

1 John
Love as a Sign of Life (Part 3)
1 John 3:11-24
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Well, Lord willing, next week, we'll step away from our study of 1 John to look at the Christmas season together. I'm excited about that; I have several things in mind. But this morning, I encourage you to turn with me again as we continue our study through John's first letter, 1 John, and we find ourselves in chapter 3.

Our world talks a lot about love, but much of what the world calls love bears no resemblance to true biblical love. Many, even in the professing Christian church, have been influenced by the world's flawed beliefs about love. Let me give you just a few of the flawed ideas about love that are common in the world and, sadly, even in the church.

Number one, here's a flawed idea. "The most important expression of love is loving myself." You hear that everywhere. Here's the Christian version, number two, "Loving others, of course, is important, but I can't love others until I love myself." This idea is based supposedly on Jesus' Old Testament quotation in Matthew 22, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Listen, Scripture assumes that we will care for ourselves and that's what Jesus is referencing in that command. But at the same time, Scripture identifies loving self as sinful and selfish.

Thirdly, there are those who talk about love like this, "I love groups of people that I don't know, such as the poor, and the disadvantaged, and the oppressed." This is really popular online to talk about how much you love these groups of people.

Number four, “I don't have to love those who make my life difficult.” This flawed idea lies behind the very common worldly advice, “Just get rid of the toxic people in your life.” But Scripture tells us to love and do good to our enemies.

Number five, “Real love is always reciprocal.” But God loved us when we were His enemies and there was no reciprocation.

Number six, “Love is primarily a positive feeling, atmosphere, or experience.” But the truth is a perfect, romantic experience may not be based on love at all, it may be total selfishness. On the other hand, helping someone who's slumped over the bathroom at 2 A.M. with a stomach virus may, in fact, be real and true love.

Number seven, “I can love someone without acting on that love. I can feel it in my heart, I can declare it, I can say I love and still truly love without acting on that love.” Folks, all of those are flawed ideas about love that permeate our world, but they're not biblical love.

Today, we're going to consider the world's greatest example of perfect love, the essence of biblical love and the practical expression of love in our real lives. We're studying the second movement in 1 John; there are three movements in 1 John; and in each of those movements, John lays out the same three tests of eternal life.

The first test is “Obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word.” The second test is “Love for God and His People.” And the third test is “Faith in the Biblical Jesus and the Biblical Gospel.”

Where those three tests are met, and it's a three-legged stool, you can't just be okay on one of them or two of them; they all three have to be true where all three tests are met; then you can have the assurance that you are a true believer and not a false believer like some in those

churches that John shepherded in the first century who left. “They went out from us,” chapter 2, verse 19, because “...they were not...of us.”

In chapter 3, we're studying the second test of eternal life. The passage that we're looking at starts in chapter 3, verse 11, runs all the way through the end of the chapter. But this morning, let's just read together the section I hope to finish, verses 11 through 18. You follow along as I read first John 3:11 through 18.

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's (deeds) were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

This section explains to us that true Christians are no longer filled with hate, as we once were, like Cain, but rather we are now marked by genuine love for one another.

In these verses we've just read, John presents several crucial conclusions about how love and its absence confirm the real condition of the heart of those who profess to know Jesus Christ. So, let's look at the conclusions that he draws here.

His first conclusion is this, loving believers is “Required by the Lord's Command,” that's verse 11. We already looked at that in detail, it's required by the Lord's command. It's a basic command our Lord has given that we love one another.

In verses 12 and 13, we discovered that loving believers is “Absent from an Unbelievers Heart.” Now, as I noted for you, unbelievers may love believers, have the kind of worldly love that we talked about that's self-interested love because of the fact that the person is their spouse or their child. But unbelievers never love believers because they are believers, which is exactly the opposite of what true believers do.

Then we looked thirdly, a third conclusion is that loving believers is “Crucial for a Believer's Self-Examination.” That's really the message of verses 14 to 18. And that section, this self-examination, begins by just laying out the reality that love, loving other believers is the evidence of whether or not we have eternal life. So, we looked at the “Evidence of Love” in verses 14 and 15. It's directly stated positively in verse 14, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren,” and negatively at the end of verse 14, “He who does not love abides in death.” And then in verse 15, he argues it biblically. We ended last time looking at this, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Now, that's where we finished last time, studying verses 14 and 15 and the “Evidence of Love.”

Today, we begin by considering “The Example of Love,” in verse 16, the example of love. Verse 16 first explains this to us; Jesus' love provides the definition and the pattern of biblical love. Look at Jesus, look at His love, and you see both a definition and a pattern of what our love is supposed to be.

Let's look at it together. Verse 16 begins, "We know love by this." Literally, the Greek text reads this way, "In this, we have come to know the love," in this we have come to know the love. He's pointing back to our salvation. He's pointing back to when we first heard about, or at least when we first truly considered in a deep spiritual way, the event of Jesus' death on the cross. When we considered His death, we gained a knowledge, we came to know or came to an understanding of the nature of true love. We saw love in its essence when we considered what Jesus did for us. Notice verse 16, "We know love by this, that He," literally, John has this tendency to use the demonstrative pronoun. Literally, "We know love by this, that ('that One,' referring to Jesus) laid down His life."

Now, the Greek verb translated 'laid down' is an interesting word choice because the word actually means 'to lay aside something like a piece of clothing.' It's actually used that way in John 13, you remember, and when Jesus gets up from the Passover meal and lays aside His outer garment to wash the Disciples' feet, that word is used. He laid aside His garment. This word makes the point that Jesus demonstrated His love for us by His deliberate, voluntary self-sacrifice; He laid aside, He laid down His life for us. That's why Jesus loves to use this verb to describe His death.

Turn back to John's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd (Here it is.) lays down His life for the sheep." Verse 15, the second half of the verse, "...I lay down My life for the sheep." Verse 17, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I might take it again."

Now, why does Jesus like this verb? Well, He explains in verse 18, here's why. "No one has taken it (my life) away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative." You see, the point of

this verb is to stress the deliberate, voluntary, willful exercise of self-sacrifice in which He laid down His life for us.

Turn over to chapter 15, John 15, verse 13, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus said, “You are my friends, and I will lay down My life for you.”

Now go back to 1 John, chapter 3, and notice that John adds this, “We know love by this, that He laid down (He laid aside.) His life. (Notice!) for us.” ‘For us,’ meaning for His people. Jesus died for His people; isn't that what the angel said in the dream to Joseph in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21? He said, “...you shall...name (your Son) Jesus (*‘Yeshua, Yaweh Saves.’*)” Why? Why name him *‘Yahweh saves?’* “For (because) He (That is, this child.) will save (will spiritually rescue) His people from their sins.” He laid down His life for us. John 10, verses 14 and 15, Jesus says, “...I know My own (sheep)...and I lay down My life for them.”

If you're here this morning, and you have never become a follower of Jesus Christ, you have never repented and believed, you've never repented. By that I mean, you've never acknowledged that you are, in fact, a sinner and been sincerely grieved about the sin you've committed against God and had a willingness in your heart to turn from that sin, and you've never truly believed the gospel. You've never understood the facts of the gospel; you've never agreed that the Gospel is true, or you've never taken that final part of faith, and that is, entrusted yourself to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Then this is your only hope. You need what Jesus has accomplished; otherwise, you will be treated with justice, and you will get everything your sins deserve. The only way you get forgiveness is by being included with His people. And how can you be included with his people? Well, it's as simple as this, you respond to the gospel message, and then He will have laid down His life for you, that's the message.

The preposition that John uses here in the phrase “for us; He laid down His life for us.” That preposition ‘for’ is used at times of Jesus’ substitution in our place. That is, that He died, the just for the unjust. It’s sometimes used that way, and certainly it is true that Jesus died as our substitute; without that, there is no salvation. But because this preposition ‘for’ is used in the second half of the verse where we are called “to lay down our lives (same preposition) for the brethren (other Christians.),” and there it’s clearly not substitutionary. So, I think in this verse, the stress isn’t on the substitution of Christ; it probably means this, the first half of the verse, “Jesus laid down His life for our benefit or for our advantage, for our good.” And of course, our good was to reconcile us to God, to purchase our forgiveness. Jesus loved us in His heart. Clearly that was true in eternity past. Jesus declares His love to us in the New Testament, but Jesus didn’t stop there. He deliberately, voluntarily, laid down His life for our good to purchase our forgiveness and to reconcile us to God.

D. Edmond Hiebert puts it this way, “Since one’s own life is an individual’s most precious possession...” Isn’t that true? What’s the most precious possession you have? It’s your life. Everything else you can do without; your life is your most precious thing. So, he says, “Since one’s own life is an individual’s most precious possession, Christ’s willingness to lay down that life on behalf of others, constituted the greatest possible expression of love.”

There’s an interesting contrast in this passage we’re studying together. You remember back in verse 12, we had the example of Cain. And there we discovered that hate, desires the harm of another, acts against that person, even including the ultimate act of selfishness, taking that person’s life. Verse 12 says Cain “...slew his brother,” he slaughtered his brother. Here we discover in verse 16, the example of Christ, that love desires, ‘the good of another, acts not against him, but for him, even including the ultimate act of self-sacrifice, the giving of one’s life,

rather than the taking of a life.’ This is what Christ did. Look again at verse 16, Christ “...laid down His life for us,” for all of His people because He loved us. That's the message of the New Testament.

Go back to Ephesians. There are so many places, but let me show you a progression here.

Ephesians, chapter 5, look at verse 25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Here's what motivated Jesus to lay down His life, His love for the church. Now, when you hear that, because we tend to think organizationally, institutionally, you think it's like something cold and austere. No, the church is His people. And that's put very clearly back in verse 2 of chapter 5, “...walk in love, just as Christ also loved you (And the word ‘you’ in Greek is plural. He loved all of you, His people.) and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” It's an amazing thing, isn't it, that Christ loved us and gave His life for us?

But I also love the fact that Jesus didn't just love us as a group. His love was individual! Turn to Galatians, back one book, Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, (Look at this.) who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Paul says, “Jesus didn't just love the group, that is the church. He didn't just love us as a congregation; He loved us individually.” As Jesus, in eternity past, contemplated fulfilling the agency of carrying out, accomplishing the plan of redemption that was conceived in the mind of God, as He contemplated His incarnation and coming into the world as one of us, as He contemplated His death, His death on the cross, He had you, Christian, and me in mind. In fact, you can read Galatians 2:20 this way, and respectfully, as Paul did, I can read it this way, “The

Son of God loved Tom, and He gave Himself for Tom.” And if you're a Christian, you can read it the same way. That's the reality.

But I love that Scripture doesn't stop there; it doesn't just talk about Christ loving us individually and having us in mind as He died for us on the cross. But His love continues. Turn to Revelation, chapter 1, and verse 5. As John begins this book, he writes that it's “...from Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (And I love this!). To Him (Jesus Christ.) who loves (present tense, is loving) us and released us from our sins by His blood.” If you're a Christian, sitting here this morning, if you've repented and believed in Jesus Christ, He loved you individually in eternity past. He loved you when he entered the world. He loved you when he contemplated death on the cross and He still loves you, and He always will. What Jesus did at the cross, what He did when He laid down His life for us, provides a definition of love.

So, let me give you a definition. “The essence of biblical love, then, is sacrificing yourself for the benefit of others, not out of self-interest, but a genuine selfless concern for them and their good.” That's the love Jesus demonstrated. His love provides for us the definition and the pattern of biblical love.

In the second half of verse 16, John explains that “Jesus’ love (that we just saw in the first half) Jesus’ love provides the moral obligation for our love,” specifically, our love for one another. Notice verse 16, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and (Notice the word ‘and.’ There is a clear, logical linkage between these two halves of the verse.) and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” We see what Jesus did, we ought to imitate Him. That's

exactly what John's already said back in chapter 2, verse 6, "The one who says he (is abiding) in (Jesus) ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."

Now, in verse 16, the tense of the Greek word translated 'ought' points to an ongoing moral duty or obligation. This isn't a one-time duty, a one-time obligation, this is a continuing obligation. What he's saying is this, "If you have experienced Christ's selfless love, demonstrated in His death on the cross described in the first half of the verse, then you are obligated to live in the second half of the verse, you are obligated to lay down your life. We must voluntarily, just like Jesus, voluntarily, intentionally, be willing to make the same ultimate act of sacrificial love that He did. As Warren Wiersbe writes, "Self-preservation is the first law of physical life; but self-sacrifice is the first law of spiritual life." We are obligated to lay down our lives, notice, "...for the brethren," for the brethren. That means 'for the benefit of, for the advantage of, for the good of our Christian brothers and sisters.' You know what this is saying? This is how far our love must be willing to go. And by the way, Christians throughout church history have demonstrated just that kind of love.

Just look in the New Testament. In Romans, chapter 16, verse 4, Paul says that Aquila and Priscilla, quote, "...risked their own necks" for his life. In Philippians 2:17, Paul said that he was willingly "pouring out his life like a drink offering" for the good of the believers that he served. (Paraphrase.). In Philippians 2:30, Paul says that Epaphroditus "risked his life" for my sake. (Paraphrase.) Now, how does it happen? How can believers literally be willing to risk their own lives for the sake of other believers? It's not because you like them—it's because you love them. I love the way Lloyd- Jones describes it. He says:

We may not like certain Christians, there is no instinctive elemental attraction. To love them means that we treat them exactly as if we did like them. Now the men and women of the world do not do that; if they do not like people, they have nothing to do with them. But Christian love means that we look beyond that; we see the Christian in them, the brother or sister; we could say we see the Christ in them, and we help that person.

So, the evidence of love shows whether or not we have eternal life. Our love for our professed brothers and sisters in Christ shows that reality, and the example of love is Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death for us, an example that we are called to follow.

Thirdly, as we look at verses 17 and 18, let's consider "The Expression of Love." John just told us that one of the best tests of eternal life is whether or not we love our fellow Christians. But here's the Problem—love is an attitude; love is something that's inside. How can we know if we truly love like this if we pass the test? Well, John goes on to explain how we can identify true biblical love for our fellow Christians. You see, genuine, biblical love always puts itself out to meet the real practical needs of the one we love; that's the point he's going to make in these two verses. He begins with an illustration in verse 17, "An Illustration of Practical Love." Look at it, "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?"

In verse 16, John just made the point that true love is willing to make the supreme sacrifice of one's own life. In verse 17, he reminds us that if you're willing to do that, then you're going to be willing to make lesser sacrifices as well. You see, most of us will never be called in this life to die for another Christian. The self-sacrifice we will be called to is not heroic, but rather

ordinary. We are called to constantly sacrifice ourselves to serve the real practical needs of our fellow Christians.

Now notice, first of all, the change. In verse 16, you have the plural “brothers.” In verse 17, you have the singular “brother,” why? I think it's because real Christian love expresses itself man to man, woman to woman, brother to brother, sister to sister. As one author puts it:

It's easier to be enthusiastic about humanity with a capital ‘H,’ than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. (And then he writes this.) Loving everybody in general, may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular.

That is our age; go on the internet and everybody is declaring their love for everybody, and this group or that group, and it's just an excuse for loving nobody in particular.

John illustrates the practical Christian love we're to have for one another by using “A Negative Example,” a negative example. Let's see how it unfolds here in verse 17. Let's take it point by point. First of all, he says, “If you are in a position to help.” Notice how it begins, “But whoever has the world's goods.” The Greek word translated “goods” is just ‘*bios*’ as in the word we get our word ‘biology’ from. It means life. But here, it means the resources that are needed to maintain ‘*bios*’ or life. So, John means you have the resources necessary to sustain life in the world. Now, that's true of all of us, obviously, or we wouldn't be here, right? If you didn't have those, you wouldn't be here. But the truth is, and you may not like to think of yourself this way, or perhaps you've never considered yourself like this, but every single one of us in this room, every adult in this room is wealthy.

This week I researched the average income of people in our world; I'm talking about all almost 8 billion people on this planet. Have you ever thought about this? Seventy-one percent of the 8-billion people on this planet, seventy-one percent make less than \$10 a day, or less than \$3,650 a year, seventy-one percent! Ninety-three percent of the 8-billion people on this planet make less than \$50 a day or less than \$18,250 a year. Now compare that to the median household income in Texas. Usually there are two spouses working; but regardless, the median household income, meaning there are fifty percent of the households in Texas make more, fifty percent make less; the median income in Texas, the household income, is \$67,404 a year. So, we are all wealthy compared to the nearly 8-billion people on this planet.

But you know what? It wouldn't matter whether we were wealthy or not because we're supposed to practically care for one another's needs even when we have very little. You remember when John the Baptist was preaching and people would come to him and say, you know, "How do we manifest repentance, that we're preparing for the coming of Messiah?" Here's one of the things he said, Luke 3:11, John the Baptist said, "...The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." So, you don't have to have a lot to have this responsibility if you are in a position to help, and we all are.

Verse 17 goes on to the next point, "(If you see your brother's need,)" notice, "...and sees his brother in need." Literally, "and is seeing his brother a need having." "Sees" refers to the fact that we observe them, we observe them firsthand, your Christian brothers or sister is having a need. Often this is someone in your life. In other words, I'm not obligated to solve poverty on this planet. Jesus said, "The poor you'll always have with you," but if there's somebody in my life that I have an opportunity, particularly a brother or sister, that I have an opportunity to help, and I have the means to do that, then I have to do that. Sometimes it's someone in our church

family; sometimes it's someone in our community; sometimes it's our brothers and sisters in a place around the world where they've had some disaster or devastation, as we've done with Ukraine, for example. But the point is, whatever the need is, it's one that we have the resources to meet. So, we see a need, we have the resources.

The third part of this verse is, “If you close your heart against him.” Verse 17 says, “...whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him.” Here's a professing Christian in a position to help; he knows about the need of his brother or sister and chooses not to help because of his own self-centered interest.

The Greek word translated “heart” here is literally “bowels.” That's because the Greeks considered the viscera, the upper viscera or the heart, the lungs, and the liver, as the seat of human emotions, and therefore, the seat of one's love and compassion toward others.

We, on the other hand, tend to think of it solely as the heart, and so our translators have chosen the word heart here. But the point is, this person has the resources, sees the need, and closes. That's a very interesting word. The word literally means ‘to close or lock a door or a gate,’ and the verb tense implies slamming the door on your compassion. It's the opposite response of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 in the story Jesus tells there, verse 33.

(A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon the man who had fallen among thieves,) ...and when he saw him, (So he saw the need, he has the resources.) he felt compassion, and (he) came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him, (and of course, gave money even for his continuing care.)

We're commanded to be like that Samaritan. We're not to close our hearts against others. And how do you do that? It's not by not feeling. It's by having the resources, seeing the need, and determining not to help because it's not in your self-interest. We're not going to put ourselves out for their benefit. If that's how you respond against the need of your brother, notice the final point in verse 17, then you don't have “the love of God in you.” (Paraphrase.) “...Whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God, abide (or continue, remain) in Him?” The answer is, “It doesn't, it can't!”

Now, the expression “the love of God” there has been interpreted in three ways. It may mean that a person who does this to a fellow brother or sister in Christ isn't displaying a God-like love. Or it could mean that such a person is not loved by God. Or it could mean that such a person does not love God, or love others. I think I agree with the commentator, Westcott, on this point, and think that John likely means all three. Here's how it looks. If you close your heart against your brother and his need, then you're not displaying a God-like love for others. And if you're not displaying a God-like love for others, it really shows, as we're learning in 1 John, you don't really love God, and therefore, you're not loved by God.

Now, don't misunderstand John's point here. Giving of yourself to meet people's practical needs is not the essence of love because, you see, you can give of yourself without loving. Remember 1 Corinthians 13:3, “...if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” You can give without loving, but John's point here is you can't truly love without giving of yourself. Lloyd-Jones writes, “This is the very nature of love; it must express itself, it is always active; and if our love does not do that, it is not true love.”

Listen, you can say, “I love you,” you can feel something in your heart, but if that never expresses itself outwardly in a desire to help others, you don't love them. The love for our brothers and sisters, that shows we're Christians, isn't the feeling kind; it's not the talking kind—it's the doing kind.

Now, having given us an illustration of practical love, John gives us then in verse 18, “The Command for Practical Love,” the command for practical love. Notice verse 18, “Little children.” Here John reminds us that we belong to the same spiritual family; that's why this is so important. These are our brothers and sisters, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue...”

Notice John includes himself in this exhortation, “let us...let us not love merely with word.” In other words, just don't love by verbalizing it, “...or with tongue.” And there's repetition here because the tongue is the instrument by which we verbalize. So, he's saying twice, don't just say, “you love people.” Now, why does he beat this up? I think it's because of the most common way that we fail to truly love others is by substituting mere talk for loving actions. That's what James writes about in James 2, verses 15 and 16. It's in the context of talking about genuine versus spurious faith. How can you know if you have dead faith that damns or living faith, true faith that saves? And he says, “You look at how it acts, how it responds.” It's how you test whether or not it's true. And in the middle of that, he writes this James 2:15:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you (Here's the key.) says to them, “Go in peace, (brother) be warmed and be filled,” (I hope things work out for you; I hope that happens; I hope your needs are met.), and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” You see, if you love someone, you should express that love. This is a different message for a different time, but it's interesting that in the gospels, you find God the Father often verbally expressing His love for the Son. And you find the Son often verbally expressing His love for the Father. Where there is true love, there will be the expression of that love, verbally.

But it goes beyond that; we must also express our love “in deed.” Now, don't put those together. Don't think that's one word ‘indeed’ or truly; that's not what it says. It says our love is to be “in” space, “deed.” Now, the Greek word for “deed” is a word that you'll somewhat recognize. It's the word ‘*ergon*’, from which we get the English word ‘erg.’ Those of you who are science nerds recognize that; an ‘erg’ is the unit of work or of energy. So, what he's saying here is, we are to love others with work, with deeds. And then he adds this, “...and we are to love in truth.” That is, we are to love genuinely rather than hypocritically. In other words, it's not just what you do that matters; it's your heart. There are a lot of people in this world who are benefactors, giving away all their money to who knows what, but it's not born out of true love for those people. He's calling here for deeds that come from a heart of love. John's overarching point is that true, biblical, Christ-like love in the heart, will inevitably express itself in outward, gracious, practical acts of love.

Let me show you a great summary of how we're to use our resources for the good of others. Turn to 1 Timothy, chapter 6. Paul is writing to Timothy who ministered in the wealthy church of Ephesus, the huge city there; some of you had the chance to visit that city. And in the church, there were wealthy people. And so, he says this to him in 1 Timothy 6, verse 17, and let me just remind you as we read this, remember where I said a few minutes ago, all of us are wealthy in the scope of 8-billion people on this planet, and again, I understand there are different standards

of living and different costs, and all that. I'm just trying to illustrate ~~we are~~ we have what we need to live, and therefore, we need to help others. Here it is in verse 17, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited." You know, when you have a lot, it's easy to think it's because you're so smart, because you have run your business so well, because you've invested so wisely. No! "Don't be conceited."

You know what? There are people more intelligent than you and I are who have a lot less than we have. Don't be conceited; it's God, it's His work, it's His providence. "...Or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches," don't, for a moment, trust your investments; that can go away tomorrow. Instead, fix your hope "...on God, (the One) who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

By the way, that's a reminder that it's okay to enjoy the fruits of your labor, that's alright, but it can't stop there. Notice verse 18:

Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, (In other words, care about reaping returns on your investment in eternity more than here.) so that (you) they may take hold of (what) is life indeed.

That's what we're supposed to do, invest ourselves, our time, our efforts, our resources in the practical expressions of love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, what are some helpful ways to apply what we've learned together this morning? Let me just give you a couple of thoughts. First of all, "Use this passage as a test of whether you have eternal life." I mean, that's the primary context of these words. If you don't love those you

claim are your brothers and sisters in Christ, and you don't love them by self-sacrificially seeking to meet their needs from your time and your resources, then you don't have eternal life. If you're perfectly content to live in your own little bubble in the Christian world, in other words, you try not to make eye contact, you come in here, ignore everybody else, and then you leave, still trying to ignore everybody else, and you got what you want, and you're gone, you need to seriously ask whether you know Christ, because real Christians love God's people. If you love your brothers and sisters in Christ with self-sacrificing love, then you can enjoy Christ's own assurance in this letter. This is one of the tests that gives us assurance that we have eternal life, not perfectly, but if we are marked by true love for others, looking to meet their needs, then we have eternal life.

Secondly, if you pass this test, where do you go from there? Well, we should long and desire to excel still more. If you really want to please Christ, then you want to continue to grow in this. Now, let me say I don't say this because this is a problem in our church. In fact, I will say to you, our church is the most loving, caring, generous church I know. So, it's not like it's a problem, but we can all still grow in this area.

Maybe you're new to our church, maybe you're a new Christian, maybe you're still a spiritually immature Christian, maybe you're new to a kind of church where really reaching into the lives of other people is stressed as a priority. What are some practical ways to love your fellow Christians in this church? Let me just give you a little list; these aren't the only ways, but they are a couple of helpful ways that come to my mind.

First of all, reach out intentionally to those around you when we come together or when you're in a some sort of a church-related event; reach out intentionally to those around you, especially

those who don't know. The New Testament commands us to be hospitable. That doesn't mean you invite all your friends over for dessert and football. Now, there's nothing wrong with doing that, feel free to do that. But that's not what the word 'hospitable' means. The Greek word means 'a lover of strangers.' In the context of the first century, that meant opening your home to traveling Christians because hotels were scarce and dangerous, and sometimes it still means that here and in other parts of the world. But loving strangers can be as simple as this, not resenting when new people come to our church when the seats fill up and your seat gets taken. Yeah, I hear the chuckles because you understand that's a temptation, right? Loving strangers may be as simple as noticing there's somebody wandering the campus, looking lost or looking for where they need to go or what they need to do, and reaching out to them, having an open, inviting expression on your face.

You know, we know how to send signals; it happens all the time in our culture. You know, you don't want to be bothered, you bury in your little cocoon, you look at your smartphone, I don't want to talk to you, and I don't want you to talk to me. You shouldn't be doing that, shouldn't be doing that anywhere, but you shouldn't be doing that with God's people. Open your eyes, look around, make eye contact, and reach out to people, intentionally engage people around you that you don't know.

A second way to do this, to excel is "Give regularly to our Benevolence Fund." Our elders make every decision about every dollar that's spent from our benevolence fund, we make it collectively. But we give out tens-of-thousands of dollars every year to people in our church and beyond who are in need because that's the heart of Christ, we want to reflect that. So, like many of us, give regularly to the Benevolence Fund.

Thirdly, engage personally, and this is the big one, “Engage personally in the practical care of other Christians.” It's not enough just to give, you know, “I'll give, and I'll let the elders do that.” No, engage personally in the practical care of other Christians. You can do this through your home fellowship group, your Sunday school class, the ministry you're involved in, or through church-wide care ministries.

Here are some ways you can do this: personally care for the needs of others; when someone is in the hospital or dealing with serious medical issues, call them, pray with them, visit them, find out ways to help with practical issues in their lives—keep their kids, their dogs, cut their lawn, think of ways you can help them. When there's been a death in the family, provide meals through one of our organized ways to do that or on your own, help with other practical issues.

When we seek to help believers around the world who are in the middle of disasters, as has happened even in the early church, participate in giving or going. Here's a practical way, volunteer for childcare, to serve the parents and children in our church as well as our guests so they can be spiritually benefited and ministered to. Make sure the widows and orphans in your circle have what they need, especially in this Christmas season. Join the ministries in our church that care for those who are shut in, those who have long term health issues, or those who are widows. The bottom line is, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, look around; these are your brothers and sisters, and if you're really a Christian, you're going to have a heart to invest in caring for them in a very real and practical and personal level.

Look again at our text, verse 16:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need

and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for these very practical admonitions to us, thank you for the test that it is. Lord, for those of us who look at our lives and while we don't love others perfectly, we do love your people, and we look for ways to serve them and care for them. Lord, encourage us; give us the assurance you intend that to be in our lives, that we really do have eternal life. Help us to excel still more, to really invest in the lives of your people. If you love them that much, Lord Jesus, help us to love them.

Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning who failed the test. Help them to look honestly in the mirror of your Word and see themselves. Lord, maybe they made a profession years ago, maybe they walked an aisle, signed a card, joined a church, were baptized—they did something that they're hanging their hopes on. Lord, help them to look in the mirror of your Word and see if they've failed the test, and help them to come to true repentance and faith in your Son, even today. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.