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1 John 3:16-24

Five Love Languages: Acts of Service

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1 John 3:16-24 (New Revised Standard Version)

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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?  Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.  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. 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.

I grew up in a home with two working parents and school lunch was a big deal. I remember writing a note for my mom and taping it on the cup where she put her toothbrush. The note said, “Can you make my lunch?” I was perfectly capable of making my own lunch for school, but if my mom made my lunch, well, that was how I knew that she loved me. And today, when my kids take their backpacks and lunch bags from the car into the house so that I do not have to make 5 trips, that is an expression of their love for me.

We are talking about the five love languages that Gary Chapman shares in his book, The Five Love Languages: words of affirmation (loving through what we say and how we say it), receiving gifts (tangible, symbolic expressions of love), acts of service, physical touch, and quality time. Chapman says that we all experience and communicate love differently. Every one of us has one or two of the five love languages that we primarily identity with. If you do not know your love language, I want to encourage you to go online to [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com) and take a quick quiz. And the hope is that by talking about each of the love languages we will better be able to love. We are a people saved by grace who are called to love. Our life is a gift to God and we are called to love one another, to respect all people, to share with those in need. So, today we talk about acts of service.

Some of you may wonder, can vacuuming the floors really be an expression of love? Absolutely! Anything you do to ease the burden of responsibilities weighing on an Acts of Service person speaks volumes. The words he or she most want to hear is, “Let me do that for you.” Laziness, broken commitments, and making more work for them tell the Acts of Service love language person that their feelings don’t matter.

Love in action. Francis of Assist was known for making God’s love real in many different ways. He lived in Italy around 800 years ago. He is the one who now can be seen as the statue of the monk with birds and squirrels all around him. He left his wealthy merchant family to live a simple life of nature, preaching, and good works. I want to share with you a story and I hope that you will be able to hear how Francis practices the different love languages. Saint Francis of Assisi took a monk in training out for a day of preaching the gospel. As they left Assisi, they helped a farmer move his cart (Acts of Service). Down the road they talked with a merchant and listened to his problems (Words of Affirmation and Quality Time). Around noon they shared their meal with a hungry beggar (Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Receiving Gifts). Soon after lunch they prayed with a sick woman (Words of Affirmation, Quality Time). On their way back, they helped a woman carry her heavy load (Acts of Service). When they returned to the monastery at dark, the monk in training commented that the day was gone and they hadn’t preached to anyone. “My son,” Francis responded, “we’ve been sharing the gospel all day long.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Francis shared the gospel this way because this is how Jesus shared the Good News, through word and deed and time and gifts. Jesus had great conversations, washed the disciples’ feet, gave away bread, and listened to little children. Jesus loved others through love in action. In his Five Love Languages book, Gary Chapman shares a story about Michelle sitting in the living room working on her computer. She can hear sounds from the utility room, where her husband Brad is catching up with the piles of laundry. She smiles to herself. In the last couple of days Brad had cleaned the condo, fixed supper, and run the errands, all because Michelle was in the midst of finals for grad school. It made her feel content. It made her feel loved. Some people feel most loved when that love is demonstrated, when love is in action: cooking a meal, washing dishes, vacuuming, cleaning a toilet, changing the baby’s diaper, changing the cat’s litter box.

It reminds me of that song, “We will work with each other. We will work side by side. We will work with each other. We will work side by side. And we’ll guard each one’s dignity and save each one’s pride. And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Jesus put his love into action and we, as followers of Christ, still share the Good News this way today. Christians feed and clothe the poor, fight human trafficking, build water wells and hospitals and homes and schools. Serving others is worship, an offering of thanksgiving to God.

Maybe this is how you came to know the love of God, through the kindness of a friend, family member or even a stranger. Maybe the hunger to make a difference is what drew you to faith. Intentional acts to make God’s love real, and our love real. Looking for ways to serve and heal and provide. And going out of our way to do it, just like Jesus did. Senator from New Jersey, Cory Booker said, “In life, it is never the big battle, the big moment, the big speech, the big election. That does not change things. What changes things is every day, getting up and rendering small acts of service and love beyond that what’s expected of you or required of you.”

The scripture that we read today is so powerful. We know love by this that Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 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? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. People are in need all around us. What they say is a clue to what they need. What are they worried about? What are they complaining about?

Now, there are some people who have a hard time expressing their needs. We don’t want to appear weak or needy. We want to be self-sufficient. But, this is why God gives us each other. No one can do everything and no one goes through life without needing help. And on the other side, some people have a hard time serving. They hear Jesus’ words in Mark 10:45, “I have not come to be served but to serve” and they cringe. Servant to them means slave, and slaves have no choice but to serve. God isn’t asking us to be slaves. Love isn’t forced or manipulated or coerced. Love is always a choice. We follow Christ, out of gratitude. We choose to love and we choose to love in healthy ways. [Augustine of Hippo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo) said, “What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others. That is what love looks like.”

When I think about the Greenland Hills family, I am overwhelmed by how many people show their love for God through their Acts of Service for this church and its people. I think of those who teach our children in Sunday School or help with our children’s choir or volunteer with our youth group. I think of Brynn and David who lead our adult Sunday School class with such knowledge and grace. I think of those who have come to the church workdays last fall and those who will come October 11, ready to clean out gutters or clean out the attic. I think of Paul Kibby and Gary Travelstead who create such beautiful creations for our sanctuary to help us worship God. They are ready to show with their actions their love for God and for this church and its people. I think of those who just this morning were helping set-up the church pot-luck and those who will stay afterwards to clean up washing dishes and vacuuming Glory Be Hall. I think of those who volunteer with the food pantry Tuesday mornings at Emanuel Community Center. Ready to put their love into action. May we choose today as Christ did, to make God’s love real.

1. Shared by Derek Maul in his book, 10 Life-Charged Words. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)