loves us, but are we really trying to love each other?

Stanley Mooneyham writes, "Love talked about is easily turned aside, but love demonstrated is irresistible." What our world today needs most is love... not "in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Our loveless world needs to see *love in action!*

Let's start to *cross-think*. Look to Jesus. If He laid down His life for me, then I can lay down my life for others. Let's *see needs, feel needs, and meet needs*. Hey, you can have a better life by being a better lover!