

The Demand of Love

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- [0 : 0 0] Okay, good morning everyone. As Jesse just said, my name is Alan and I am one of the pastors here at One Harbor Havelock. Good morning to you all. It is such an honor to be here with you as we work through this series of 1 John titled The Way of Love.
- It is a letter to a church in danger of becoming increasingly unlike Jesus. They were still showing up doing Christian stuff, but you and I can do all those things and not be anything like Jesus.
- John is basically calling them back to the basics, like knowing God, encountering His love, and then living as His obedient, loving people in this world. John has already told us the ultimate commandment we are called to follow as Christians, to love. That's the title of the series.
- In this passage, he tells us again, but he goes into a bit more detail. He doesn't want us to miss this, repeating it to shape our identity and form us. Not only does this passage stand in the center of the book in terms of words, the actual number of words, but it is also theologically the heart of the work.
- John defines love for us, pulls back the curtain on it. He doesn't want us to have a view of love shaped by what we think, what you and I think love is. But what God's love is like.
- [1 : 2 0] So I'm going to read the passage. It's 1 John 3, 11 through 18. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
- We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. If you're new to the Bible and you're like, who in the world is Cain? We'll get there in a little bit, okay? Okay. And why did he murder him?
- Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.
- Whoever 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. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.
- But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.
- [2 : 2 0] This is the word of God. We all love love, right? Love is something just about everyone can agree on. I doubt you'll find many people who would say we need less love in the world.
- In fact, I bet that if you asked people what would heal and save the world, and you gave them a few multiple choice options, love would be the thing we would pick. What we all need is to love one another.
- I mean, one of the Beatles' greatest hits proclaimed, All you need is love. Everybody, all you need is love. All you need is love.

Love. Love is all you need. Right? There you go. That's what I'm talking about. Yeah, there you go. All right.

From the peanut gallery back there. So if we all know the right answer, what's the holdup? What's taking us so long? Why aren't we doing this? Why isn't the world a place full of peace, love, and harmony?

[3 : 24] John tells us here that we shouldn't be surprised, actually, if the world hates us. In other words, it's actually hate, not love, that is natural, that comes easily.

What we see about love in this passage is that it's harder than we think. In fact, more supernatural than we think. There is a natural way to treat people and a supernatural way.

The natural way is the way of the world, and the supernatural is the way of the gospel, the way of the cross. So we see that the way we naturally think is the selfish way. The way of the world is to do to others what they do to you.

You know, eye for an eye. You treat others how they treat you. I remember that back in the day, if someone made fun of me, I would break out a few of my famous your mama jokes. You know, like, your mama's so old, her social security number is number one.

Or your mama's so poor, the ducks bring her bread. Isn't that terrible? But, I mean, I did it. But, if others make you feel bad about yourself, well, we all do our best to make them feel bad about themselves.

[4 : 30] Right? I mean, and if others love you, then you love them. Because, obviously, they really have good taste. Right? We're all so easy to love. My wife can attest to that.

The way of the world, John says, is typified by Cain. That was mentioned in the scripture. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel. They were actually the first siblings. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel.

Cain was jealous of his brother Abel, whose sacrifice was received by God. Then he got angry. That anger turned into hate. And that hate ultimately turned into him murdering his own brother.

Now, we don't get too much detail on their relationship. I wish that were different. I find it so fascinating how quickly sin corrupted our human nature. However, the Bible uses it over and over again as a prototype for what human relationships are like between sinful people.

We all live in the shadow of Cain. We all might not murder our brothers, but we act out of self-interest. And we often seek to harm those who we feel have harmed us.

[5 : 35] We may not murder them, but maybe we want to kill their reputation. We want to turn others against them. We want to murder their happiness. Or we simply murder our relationship with them.

You cut them off. Like Kevin O'Leary says in the Shark Tank show, when he's done with people trying to pitch their business, you're dead to me. That's what he says. That is all totally natural in this sinful world we live in.

You hate me, I'll hate you. You make me feel bad about myself, I'll make you feel bad about yourself. So, you know, if your wife hurts your feelings, you say something hurtful back. If your boss belittles you, you put in a lackluster effort.

The natural way is the self-interested way. Even if you don't remember anything about the story of Cain and Abel, you probably remember what Cain said when God asked him where Abel was.

Cain said, am I my brother's keeper? I mean, speaking to the God of the universe, he already knew what happened. Am I my brother's keeper? That's the way of hate, the way of self-interest, and it's perfectly natural to us in our individualistic culture.

[6 : 46] I'm not my brother's keeper. I'm only my own keeper. I'm responsible for me. Because if I don't look after me, who will? But in contrast to the natural way to treat people, which treats people the way they treat us, true love treats others the way God treats us, not the way others treat us.

In verse 16 it says, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. The way of hate and self-interest, the way of the world, is to treat people based on how they treat us.

But the way of the gospel, the way of the cross, is to treat people based on how God treats us through Jesus Christ. Right? He laid down his life for us, so we treat others out of that.

Our actions toward others are not a direct response based on the way they act towards us, based on the way they talk about us or make us feel. Instead, they are to be a response based on how we have been treated by God through Jesus Christ.

The natural way is to say, am I my brother's keeper? But the gospel way to say, I am my brother's keeper. Flip those two little simple words, it's a huge difference in meaning.

[8 : 00] Because Jesus, my great older brother, was my keeper. He laid down his life for me when I least deserved it. When I didn't earn it. When I had my back turned on him.

When I never would have done the same for him. That is the supernatural way of love. This is where the rubber meets the road in our Christianity. Somehow that's become my little key phrase.

I don't know how, but. Will the world see something real? Something supernatural in the way we love? Or are we going to settle for being people who have a certain set of doctrines? We say we believe while continuing to treat people according to the same natural standards of the world.

Of self-interest and self-regard. This is where we actually have to take our Christianity and use it. John gets very practical. He gets right up in our grill.

My grill. Your grill. Right where we live. Love like this will disrupt your life. I want to just break down how this love works. How it acts. I think going through this practical process will be helpful for us.

[9 : 03] In verses 17 and 18 it says, But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, How does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

So I see there are three steps here that I think are worth looking in and how to love. They are really clear in 1 John. And I will also be referencing a book many of us have read by an author named Paul Miller, Love Walked Among Us.

It's a great book. If you haven't read it, you should probably check it out. First, you have to see your brother in need. Love looks. Then you don't close your heart, but open your heart.

That love, it actually enters in. And then you love in deed. Love actually acts. It gives. So first of all, we see that love looks. Love starts with looking.

With opening up your eyes and focusing on someone. What we focus our eyes on, we focus our hearts on. If you're anything like me, probably your greatest obstacle to loving people is that we're pretty oblivious of other people's problems.

[10 : 11] Why is that? Because we've got our own problems. I mean, right? They feel bigger. They feel bigger because they're happening to us. They're happening to me. They're happening to you. Of course they're more important.

They're bigger. I need constant reminders to lift my eyes off myself. To look up. To see what's going on. A friend of mine was on Instagram the other day. And someone shared a little inspirational meme.

And it took me back a bit. It said, Dear you, focus on yourself. Focus on yourself. Focus on yourself. Focus on yourself. As if I needed a reminder to do that.

That comes easy. Like breathing. It's easy to focus on yourself. Society has gotten to the point that we're so self-obsessed. We actually think we're not self-obsessed enough.

Isn't that crazy? The thing I need a constant reminder to do is focus on others. Jesus did this. Jesus, he actually saw people. And when he saw them, he focused on them.

[11 : 13] The New Testament tells us this all the time. In Matthew 9, 35 through 36, it says, And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus saw them. He saw their diseases.

He saw their afflictions. And he had compassion. So he healed them and told them the good news. Or I love this verse about Jesus seeing the rich young ruler. This is a good one here. Mark 10, verse 21 is the end of it.

And it says, And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, You lack one thing. Go. Sell all that you have and give to the poor.

And you will have treasure in heaven. And then come follow me. Jesus looked at him. And he saw his wealth. But he also saw his greed. He saw the hold that money and power had on his heart.

[12 : 13] And instead of thinking, What a selfish, arrogant little jerk. I'm going to make this guy look like an idiot. He's getting ready to experience some of my gospel-centered humble pie. No.

No, he loved him. He had compassion for him. We missed that part of the story. We looked right over that. He saw him, someone who looked like he had it all together.

And he saw even what he was going through. And he thought, I love you. And I want to set you free, too. We actually have a hard time filling our eyes with others.

We're busy. We're driven by our own agendas. To really look at someone else is a complete interruption of our lives. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows us how he wants us to live.

But do you remember the priest and the Levite who passed right by the wounded traveler? Too distracted? Too preoccupied? Have too many important things happening? Maybe they were in the middle of helping someone else.

[13 : 11] We don't know. But it prevented them from even seeing the person, the neighbor, right in front of him. Luke 10.33 says, But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

Paul Miller says, The Samaritan sees a person. The priest and the Levite, they see a problem. What do we see when we look at others? We can see people, or we can see problems.

Maybe we see other people as opportunities to advance ourselves in some way. I mean, either way, we haven't seen them as people like Jesus did. Try to imagine what Jesus' eyes were like.

I'd imagine that when he saw you, you felt truly seen. Like he wasn't just waiting for his turn to speak. He took his time with people. I certainly don't always do this.

In fact, usually when I fail, when I'm unkind to my wife, impatient with my kids, it's usually because I've failed to really see them and focus on them. I'm focused on myself, my thoughts, my agenda, my wants and needs, rather than the other person.

[14 : 22] And in those moments, the other person might actually be in the way of my wants. In those moments, I have to stop. I have to open my eyes. I have to make a decision and place that person's needs above mine.

Look at them truly and see they have needs and pains and wants and cares, just like mine. And I need to look and to listen. Love looks.

It definitely looks. But then, love enters into people's pain. John says, when we see our brother in need, don't close your heart. Open your heart.

When Jesus looked at others, he felt compassion. We've said that compassion is the single word that describes Jesus the most. compassion, the definition is, to draw near and enter into suffering with someone.

Love sees, but then it opens up and enters in. The need that is seen can't be unseen, so their problem becomes my problem. Love is a mind and a heart full of someone else.

[15 : 21] This, my friend, is hard. And the irony is that we all want this from everyone else. Right? We all want other people to cherish us. We want their minds to be full of us, for someone to be caring about how we are doing at any given moment, and yet we have the hardest time doing this for others.

I do it. I'm at work sometimes and I'm thinking, I wonder what Shelly's doing. Is she thinking about me? Is she laid out on the couch, you know, kick back, whatever, you know, while I'm here suffering?

Whatever. She's not. She's not. She's raising our four children and one more on the way, so she's busy. Jesus, of course, He does this well.

He looks at people and then He opens His heart and He enters into their world. Mark 8, 1 through 3, He says, In those days when again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples to Him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way and some of them have come from far away. Paul Miller says, Why does Jesus mention these observations?

[16 : 41] He's definitely getting down in the weeds with these observations. I think it's because nothing is obvious if it's not happening to you. With these words, Jesus shows us that love takes work.

He has to slow down. He has to put Himself in the crowd's shoes and think about their needs. I love that. Nothing is obvious that's not happening to you. And think about that.

How true that is for me. Entering into someone else's cares is completely non-obvious, non-intuitive. Empathy takes effort and that's the effort that love makes.

Liking someone is instinctive. Almost purely physical. But love thinks. It puts itself into the position of the other person. Love is imaginative, ingenious, inventive.

It finds ways of overcoming evil with good. We have to engage our imaginations in entering through the worlds of others so that we can love them. There's one more story where Jesus looks and enters in.

[17 : 41] It's found in the book of Luke, chapter 7, verses 11 through 15. It goes like this. Soon afterward, he went to a town called Nain and his disciples and a great crowd went with him and he drew near to the gate of the town.

Behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow. That's very important right there. And a considerable crowd from the town was with her and when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, do not weep.

I love this moment. Just imagine the searching eyes of Jesus. Got this huge crowd, tons of people, so much to be distracted by but Jesus picks out this woman and his eyes meet her pain.

It goes on, then he came up and touched the beer and the bearer stood still and he said, young man, I say to you, arise. And the dead man sat up and began to speak and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Jesus' eyes never leave this woman. He's not thinking about the crowds of people watching him, how they might be impressed by his power or what opportunities for advancement might open up.

[18 : 50] He's thinking of the need in front of him, the son's physical need and the mother's emotional pain. He fully entered into their world. So Jesus sees people, he opens his heart to people and then he acts for them.

This is the same process John gives us as well. He says, don't close your heart and then don't just love in word and tongue but in deed and in truth. Love acts and it gives.

Jesus has shown us how to love, look, feel and then help. If we help someone but don't take the time to look at the person and feel what he or she is feeling, our love is cold. And if we look and feel but don't do what we can to help, our love is cheap.

Love does both. So just don't throw \$20 at a person. That's treating them like a problem, not a person. But love does have to act or actually it's not love.

Whatever the Bible talks about the love and compassion of Jesus is describing him acting. He's healing. He's washing feet. He's forgiving. The most vivid act of love the world has ever seen is Jesus hanging on the cross shouting, it is finished.

[19 : 59] I say I love my wife but do I serve my wife? Do I forgive my wife? Do I bless her with my words? With my hands?

Certainly not all the time. If not, what on earth do I mean when I say I love her? I say I love my church. Do I give to my church so that I can be part of providing for the needs of my brothers and sisters and the mission we share?

I say I love my community but do I serve my community? Love has to be more than good intentions. Love just doesn't act but more specifically love gives because love is inherently sacrificial.

It's costly. It's expensive. When the Bible talks about how much God loves us many times it says here's how much God loved us that he gave. Love is generous. You can think that you're a loving person but love is more than feelings.

Love isn't all about liking everyone, about feeling good vibes. It's about giving. If you think you are loving but that love isn't reflected by generosity with your money, generosity with words of affirmation, generosity with your time, you're not loving in any sense that matters to anyone else.

[21 : 12] It's no secret that we live in a consumeristic culture. We have more stuff than ever and we want more stuff than ever. Our eyes are often full of what we want. We're focused on our next purchase, our next experience, our next trip.

Or our next thing. And what we look at and focus on is what our hearts are set on. A culture of consumption driving our focus and attention ever inwards, shriveling up generosity.

In fact, do you know that as the average American income increases, percentage given to charity goes down? Statistics say those who make under \$25,000 a year give on average 12% of their income to charity.

Those who make between \$50,000 and \$75,000 it decreases to 5%. And those who make half a million to \$1 million a year the average given to charity is 2.8%.

Isn't that sad? It's hard for love centered generosity to grow in the soil of consumerism. It takes a massive intentional effort.

[22 : 16] It takes spiritual power. It takes prayer. It takes an encounter with grace. It takes running to Jesus. It takes surrounding yourself with loving, generous, sacrificial relationships.

It's not easy and I'm not there all the time by any stretch of the imagination. It's a battle. To love is a battle. A battle with my eyes to truly see people. A battle with my mind to allow my imagination to enter the world of others.

A battle with my heart to open up and care about another person as an image bearer of God. A battle with my hands to open up my death grip on my wallet and put my money where I say my heart is.

That's the spiritual battle we're in. And John says it's a life and death battle. There's a very ironic thing that happens in this passage. John paints a picture of love that is like Jesus' self-giving.

He says Jesus laid down his life for us and so we have to lay our life down for others. What? That means love is a kind of death. It's sacrificial.

[23 : 22] It's costly. It hurts. And yet John says unless you love like this you abide in death. Verses 14 and 15 says we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

Whoever 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. So if you live like Cain in a world of hate defined by treating people like they treat you you don't have life.

You abide in death. Only love leads to life. Selfishness leads to death. The irony is that the world's way of living which is all about self-interest and self-preservation and self-regard does not lead to greater life and joy like we think and believe it will.

Nope. It leads to the death of self. The spiritual death. The irony is that abiding in what you think will give you life without worrying about the lives of others is actually abiding in death.

It's very easy to die this death in our culture which is the double whammy of being individualistic and consumeristic. Our individualism tells us that we are ultimately responsible for ourselves that somebody else's problem is just that somebody else's problem ain't my problem I got my own problems and our consumerism tells us that we can have the life we want we can acquire it for ourselves we can pull ourselves up we can get it you work hard you put your nose to the ground you can make yourself this is America our individualism and consumerism seem to promise comfort and pleasure but they actually leave us spiritually empty individualism doesn't enrich our souls because God made our souls for love and love is focused on others consumption doesn't enrich our souls because God made your soul for love and love just doesn't consume love gives this is hard because it means sacrifice because it's costly it's dangerous it's risky every part of it looking is risky once you see it you can't unsee it there's no rewind on your brain opening your heart and entering someone else's world is risky once you do that you might have to rethink your own world and giving is risky what if they don't deserve it what if they don't respond with gratefulness it can feel risky and reckless to love this way what if you give and give and receive nothing in return it's vulnerable to love at all is to be vulnerable love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken if you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one not even an animal wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries avoid all entanglements lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness selfishness but in that casket safe dark motionless airless it will change it will not be broken it will become unbreakable impenetrable irredeemable c.s. lewis that's some heavy statement right there to avoid the risk of love to avoid the cost of love to avoid the vulnerability of love is to choose death and remember gospel love doesn't love for what it gets out of people it doesn't love people based on how they treat us but on how

[26 : 57] God treats us and God loved us to death when we were his enemies Jesus didn't die for us because we were so lovable he treated us according to the love of God not according to how he was treated he came down into the world into a world full of canes you and I into a world of hate of envy of revenge and he loved us he saw people who felt unseen he opened his heart to people who felt totally ignored by the world his love was much more than talk he acted towards others in healing and compassion he gave he gave his life but even though he lived in love Jesus Christ still descended into death for us so that we could be forgiven healed and invited into his life his love at the center of our faith is not our love but his love it's our only hope of life it's our only hope to be changed

Jesus wants to save us from the coffin of our selfishness it's scary it's risky it might even feel reckless but Jesus is calling us John 13 35 says by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another Jesus wants his church to be like a city on a hill shining a light of love for the world to see unfortunately unfortunately this is not always the case we see bitterness we see division we see selfishness if that describes your experience with a local church may I just say I'm sorry I'm sorry what the world doesn't need to see is a church that looks and loves like the world treating people based on merit based on how they have treated us nope the world needs to see a church that treats others like God has treated us he's been so good to us that it spills over and we are compelled to love as the band comes up we've got a few ways to respond here first of all if you're here and you're not yet a Christian our culture tells you that true happiness and love is found in stuff

I need more stuff however we continually find ourselves shocked when people with stuff turn out to not be happy we think hopelessness looks a certain way because we believe the lies we believe that money sex and power are the real answers if you have them you can't be in want it's impossible but in reality we see the opposite is true Jesus is calling you today to see him to behold true love Jesus wants you to see him seeing you he sees you he sees the real you he sees the real me we're all jacked up and he still loves you he sees you not for what you can do for him not just for how you have wronged him he sees you through the lens of compassion with love he wants in and he has acted if you're here and you're already a Christian it says by this we know love that he laid down his life for us the call today isn't love others and then

God will send his only son no we don't love so that God will love us we love because he has so loved you and me the question is how is that spilling over stop spending all your effort trying to earn God's love and start spending that effort on loving others like he has loved us we do that by reminding ourselves through communion the greatest act of love was shown to us by Jesus Christ in his death our hope is not our small love but his great love his broken body and his shed blood the fuel for love is not guilty is not guilt in my failure to love it's grace and wonder at his love for me the center of our worship is lifting up his love giving him glory for it take a moment with me to repent for the individualism in your heart the consumerism the tendency to see people as problems or opportunities instead of truly looking entering in and giving know that even now his eyes are on you he entered into your world into your sin and he gave himself for you for me in him we are loved we are seen we are forgiven our future is secure in him and his love we don't have to consume to our bright future only a bigger picture of

Jesus will help us love