

Labor of Love

1 John 3:16-24 - Joel Pickett

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Introduction

This is a phrase we have all heard before and most likely used at one point or another. For me I think of the labor of love that goes into tamale making. I came to realize this when I married into my wife's family and witnessed the days of preparation to the chilis that become the delicious sauce, the cooking & shredding of the meat, and the actual process of spreading/folding is without a doubt a labor of love. And of course, I was put on the tedious task of drying of the ojas. *For those of you who are like me, those are the corn husks that must be thoroughly dried.*

Or after a mom finished washing, folding, and putting away every single piece of clothing we would say it is a "*labor of love*." Or after a husband finished the DIY project that always takes longer than expected with 20 trips to Home Depot, we would say it's a "*labor of love*."

And biblically speaking, love by nature is laborious. True biblical love labors. It's not just an emotion. It's not just a feeling. *Genuine love works and works hard.*

This is exactly what we find when we look to the One who the Bible says is love, that is God Himself. We find that love isn't just something God possesses but it is who He is. Which tells us that He is the source of love, and it is only as we look to Him can we really understand what it is.

When we study God who is love in the Scriptures, what we find very quickly is that love labors, love works. God doesn't just say He loves us, but He does something about it because real love is always put into action.

Now the Bible has quite a lot to say on the topic of love and we, of course, all know the chapter of love which is **1 Corinthians 13**. "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy....*"

And in that chapter, we don't find so much a definition of love but a description of love. A description of what love does and what love doesn't do.

And in light of our topic today, this description of love is compelling in the fact that love is not passive, but it is active. It doesn't sit by idle but gets up and gets in the game.

Now while 1 Corinthians 13 is the chapter of love, really the whole book of 1 John should be known as the letter of love. After all it was written by "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" as John so proudly described himself in his gospel account.

But this is really how John felt. He saw himself as the beloved disciple, the apple of His eye. The love of God was something that John didn't just know intellectually but something he experienced practically.

In the Gospel of John – he uses the word "love", 57 times over 21 chapters

In the Epistle of 1 John – he uses the word "love", 46 times over just 5 chapters (*lot of love*)

In addition to this being the letter of love, there is a reoccurring theme chapter by chapter to know God and to know that you have the eternal life that He has provided to those who believe.

1 John 5:13

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to believe* in the name of the Son of God.

John uses the word “*know*” in some form 23 times throughout the 5-chapter epistle. **And this is his goal**, that you would truly KNOW that you have this eternal life given because of His great love for us.

And so today, within our passage and under this theme of this labor of love, we will discover the display of love, the assurance of love, and the obedience of love.

The Display of Love (verses 16-18)

¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *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?* ¹⁸ *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

It is here that John describes the basis for how we, as followers of Christ, know love in the first place. *How we know what it is and what it's like.*

The best way to know love is to look to the cross. There is no greater display of love than Jesus laying down His life for us. And this is in fact exactly what Jesus said during that last night with his disciples before His death in that upper room...

John 15:13

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

But this isn't just a fact to know but a reality to experience.

Know: “*ginōskō*” *to come to know by personal experience*

This is not just to look at the menu and know what they have but it is to order the meal and dig in. This is to not just see a picture of the Grand Canyon but to stand at the edge of it looking out over the breathtaking sight.

This Greek word is used in the present tense which indicates to us that it isn't something to merely acknowledge in the past but something to experience in the present day by day but never quite coming to the end of it.

Paul put it like this in his prayer for the Ephesians at the end of chapter 3....

Ephesians 3:18-19

¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul's prayer is they would begin to comprehend all the dimensions of this love that passes knowledge. Without a doubt it begins with knowledge, but it doesn't end there.

And every day the believer is to press into this indescribable love of God and in fact it will take all of eternity to experience the fullness of who He is and His great love for us.

John says we know this love because Jesus laid down his life for us. And yes, it was Jesus who chose to lay down and give up His life for us. *The Bible says that it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross.*

Jesus didn't get Himself killed as some suppose but we know that He laid down His life willingly and was all part of the plan of redemption before the foundation of the world.

Revelation 13:8

⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

What Jesus did on the cross for us wasn't a last-ditch effort but rather intentionally purposed by the very hand of God before the beginning of time. *Jesus knew what was coming and His life was not taken from Him but willingly given up for our benefit.*

Jesus was clear on this in His teaching on the Good Shepherd and the sheep...

John 10:15, 17-18

¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

¹⁷ "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

He laid it down Himself. He gave up His spirit and it would be Jesus who would take it up again.

It is the cross of Christ that is the greatest evidence of His love for us and what then ought to become the greatest motivation for our love for one another.

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Demonstrates: *to provide evidence for, to stand as proof by one's actions*

Because His love is demonstrated, so our love also must be demonstrated.

"And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Ought: obligation, duty *(this is the reasonable response, the logic is rather straightforward here)*

John 13:14

¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

1 John 4:11

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Remember, genuine love labors. And so, if we have truly experienced this sacrificial love of God, then that love won't stay contained within us but will flow out through us.

But let's say that you see there is a real lack of love for others in your life, don't think that the solution to the problem is to walk out of here determined to be more loving - for you won't make it past the parking lot without dropping the ball. **Step 1:** *you must focus in and meditate on the cross.*

It is ultimately His love for us that compels us to live for Him and not ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

¹⁴ For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

In verse 16, John sets the bar and in verse 17 he gives a scenario. This is something that John loves to do in his writing. It's a compelling way to make it practical and applicable.

17 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?

In this scenario John focuses on the person whose got the goods. This isn't someone who is necessarily rich but someone who has compared to another who does not have.

Goods: financial means, possessions

Widow who gave out of her livelihood, woman with the flow of blood for 12 years spent all she had from her livelihood on physicians, or how the prodigal son spent his portion of his dad's livelihood.

And this person whose HAS, sees not just anyone but specifically a brother in need. Not a brother by blood but within the family of God.

And this person who HAS then shuts up his heart to this brother who does not have.

Shuts up: to close

Same word that we find in **Matthew 6:6** when Jesus says, "*when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door,*"

This word heart is not referring to one's physical heart of course but one's capability of displaying compassion.

John then ends this scenario with a rhetorical question that challenges any reader to evaluate this kind of response in light of God's great sacrificial love.

"how does the love of God abide in him?"

To say you have received God's love but refuse to be a vessel in which that loves flows through in a most basic of ways is a proof that maybe you've never received His love in the first place. Maybe His love has been something you have recognized intellectually but never received experientially.

Not only is faith without works dead but love without works is dead.

James 2:14-17

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Clearly, the more difficult action to take would be to give your life for someone, that is the bar set by Jesus. It is a much lesser demand to help someone in need. Yet we can often have in our mind the heroic act of giving up your life for another while the thought of helping a brother in need is much less “flashy”. This love is not to be just to be a theory but real and practical.

John then refers to them as “My Little children” as he gets to his point of action in verse 18. This is not a belittling term but one of endearment. This is what John longs for them to walk in.

¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Word: communication **Tongue:** speech

Love involves more than mere words. To love in tongue only is to love insincerely.

Deed: an action, a work **Truth:** that which conforms with reality

Remember, love labors, love does something. To love in truth is to love genuinely.

The Christian should be the first one to put “their money where their mouth is.” People say “talk is cheap” and its true! But real love is expensive, it is costly. We must not just talk the talk, but we must then walk the walk.

You know what they call someone who is all talk but no walk in Texas? They say he is “all hat and no cattle.”

Billy Graham always said that if you gave him a man’s checkbook, he would tell you what kind of man he is. (bank information) and how true this is! *Do we say we love or do we show love?*

In Luke 10, Jesus speaks with some religious lawyers who He knew were all talk and they came testing Jesus. They asked what they should do to inherit eternal life and so Jesus puts it back on them and asks them what the Scriptures say.

These lawyers proceed to quote that one ought to love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus responds, “great job”. Do that!

But these snarky lawyers respond with, “And who is my neighbor?” This is the setting in which Jesus shares the parable of the good Samaritan and hopefully you can recall the story.

It was the priest and the Levite who professed to not only know God but follow the law of God and yet didn’t follow through in their actions, but the least likely Samaritan helps the man who was robbed and left for dead. *It was costly, inconvenient, and long term!*

You see the lawyer wanted to talk about this abstract concept of who really is my neighbor where Jesus’ focus is on ONE man in need and one who saw and did something about it.

Jesus’ definition of neighbor = anyone who you see in need and whose need you are able to meet

We must not talk so abstractly how we love people. Who has God put in your sights today? How can you love them? How can we show them compassion?

The Assurance of Love (verses 19-21)

¹⁹ And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

It is by this displayed love that we are able to experience the assurance of love.

Now this assurance is only able to come to those who live out the love they received. John says it is by this display of love in our lives that we can then know we are of the truth.

This love for one another is the surest sign of someone who has really been born again. Jesus said you will know them by their fruits and honestly, we will know ourselves by this fruit.

Love is the Christian's trademark.

John 13:35

³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Now we must not make the common mistake thinking that this work of love that ought to come from our lives is HOW we get saved or how we keep our salvation but rather the very evidence that we are saved.

Never mistake the fruit for the root. The fruit of love can only come into someone's life as they have put their faith and trust in Christ as Savior. And then from that connection to Jesus, your life can bear fruit. Apart from Him we can do nothing!

John 15:5, 8

⁵ "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

And make no mistake about it that when God puts His love in us, it will come out of us.

It cannot be contained. The Bible tells us that THE fruit of the Holy Spirit is love.

But the topic here in our text today is not for other people to know but for us to know. Remember this is the purpose of the entire letter of 1 John. *"that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue"*

Assure: to persuade and convince, to be certain

Heart: "kardia" can refer to the physical heart but in many contexts refers to one's inner person, the conscience

And as you know our heart can be a fickle thing and so we must assure our hearts. We must remind ourselves that we are His and He is ours.

There were times where David had to reassure his own heart in the midst of discouragement.

Psalm 42:5

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him *For* the help of His countenance.

There are times where we can look at our lives and yes, we see our lives changed and we know we aren't where we used to be, but we look at the bar that Jesus set by His love and we know we aren't where we want to be. And in that there can be the temptation to allow our heart to condemn us. And this is something Satan capitalizes on and seeks to kick us when we are down as the accuser.

BUT HERE IS THE GOOD NEWS!

²⁰ *For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.*

John assures us that God is greater than our hearts and we are not to base our relationship with Him based on feelings but by faith! By faith in the fact that when God begins a work in us, He will be the one to complete that work in us!

C.H. Spurgeon

"Sometimes our heart condemns us, but, in doing so, it gives a wrong verdict, and then we have the satisfaction of being able to take the case into a higher court, for 'God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.'"

Condemns: "*kataginōskō*" kata - to know something against ginosko – to know by experience

The verb is basically a legal term, which is often rendered by expressions like, 'to judge against,' 'to declare guilty,'

And even when our heart declares us guilty, God's word holds more weight than our inner thoughts.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

During Peter's reconciliation meeting with Jesus there on a beach in Galilee, after the third time Jesus asks if he loves Him, Peter is grieved within himself and tells the Lord that He knows all things.

John 21:17

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

And yet even in this, Jesus commands that Peter's love should translate into action because sincere love always labors.

Conscience by itself is not an accurate measurement. We must go to the WORD.

Martin Luther

"Conscience is one drop; the reconciled God is a sea of comfort."

WE GIVE TOO MUCH CREDIT TO OUR THOUGHTS

We must bring our hearts, our conscience back to the Word because faith comes by hearing.

Romans 10:17

¹⁷ So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

This heart assurance granted to us by the high court of God then makes way for a great confidence in our relationship with Him.

²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Confidence: boldness, specifically the absence of fear in speaking, cheerful courage

And oh, this confidence is something so glorious for the believer to experience! But can only come as we live out our faith and as we rest upon the God who knows all things.

John talks about this confidence in the previous chapter...

1 John 2:28

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

It's as we are connected to Him that we won't need to be ashamed but will have no fear in that day.

Then again in the following chapter!

1 John 4:16-17

¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

The reason that there may be remnants of shame in your life, the reason there may be fear is because you have not yet been perfected or completed in the love of God. And so we must **GO TO THE CROSS** and allow His love to bring us to full maturity.

The Obedience of Love (verses 22-24)

²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. ²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

It is within this assured, confident love that serves as the greatest ground for our obedience to grow.

Love and obedience go hand in hand. God loves us by giving His Son for us and we love Him by doing what He says. This is God's love language.

John 14:15

¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Here in verse 22, John continues on within this assurance and confidence we can have in Him in regard to prayer and what we ask of Him as we seek to obey and please Him.

The statement: *"whatever we ask we receive from Him"*

This is an awesome and amazing promise! Jesus said ask, seek, knock and it will be given, found and opened to you. But Jesus says that in the context of a relationship between a child and their Father and that the Father will give good gifts to those that ask. So before y'all get crazy, be sure to read the qualifier.

The qualifier: *"because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"*

The door that opens up answered prayer is a life not of perfection but a life that is aimed to please Him. The Bible says that God does not hear the prayer of the person who regards sin in their heart. God says that it is sin that hides His face from us. *But on the contrary a life of obedience gives us confidence to come to Him.*

1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

The one whose aim is to please the Lord will seek to pray prayers that line up with the will of God because they have come to know that His way really is the best way.

To pray according to His will is to pray in Jesus's name. When we conclude our prayers in Jesus' name that isn't a magic formula that will get us what we want. It is to say I want my prayer to be aligned with your will!

John 14:13-14

¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done but His will done that He may be glorified.

John 15:7

⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

THIS IS THE GREAT WORK OF GOD IN US, when His word is in us, then when we pray, it will be the Word that will come out and we will find ourselves praying within the divine will of God.

Warren Wiersbe

"When our delight is in the love of God, our desire will be in the will of God."

You see I don't believe that you need to be careful what you pray for. Some people say don't pray for patience because God will make sure you get into positions where patience is needed. If we pray the Word of God according to the will of God, we can have absolute confidence in that we will receive what we ask for.

One of Augustine's famous quotes is to love God and live how you please! *Another way to say something similar would be to love God and pray for anything!* Now to the person who has experienced the inner transformation of the Holy Spirit by His word you get this. You get this because you have seen how your desires have changed and have come into alignment with His will.

Psalm 37:4

⁴ Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

As you delight yourself in the Lord you begin to change and change for the better. You become one with Him and you begin to desire what He desires.

So what then is God's desire? What pleases Him? What is His number 1 commandment?

²³ *And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*

Now notice that John uses the word commandment as something singular yet goes on to express the commandment in two ways. **#1-** Believe on the name of Jesus & **#2** – Love one another

You see these are two inseparable realities. Faith and love go together!

Galatians 5:6

⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

There is an essential union between faith and love. Our faith works through love and that's what the Christian life is all about. **Avails:** useful

John then ends this section on love with verse 24...

²⁴ *Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*

The way that we stay connected with Him is by keeping His commandments. We abide in Him by obedience, and He abides in us by His Holy Spirit.

And here we have the THIRD “*by this you know*” that He being the Holy Spirit abides in you...

Romans 5:5

⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Aren't you so glad that our hope in Him doesn't disappoint? And the reason is because it is by the Spirit of God given to us that God's love has been poured out in our hearts and if His love has been poured out in us then it will overflow out into our lives.

You see this love isn't something that we need to work up, but rather it is given to us and flows through us as we abide in Christ in obedience.

Our focus must be on our connection to Christ and through that connection God will supernaturally produce the Fruit of the Spirit of love in our lives.

Jesus said this of the future believer after they received the Holy Spirit...

John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

But friends, Jesus is glorified, the Holy Spirit has been given and God's labor of love has been poured out in our lives.

And as recipients of this amazing love, our lives ought to become vessels for that love to overflow out of us to those around us. May we not shut our hearts to the needs He puts in front of us.

God desires that we would be settled and established in His love that we might have that absolute assurance and confidence before Him. And so, when our heart condemns us, **let us go to the higher court of His word** and to the God who is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

LET'S PRAY