

## How Can We Express Genuine Love to Others?

When I began this series from John 3:16, I mentioned that many people believe that this is the most well known verse in all the scriptures. Martin Luther called it the “Bible in miniature.”

We’ve seen several aspects of God’s love as shown to us in this verse. As I conclude this series, I want to give us something to meditate on. Although we’re incapable of imitating every aspect of God’s perfect love, God’s love is meant to be an example to imperfect people that will rightly encourage us in our love for others. To unpack this further, I want to briefly look at the first epistle of John and reference another verse that speaks of the “good news” of Jesus Christ.

John writes: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10) John follows Verse 10 with important encouragement from Verse 11: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” I’ll use 1 John 4:10 to call attention to some important ways in which we can express genuine love for one another:

— Genuine love *takes the initiative*. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us ...” God didn’t wait until we had our lives in order before he determined to save us. If he had, we would have no hope. To love others like God loved us means we don’t wait until they’re just the ideal person whom we’d want them to be before we show love to them. Just like we are, sometimes others are very unlovable. Therefore, loving this way — i.e., taking the initiative — is rarely easy. We can think about this in every situation — in the home, the church, in our jobs or other relationships. Parents: Do your children always wait for you to ask them before they help around the house? Church members: Do you actively seek ways in which to serve, or do you wait and serve only when you’re asked directly, if at all? Employees: Do you only do what you have to do to get by, or do you seek to take the burden off others? Genuine love takes the initiative. We see this truth in Isaiah 6. When the Lord wanted someone to go and tell the people about the judgment that was to come, he asked, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds immediately, “Here am I! Send me.” That’s an example of the kind of love that takes the initiative.

— Genuine love *acts sacrificially*. “... and sent his Son ...” Christ sacrificed his life for sinners. In Romans 5:8 we read: “... while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Are we sacrificing for others or are we merely doing the least that we can do to get by? A pastor once told this story. “Shortly after the American Civil War, a man in farm clothes was seen kneeling at a gravestone in the soldiers’ cemetery in Nashville, Tenn. An observer came up and asked, ‘Is that the grave of your son?’ The farmer replied, ‘No, I have seven children, all of them young, and a wife on my farm in Illinois. When the war came, I was drafted and, despite the great hardship it would cause, I was required to join the army. On the morning that I was to depart this man, my neighbors’ oldest son, offered to take my place in the war.’ The observer solemnly asked, ‘What is that you’re writing on his gravestone?’ The farmer replied, ‘I am writing, He died for me.’” We may

never be asked to give the greatest sacrifice of dying for someone else, but we're all called to follow Jesus Christ in loving others in such a way that acts sacrificially.

— Genuine love *meets real needs*. "... to be the propitiation for our sins." "Propitiation" is a word that teaches us that the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus turned away the wrath of God that sinners deserve, from those who trust Jesus by faith. God gave his Son so that all those who believe in him will truly have "eternal life." Our needs were great and God met those needs. We're required to perfectly obey the law of God and we cannot. And yet, Jesus Christ obeyed perfectly and his obedience is imputed or credited to our account; we needed our sins forgiven and our sin debt wiped away. Paul writes that God "forgave all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Col. 2:13-14) Because of God's amazing love that met the needs of his people, as you look around your little world, look for places that you can meet real needs that others have. Don't always gravitate toward the smallest thing that you can do but rather, seek out the thing that will take a heavy burden off another. It won't always be easy, but we want our love — although imperfect, to be sure — to point others to the love of God.

The pastor of the church that our family attended while I was in seminary in St. Louis, Mo. — the Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church PCA — once told a true story of a little girl who had been listening intently while he preached. When she went home after church she said to her mother: "Mom, didn't the pastor say that God lived inside of us?" Her mother replied, "Yes, dear, he did." "And didn't the pastor say that God is bigger than we are?" To which the curious mother replied, "Yes, honey, he said that, too." The little girl then remarked, "Well, if God lives on the inside of us — and if God is bigger than we are — won't he show through?"

Beloved, we want God's love to shine through us as we seek to show genuine love to others by means of taking the initiative acting sacrificially and seeking to meet real needs. Be comforted in the gospel truths we've seen in this series. God has done everything that we need.

By God's grace in Jesus Christ, those who believe in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus are God's children and we have eternal life in Christ.

*The Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton.*