

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.

Two High School sweethearts were talking on their phones. The boy said to his girlfriend, “Baby, just to be by your side, I’d swim through shark-infested waters...

I’d hike across the scorching desert...

I’d hack my way through the thickest jungle...

I’d brave the attack of vicious animals...

I’d climb the tallest peaks...

I’d sail through the fiercest winds...

I’d plunge the depths 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... say we love others... even desire to share God's love with the people around us... but true love is more than words.

John explains that real love is not shown "in word or in tongue," but it's exhibited "in deed and in truth."

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

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

Is your marriage on the skids? I can 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 lines of communication..

Do you have a conflict with a neighbor, or coworker, or church member? I'm going to spell out how you can overcome friction in a friendship... *Today, I'm going explain how our church can win the world for Jesus!*

Right now, 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.

Verse 18 reveals the key, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Here's my advice to

everyone of us this morning, **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 the believer's birthmark.**

Jesus didn't say we'd be distinguished by our *Christian T-shirts*, or *the fish sticker on the bumper of our car*, or *the Bible we carry*, or *our flowery prayers*, or *how much Scripture we know*, or *how often we serve...*

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

Greek writer, Lucian (*himself not a Christian*), 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 use to write it on his eye black.

The day after the Florida quarterback wore the verse under his eyes in the 2009 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 success for 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 lines from the greatest 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 the song title that really grabs me. It fits the theme here 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 starving for love - a refugee from a dysfunctional family, or a survivor of an abusive background - walked into our church, and fell into a pile of us, *would they walk out covered in love?*

My prayer is that Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain will be a church known for our love for one another!

This morning I want to talk to you about, “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, (and 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 careful study of the sacrifice of Jesus. To behold undiluted love, look to the cross. The ultimate illustration of real love is our Lord 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 pleasant feelings and warm fuzzies. Love is all about commitment, and endurance, and sacrifice.

Once an Eskimo boy said to his girl, “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 replied, “*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 valid 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.

Jesus could’ve called 10,000 angels to His rescue, but He chose not to... *Our Lord didn’t have His life taken from Him - rather He offered it willingly!*

It reminds me of the engaged couple who came to the pastor for 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 and programmed us with desired responses. Instead He chose for us to be able to choose. Love for God would be pointless if it didn’t flow from our hearts, if we didn’t desire to love Him.

And the same is true with our love for each other. It has to be voluntary. It’s been said, “Love never asks how much *must* I do, but how much *may* I do.”

Second, true love is also **unselfish**. Verse 16 says Jesus *laid down His life*. Love is always laying it down - not picking it up. It’s giving - not just receiving.

It’s said, “Love begins when one 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, 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 is a marvelous exception to human nature. You hear comments like...

“I hope your husband makes it? *We’re praying your son walks again?* I’d give anything to swap places with that little girl!” No one worries about themselves in the ICU. 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 waiting 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. *A little more joy of course* - but the same sort of caring and mercy.

For in reality, all of 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 *unselfish love*.

Third, real 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 expensive.

Once, a daughter came to her grandma 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.

So she asked her grandma, "**What can I do to stop Jimmy from spending so much money on me?**" Without any hesitation her grandma replied, "*Marry him.*"

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

It reminds me of a story about King 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, and apparently its well pumped clear, clean, cold water.

At the time though 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. He was just day-dreaming.

But three of his men heard David’s words - and hoping to show their leader their love for 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... But David poured it out on the ground!

He felt unworthy to be shown such sacrificial love.

Realize, true love operates on a strange logic. *It buys gifts it can’t afford. It puts out effort even when it’s tired. It takes the call even when it’s inconvenient.*

Genuine love risks danger and spares no expense.

Real love is willing to make a sacrifice! Sincere love is extravagant and costly - it’s a *sacrificial love*.

And fourth, 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.*” 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 takes the initiative. It doesn't wait for the other person to love first.

Real love is unconditional.

Robertson McQuilken was the President of Columbia Bible College when his wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzhiemers. When the disease progressed, he resigned his prestigious post to stay home, and care for his wife. It was an extraordinary example of love.

He once 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.

Realize, this is **what love is...** it's *voluntary, unselfish, sacrificial, unconditional...* Is your life... is our church... marked by this kind of love?

But 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; then I show my love for Him by laying down my life for other people. A Christian's love is tied to the cross.

At the cross is 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 is 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... I recognize the depth of my corruption. My sins warranted such a hideous punishment...

But I also calculate the value I've obtained. For if such a heavy price was paid for my redemption; then 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 in the church...

If Jesus bore the cross I can sacrifice a little spending money to help a person who lost their job...

If Jesus hung on 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 carpets for *your* wife... *You can...* I suppose, I can too!

This is how love should think - *it cross-thinks*. But verses 17-18 tell us **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? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Love does three things: it **sees needs - it feels needs - it 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 up in the air.

But love has a set of eyes that enable us to see the needs around us. **Love is always on the lookout!**

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 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*.

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 other people miss.

How many blind men and women do we pass by?

Yet don't we possess the light of God's Word? I wonder how many sinners like Zacchaeus we've left *up a tree* - or *out on a limb* - because we *passed by* without even knowing they were *close by*. Genuine love opens eyes to the needs of the people around us.

So many people today are in desperate situations...*morally, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, relationally.*

Our world is truly **“lost”**... and it's never been more appropriate to use that term to describe people without Jesus than it is today. From the value of unborn life, to gender identity, to sexuality, to healthy family structures, to our purpose in life - people are confused.

There is a whole generation today in crisis.

And how many hurting people have we, followers of Jesus, let slip through the cracks - or left up a tree?

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

I didn't see it until after everyone had left that day.

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 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, 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.

Several years ago when the earthquake hit Haiti, I recall watching on the news planes and helicopters air-dropping pallets of supplies to the Haitian victims.

They dropped the pallets in a open zone, and needy people rushed in and started picking off the supplies.

I was glad people were getting the basics they needed, but there was something missing...

We were putting food in people's mouths, but their suffering was so much greater. They needed 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. At times for reasons unknown to me, 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 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 trudging 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 end up an embittered, cold old man.

Love feels needs. I ran across a statement that to me 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, it empathizes, it genuinely cares...

And finally, **love meets needs.** It *sees needs, feels needs, and meets needs.* John says it so well in 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!*

Love is always ready to roll up its shirtsleeves and jump into action. Real love has a git-er-done mentality. 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; then love’s impulse will be to meet that need. We’ll want 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 another person can make matters worse. This is why we need wisdom.

God might say “*no.*” But there should never be a time when *I say no* and shut my heart to the need at hand. Listen, if *I got the goods* and *you got the 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 his hand. He just wanted to unwind and relax, not long, just a minute or two... 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 newspaper the father muttered, “**I love you too, son.**”

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

Finally, the boy dove into his father’s lap, crumbling up his paper. After regaining his balancing, the dad asked, “**Son, why in the world did you do that?**” The boy replied, “**Dad, I love you so much I just had to do something about it!**” This is real love. *When love sees a need it has to do something!* Love meets needs.

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

Real love seeks 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 guy who needs food. Love is felt strongest when it targets a need.

Some men like working around the house - and you think by doing so 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 your wife would prefer something from the florist. She wants to know you treasure her - not just the house.

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

Maybe you can buy him some Braves tickets.

Sometimes we try to show love, but the other person doesn't perceive it 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 *the other person's need* not just *my own convenience*.

There use to be a Christian song that got a lot of airplay on the radio. It contained the 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 betray my words*. What a sad indictment that would be. It's so easy to talk about love... *all the while there's a harshness in our voice... a judgmental look on our face... a mean*

pounding in our step... Jesus loves **us**, but are we trying to love **one another**?

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, I can lay down my life for others. Then let's see *needs, feel needs, and meet needs.*

You can have a better life by being a better lover!