

The Distinguishing Mark of Love

If you have your Bibles today, I'd like you to turn with me if you would to 1 John Chapter 3. We're gonna be looking today at verses 11 through 20 in our continuing series "Living With Certainty" and a message called "The Distinguishing Marks of Love."

John is writing to a group of people whose faith was being undermined. Gnostic heretics, false teachers were trying to convince the people all the time that they really didn't belong to God and that they were the ones on the right track. It's the same message that the culture and many of the cults are putting into our minds today, but John wanted his people to know that they could live with certainty, they could know whether or not they really belong to God. One of the ways is that upon your life is the distinguishing mark of love. This is the way John put it in 1 John Chapter 3. He really starts the thought in verse 10, the message we looked at last time:

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

¹¹ This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us: ²⁰ For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Let's pray for a moment.

Father, this is really powerful stuff, and there's a lot of this that makes me uncomfortable. To be honest, I'm not sure I'm living this out all the time the way you want. But I don't have to be afraid of that, I need to learn what it is you want and what it is you're trying to accomplish in me and through me as you are with all of us.

Thank you, God, that our lives are to be distinguished by how we live and how we act. The truth will be seen in how we love. I pray today you'll speak and teach us so that we may learn more of these things and bring glory to your name. We thank you, God, for this. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Karla and I were at a local crafts fair a week ago Saturday looking around at all kinds of interesting stuff, and I was off wandering by myself. On this table I saw this large bear. It looked like a Boyds Bear figurine, one of the largest I've ever seen. Now, Karla has a few of these little

Boyd's Bears in her collection. I thought, "Wow, what a great chance to score a big thing in a place like this. I can probably get it dirt cheap. I'll give it to her for Christmas. She'll think I'm a hero."

So I looked at this thing. It had all the marks I could see. It had all the detail. It had the face. It had the eyes. It looked like a real Boyd's but then I looked for the distinguishing mark of the Boyd's label on the paw or on the foot and it didn't have it. This was a very clever knock-down, but it wasn't the real deal because, if you know anything about Boyd's Bears or Boyd's products, somewhere on the product there will always be the little stamp that it's a genuine Boyd's.

You know, I realized as I went through that experience that there's a mark upon the life of every Christian identifying them as to whether or not they are the real deal. "The distinguishing mark of a Christian," John says, "is love." You remember in John 13 in the sermon in the upper room when Jesus was telling the disciples the night before he died that he was leaving and that he was going to the cross? Do you remember in John 13 verse 34. He said:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Love is the distinguishing mark. Apparently, John never forgot the impact of those words:

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

We've been saying for weeks now that John writes this letter to help the people he loved to live a life of certainty and to not be led astray by the false teachers that were infecting the church. John continues to give the distinguishing marks of a true believer, the chief of which he says is that they love one another. As I mentioned, he said in verse 10,

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

¹¹ This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

John said to them, "This is the message you have heard from the beginning." That word "beginning," as we saw in John, has to do with origins. This message had its origin in God and it's never changed. Love is not the application of the message. John is saying, "Love is the message." God loves us, so he gave his Son. We love God, so we give ourselves to loving each other. Love is the message and the goal that God intended for humanity from the beginning, but that goal, that message, was corrupted by evil when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and that evil played its way out when Cain killed his brother Abel proving that Cain never belong to God because he had no love for his brother in his heart.

John told these Christians, "Don't be surprised if the world hates you," especially if you're living the righteous life of Christ because the world hates righteousness. It's the distinguishing mark of those who belong to the evil one. So when you are living for Christ and the world hates you, don't be surprised at that. "But," John said, "you are not to hate. You are to love, and that will be

the distinguishing mark that proves to you and to the world that you really belong to God.” That’s why John tells them, “We can be certain that we are God’s children when we live lives marked by love.”

How will that distinguishing mark of love be seen? John says that we will see it when we respond to our brothers by laying down our lives. And we’ll see it when we respond to our brother’s need with action and in truth. The distinguishing mark of love will be seen when we respond to our brothers by laying down our lives. Here is what he said in verse 16:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Laying down our lives is the opposite of self-promotion.

Marc Halevi is a prize-winning photojournalist. One of the things he’s most noted for is a series of photos he took in December of 1991 when he was employed by the Lawrence Eagle Tribune Newspaper in eastern Massachusetts to film an Atlantic storm that was beginning to rage near place called Plum Island off the coast of Massachusetts. He said:

As the winds blew and the waves pounded the shore, he was snapping his pictures when he noticed a woman standing near the water looking out at sea. Suddenly, a wave came up, knocked out the sand beneath her feet, and she plunged into the surf. As he continued to snap his photos about 50 feet away, he saw this lady laying helpless in the surf with her hand up needing help. He noticed down the beach was a lifeguard and another man who came running to her aid. As they came they stopped. As she reached out to them they did not reach out to her, and then suddenly a huge wave, about 20 or 25 feet high he estimated, came crashing down on the beach. When that went out to sea the woman was gone. The body of 48-year-old Sandra Cook washed up on shore days later about five miles away.

A photojournalist, a lifeguard, and another unidentified man all stand and watch as a wave sweeps a woman away to her death. Contrast that with what happened at a New York subway station the first week of January in 2007. After entering in New York subway station, 19-year-old film student, Cameron Hallopeter, suffered a seizure while waiting for a train. As his body convulsed out of control, the young man stumbled down the platform and fell onto one of the tracks directly in the path of an inbound train. You may have remembered this. It was all over the news and in the newspapers.

Fortunately, a 50-year-old construction worker named Wesley Autrey noticed his distress. Standing on the platform with his two young daughters, Autrey, realized that nobody else in the station was gonna do anything. According to later interviews, he decided, “I’m the only one to do it.” Placing himself in great danger, Autrey jumped down onto the tracks, grabbed hold of this young man, put his body over the top of him, and rolled with him into a drainage trough cut between the two tracks. An instant later, that commuter train thundered over both of them with only inches to spare. Amazingly, neither man was injured.

One man takes pictures while a woman drowns. Another man lays down his life for a stranger. John tells this church, “The Gnostics and the false teachers are the ones who stand by every day claiming to know God. They see the needs and do nothing. They will not get involved.” They are like the man standing on the beach with a camera. “But you,” John said, “are to be like the man in the subway station who lays down his life for a man he doesn’t even know.” He said in verse 16:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

People, don't miss the contrast that John is building here between Cain and Jesus. Cain was the son of Adam and Eve, the brother of Able. You remember in Genesis Chapter 4 we learned that Cain and Able both bring an offering to God. Abel's offering is accepted; Cain's offering is rejected. Many times people say, "Well, it's because God like the sacrifice of the flock better than the fruit of the field" and all of that. I don't believe that has anything to do with it. What was in the offering didn't matter. It was the man presenting the offering that made the difference.

God could see the evil in Cain's heart. He knew Cain didn't really belong to God, and he knew he didn't love his brother. When God turned down Cain's offering it says in Genesis Chapter 4 that Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. Wouldn't you think that if God says, "**That offering's not acceptable,**" that somebody would say,

"Why is it not acceptable?" But instead he just got angry, which is what a lot of people do. If we don't get what we want from God, people just get angry but ought to ask the question, "Why do I not get what I'm asking from God?" Genesis 4 verse 6:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

John said in 1 John 3:12:

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

God didn't make Cain kill Abel by rejecting his offering, God rejecting Cain's offering because he saw there was no love for God or his brother in his heart. So when God rejecting Cain's offering, the state of Cain's heart was revealed when he hated and killed his brother. God already saw the hatred there. He knew he was a murderer. He knew he didn't love God, and he knew he didn't love his brother. He knew he didn't belong to him, so he rejected the offering because the offering was not for God. It was a show.

You remember at the end of this passage in verse 20, "For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." He knows what I think. He knows that you think. He knows what I do. He knows what you do. He knows every thought and motive of our heart. He knows those who truly worship him and those who don't. Cain had no love in his heart so he took a life. The contrast is that Jesus is love, and he laid down his life. We who belong to Jesus will do the same.

Verse 16:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

That word "laid down" is a word that means "to bow" or "to put under." It's the idea of seeing others as more important than yourself. It isn't putting ourselves down. We are children of God. We are infinitely valuable to God. It isn't that we are less important than others. We're not, but we are to see others as more important than ourselves and treat them that way.

It's the same message that Paul taught the churches he led. You remember in Philippians 2 verse 1:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love –

The same love for God, the same love for each other

being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. But, in humility consider others better than yourselves.

It changes the way you respond to people.

⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of the others.

Where did Paul learn that? He learned it from Jesus. Philippians 2 verse 5:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (or held on to);
⁷ but made himself nothing
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

I had a man ask me once, “How far do we have to go with this loving others and self-sacrifice thing?”

I said, “Never further than the cross. Never further than the cross.” Verse 9:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

You see, when people see us loving like that, laying down our lives for others, considering others more important than ourselves, and responding to them that way, that kind of love will glorify God because you and they will know that that love is marking you as belonging to God. That's what Jesus did.

Jesus told the disciples on the Mount of Olives shortly before he died, that in the last days people's love will grow cold. You remember in Matthew 24 verse 10:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

That's what's gonna mark the end times, that growing lack of love. Paul told Timothy that the lack of love will increase in the last days and manifest itself in all kinds of selfish and evil behavior. Do you remember? 2 Timothy 3 verse 1:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents.

If we had time, we could develop the whole tie with that to whole gang thing that we're seeing today.

Ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, --

You see that?

unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

Does anybody see this happening?

⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

These people who live like this will be claiming that they are more and more spiritual. Paul said:

Have nothing to do with them.

John said, “Our lives be marked by love as seen in a willingness to lay down our lives for others.” And as the world has less and less love, what a chance for the love of Christ to shine in his church.

This love that John is describing is the word “agape.” It’s the unconditional love of God. Nobody is surprised by that. So John is saying, “We lay down our lives, not simply because Jesus did, but because in laying down his life Jesus was revealing what agape is.”

Glenn Barker, professor at Fuller Seminary, in his commentary wrote, “Love is denial of self for another’s gain.” Love is denial of self for another’s gain. That’s what it is. It’s not only what Jesus did in the past, it’s what he’s continuing to do now through the lives of those in whom he lives. You see, Jesus loved; therefore, he laid down his life. Now, it’s important to God’s people in whom he lives to continue to lay down their lives because Jesus is laying down his life now through us. That’s what makes this important. It’s not about us; it’s all about him.

John said, “When you see this kind of love manifest in you, you will know with certainty that you belong to God. You and others will see Christ in you.”

Not only in laying down our lives, but the distinguishing mark of love will be seen when we respond to our brother’s need with action and in truth. Here’s the way John put it verse 17:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us: ²⁰ For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Erwin Lutzer is the senior pastor of the great Moody Church in Chicago. He is also the author of a number of books, one of which is called *When a Nation Forgets God* published by Moody Press in 2010. In that book he retells the story of a Christian who was living in Germany during the rise of Hitler. This is what the man wrote:

I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I consider myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it because after all what could anyone do to stop it.

A railroad track ran behind our small church. Each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was the screams of Jews being carried like cattle in these cars.

Week after week, the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming, and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed and no one talks about that anymore, but I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God, forgive me, forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians and yet did nothing.

You and I pass by trainloads of people every day that are lost and dying. We don't hear their screams all the time because they're not screaming. In fact, many of them don't know they're lost and dying. There are people sitting right next to us every week in church or across the aisle who have enormous needs. Sometimes we hear of those needs, and we don't do anything.

I want you to know I think our congregation is very loving and very giving. I think John's contribution probably was too, and yet he's admonishing them to make sure that they are not loving just with words but that their love is seen in action and in truth. John said in verse 17:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

The word "actions" is the word "deeds." It's a word that refers to the works that demonstrate the reality of our faith. The word "truth" is the word "objective reality." It's "integrity of character." It means that our life, how we live, actually matches what we profess. There's an integrity of objective reality that we live actually what we profess to be. So we are to demonstrate love through things we do to meet the needs of others as a sign that our love is objective reality, consistent with the character of Christ and not just in words. John said, "It is a response to human need motivated by love." Verse 17:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

You can extrapolate that out. Material possessions could be anything. How could you have anything that can meet another's need and you see it but you don't respond. If that's the case, then how can the love of God be in you? The material possessions were particularly important because in John's day that was acute. For many of these people who committed to Christ, they would lose everything. Many would be cut off from their family. Many would have no hope of employment in any village where they had professed Christ, and many of them would find themselves wholly dependent upon the church. John is saying, "How can you know these needs are real and yet you're not doing anything to meet them?" John said, "We need a response to human need motivated by love." The key to understanding this is in the words "sees his brother in need" in verse 17:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need."

It's important because if we don't understand what John's saying, we're gonna run around giving money out to everybody standing on a street corner holding up a sign, and what we may actually be doing is not loving at all. It may be perpetuating or enabling a sin problem that needs to be addressed so we really need to be careful how we do this. John understood that too. So he used the word "to see" which means "to observe" or "to know" or "to investigate carefully." Because, you see, it's not just people telling you they have a need because some people lie. It's

not just responding to what you perceive, but it's looking into things a little deeper because not everybody who has a perceived need has a real need. They may be perpetuating a problem that you're just enabling if you're not careful of what you're doing.

I've learned this the hard way over the years. I remember the family who came and said they needed help with food and rent. After a few questions, we looked a little deeper and found out this family is taking home \$5,000 a month but they are very irresponsible with their money. They were using it on all kinds of things except paying bills and meeting the needs of their family, and they were expecting us in the name of Christ to bail them out of that situation. Well, we can help with food on their table but we're not going to do that without them addressing the core issue that is creating the problem. So just throwing money at that is not what God's asking us to do.

Or I'll never forget the family who called one time needing diapers for their baby. I go buy the diapers. I get their address. I go by their house. I knocked on the door. They open the door. There's half a dozen adults in there drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, watching football on television. There's stacks of diapers around the couch they've gotten from other churches to whom they've made this call who also probably supplied the pizza and everything else that they're taking care of there. I realized God's not asking me to respond to every need without making sure the need is real. It might make me feel better to go get diapers and throw it at somebody, but I actually am participating in their sin and their deception.

Or the guy holding the sign that we all see "Homeless and hungry." They're all over the place. Sometimes they are homeless, and sometimes they are hungry, and sometimes they're just trying to get money for some purposes you and I wouldn't support. Now, when they stand in between traffic I can't stop and get out of the car and talk to them without angering everybody behind me on the left turn light, so I can't always talk to them. But when I can, when I'm off to the side of the road, or I see some of them walking around, or they come up and approach me in a parking lot, that's a different story.

I was over by Target one day and this guy approaches me. He held a sign in his hand. He's obviously been out there on the median holding the sign just moments before. He walked over and he came up to me and he said, "Do you have any money for food."

I said, "Well, are you hungry?"

He said, "Yeah, I'm hungry."

I said, "Well, you know what? I won't give you any money, but how about we go right in here. I'll take you right in here and I'll buy you whatever you want for lunch."

This is a quote. He said to me, "I'm not gonna eat that garbage."

I had just eaten lunch in there which made me rethink how I was eating among other things, but that's what he said, "I'm not gonna eat that garbage."

I said, "Well, I can't help you then because I ain't gonna give you money because you're not hungry. I don't know what you're gonna do with this, but I'm not gonna perpetuate your problem. Sorry, pal."

God is not asking us to give money or assistance to everyone who asks. And we are to be careful lest we are found enabling their lies and their sin of irresponsibility. I have found over time, usually just giving the money is not the answer. If someone needs help with their rent, it's best to go help give the money to their landlord than it is to give money to them generally. If they have need for help with their PG&E, it's better to go down to PG&E and actually put something on their bill than it is to give them money. Or if they're hungry, you take them to the grocery

store and buy them groceries or take them in and buy them a meal. If they say they need clothes for their kids, you say, "Let's go get some. Get your kids, and let's go down and we'll get them an outfit for school or we'll buy them some new shoes," or whatever you can do.

The point is, John was not telling his people to start throwing cash at everybody who tells you they have a need. That might make you feel better, but that's not going to solve the problem, and that's not love. In fact, you can throw money at something sometimes just to ease your conscience and you're not loving the people at all. So we have to be careful with it. He used the word, "to see your brother in need," which means that you know them somewhat, you've asked a few questions, you've determined with your own eyes that the need you see is real. It's a genuine need in their life.

Now, if you see that need and then you decide it's real and then, "I'm not gonna do anything about it."

John said, "How can the love of God be in you to see the need and know it's real, and you have the means but you don't do anything." That's what John's talking about. In fact, he said, "If you have no pity on them, how can the love of God be in them?" That phrase "have no pity" literally means "to shut up the bowels of your compassion." You don't feel in your gut a responsibility to help when you have a real need and you could do it and the need is real. You're not getting led astray. You're not being lied to. This is genuine and you can help but now you're not. How can the love of God be in you? Jesus would never do that.

That's what the Gnostics and the false teachers did. You remember, in John's day they were claiming to be the enlightened ones. "We've got the real line on Jesus. We know who he is. You guys are duped. You're illiterate. You're ignorant. You're following and listening to teachers like John and the word. You need to listen to us."

John said, "Don't you be swayed by these people telling you you don't know Christ. They are the ones who don't know him. They claim to have the truth, but I know they don't have the truth," John said, "because they don't have the actions responding to human need. Verse 18:

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Glenn Barker once wrote in his commentary that love that fails to respond in action to genuine need is not only empty it is blasphemous. It's a violation of truth. It is a misrepresentation of God. Verse 17:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

You remember what Paul said to the Corinthian church in the famous love chapter 1 Corinthians 13 verse 1:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

I can have all the gifts in the world, but if I'm not practicing love I'm just noise.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I am the pastor of a church who brings a great message every week but doesn't have to actually live it out when I see people in need, I'm nothing.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

If I go do all these things, throw money at people that need it, and actually go out to serve at the COC, but I don't love people, I'm down there more to ease my own conscience, then I'm not gaining anything. I'm not gaining anything. But when the truth is seen in actions because we love people, God said, "**Now that makes a difference. That makes a difference.**"

Faith without works is dead. Do you remember what James said in James 2 verse 14?

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

When you see that kind of love in you, you can be certain that it's God in you. Why is this important? Because in John's day the Gnostics and false teachers were undermining the faith of people. They would say to them, "Well, if you were really smart you would follow us. If you really were in Jesus, you'd be doing this for us."

The people were starting to wonder, "You know, maybe they're right. If I really was a Christian, I would be giving them money. I would be passing it out to everybody I saw." You can start to question your own heart. John said in verse 19:

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth.

When we lay down our lives and we're willing to meet genuine needs because God's enabled us to do it, this then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. There are times we feel guilty about it, like, are we doing the right thing? John said, "When you see these things in your life you don't have to feel guilty about your responses and you don't have to condemn yourself because you're not meeting every need out there. You're meeting the ones that God's showing you that he is enabling you to meet. As you do that, you are confirming that God is right, you really belong to him. So don't listen to those who tell you if you are really a Christian you'd do this for me. You might be able to say to them, "If your need is determined to be genuine, maybe I will help you."

God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything. He sees everything we do. He knows our motivations. He sees the things that nobody else sees. So whether anyone else ever recognizes what you do, God sees it and he knows that you are doing it out of a heart of love. John said:

¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us: ²⁰ For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Shane Claiborne in his book, *The Irresistible Revolution*, was writing about a summer he spent in the slums of Calcutta with Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa is the Catholic nun who founded The Sisters of Charity which works amongst the poorest of the poor around the world. They now have about 4,500 nuns and sisters involved in this as well as others in, I think, 133 countries. It's amazing how this has spread. Shane Claiborne was writing about what he observed from Mother Theresa each day. This is just one of the things he noticed. He said:

People often ask me what Mother Theresa was like. Sometimes it's like they wonder if she glowed in the dark or had a halo.

She died about 1997, 87 years old.

She was short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even ornery like a beautiful, wise, old granny. But there's one thing I'll never forget and that was her feet. Her feet were deformed. Each morning in mass I would stare at them. I wondered if she had contracted leprosy, but I wasn't going to ask, of course. "Hey, Mother, what's wrong with your feet?"

So one day a sister said to us, "Have you noticed her feet?" We all nodded. We were curious. She said, "Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone. Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair so she digs through and finds them, and those are the ones she keeps for herself. Often they don't fit. Years of doing this has deformed her feet. Years of loving her neighbor as herself has deformed her feet.

This is the kind of fasting that creates the divine longing for justice, where our feet become deformed by a love that places our neighbors above ourselves.

You know, some people wonder, "Is Mother Teresa really a Christian or is she really just a good Catholic lady out doing good works who really needs to be saved?"

Jesus said, "**You will know they are my disciples when they love one another.**" Make no mistake, no one, not even Mother Teresa can be saved by sin from good works. You have to come to Christ or you don't come at all. But if Jesus lives in you, it will show by the way that you love, and a willingness to lay down your life for others, to jump in at times where other people will not jump in. It is not self-preservation to seeing others more important than yourself. It will also be seen not just in words, but in action and in truth.

In fact, John said, "This is how you'll know you're in the truth, because you will see the actions of love coming from your life. And when you see these in your life, you'll know with certainty that you belong to God." John said in verse 11:

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

Verse 14:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.

Lord, I really need you to help me with this. I am not content. I'm not content with just the love of word only. I don't get it right all the time, and I don't have the means to meet every need I see, but I pray that you would help me to have a willingness to lay down my life to truly see and respond to others as more important than me. It will change the way I treat people and that when needs are assessed to be genuine and you've put in my hands the means to do it, that you would help me to respond in action and in truth.

I want to thank you for this congregation, Lord. I've never seen one like it. I've never seen so many people that are willing to do so much in response to human need. I know the love of God is shining through this congregation. I'm praying, God, you'll give us wisdom and discernment and the willingness out of a heart of love to do even more the right way, your way, as you direct, then not only will we know that we are ones who belong to God, but that the world will know it because as love grows cold, your love will shine even more. And when you're lifted up you'll draw all men to yourself. We thank you, God, for this. Love through us. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.