

Recognizing Love

1 John 3:16-24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

We are people and a society that likes to use the word love. It is all around us and easily misused. These are some that I found on the Internet...

Love is the most powerful force in the world. Although love is a feeling which can't be expressed with words, sloganshub.org gathered a list of 60 catchy love slogans to help someone in expressing their inner feelings. Here are some:

[Love has no borders](#)

[Love is about trust](#)

[Love makes two hearts one](#)

[Make love, not war](#)

[True love begins when nothing is looked for in return](#)

[Spread more love](#)

[True love is worth the wait](#)

[All you need is love](#)

[True love is hard to find but even harder to hide](#)

There is only one happiness in life, to love and to be loved

Love life & Live it

A true love story never ends

Love cures people. Both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.

Live with no regrets, love with no limits

Find love with your heart, not with your eyes

Faith makes all things possible, love makes them easy

Life is the flower of which love is the honey

Love is patient, love is kind

To love is to receive a glimpse of heaven

Love is the language of feelings

Love is the key to happiness

True love never dies

Love is the beauty of the soul

Love is the greatest adventure

Love is like an ocean, deep and always in motion

Other top performing U.S. 'Love' quotes include:

'Nothing says lovin' like something from the oven, and Pillsbury says it best.'

'Virginia is for lovers.'

'You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's.' [Levy's Rye Bread]

The other American slogans studied were:

'All you add is love.' [Purina Dog Chow]

'We love to fly and it shows.' [Delta Airlines]

'Drive = Love.' [Chrysler]

'It must be love.' [Honda]

'I love this game.' [National Basketball Association]

'I'm lovin' it.' [McDonald's]

Our scripture teaches us that Love is not known by catchy slogans, but Love is known in action. How do we know God's love? It is through God's action in sending Jesus Christ into the world, and through Christ's action of laying down his life for us. The actions of God show us what God is like.

The same test applies to our love. How do others know what is in our heart? It is by our actions. Just as God's love is known to us through the visible action of Christ, so our love is known and recognized by others through concrete actions that mirror Christ's own. Christ laid down his life, and we are to lay down our lives.

"Lay down our lives." We speak these words with tones of awe, and well we should. In the public arena, the only time we usually hear these words is to praise the sacrifice of a soldier who died to save others, or perhaps to speak of rescuers who died while attempting to save others from a burning building or from rising waters. It is action—specifically this often surprising action of extraordinary self-sacrifice—that is the test of love.

For Christians, self-sacrifice should be ordinary, not extraordinary. We *ought* to lay down our lives, John wrote, not intending to give a grand challenge for heroic Christian but an everyday commandment for ordinary Christians. The Christian life is a life laid down for others, a life built on self-sacrifice.

Sometimes self-sacrifice can mean physical death. We know that when we stand beside victims of injustice or hate or racism, we might become the next victim. If we go in love to those who are under daily threat of violence or war and

share with them a witness for healing and peace, we have to expect that the next bomb or bullet may find us. In every age, Christians have acted with such Christ like love, going where they do not have to go and suffering what they could easily avoid.

More often, our stakes are lower. But the principle is the same. Laying down our lives, at its core, can mean any number of ways in which we lay aside our claim to own our lives. We lay down our lives when we put others first. We lay down our lives when we live for the good of others. We lay down our lives when we make time for others. To love others is to lay down our life for them. When we lay down the completely normal human desire to live for ourselves, and when instead we allow the love of God to reorient us toward the needs of others, we are laying down our lives and our love is recognized.

John was pretty hard on Christians who say they have the love of Jesus in their hearts but do not share their material goods with those in need. We can only imagine what he would say of us today in a world in which almost half the people live on less than two dollars a day. The challenge of global poverty can overwhelm us. Perhaps that is why John did not speak of the poor in a collective or generic sense, but spoke of a brother or a sister, the one in need who is before us at that moment. If we close our hearts to that sister or brother, we close our hearts to God.

How can you claim to receive the love of God in your life, John asks us, if you do not show love in your actions? Many Christians today claim we believe in Jesus Christ. By that, we mean we assent to the truth of the gospel. But what is the truth of the gospel, if not believing that living a life of sacrificial love is the starting point of our new life in Christ? Believing in Christ means believing that Christ saves us by making us like himself.

Faith and love come bound together as a single package. Faith is never alone. When God creates saving faith in our hearts, God creates active love. Faith in Jesus Christ is faith that transforms the believing heart, making it a self-sacrificed heart.

Faith and love together are the gifts of single grace—they are God's doing. We cannot receive one without the other. And because God creates faith and love in our hearts, God commands them, and by grace we are ready to obey. God gives us what God commands. John points us to God's commandment: "that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another" (v. 23).

Believing and loving come from a single grace and result in a single act of obedience. The commandment cannot be split apart, because Jesus Christ is the concrete embodiment of God's love. We cannot believe in Jesus without believing in love, and we cannot have love without action. John gives us no room to negotiate. The self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ is the ground and motivation and meaning of our own self-sacrificing love. When we keep the love commandment, we are one with Christ. We abide in Christ, John tells us, and Christ abides in us. **Ronald Cole-Turner**

On yesterday I watched the funeral service of former first lady, Barbara Bush. It was wonderful to see and hear the testimony of her faith. She understood and recognized the love of God in her life. She had her difficulties, but she was always able to recognize God's love and showed God's love to others. I pray that each of us recognize God's love in our lives, and show God's love to others.

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 2:
Lent through Eastertide.