

The Lasting Works of Love

Our Identity in Christ

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Please turn to with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1. We come this morning to the last paragraph of this first chapter, 1 Peter 1. I remind you that we've seen the purpose of 1 Peter is to prepare believers, Christians, in the first century for a time of tribulation and persecution. His theme really is encapsulated in two English words in 1 Peter 5.12 where he says "stand firm." He wants those who follow Christ to stand firm amidst increasing opposition. He understands that the cultural hostility is growing, social animosity is intensifying, spiritual enmity is becoming more obvious and pointed, and political persecution is right around the corner, and so he wants Christians to be prepared to stand and to endure. And so that's the purpose of this whole letter, and we've seen as we've looked at how he begins this message that is intended to strengthen them for hard times ahead, he begins by laying a foundation of saying, "Hey, you need to be mindful of all that God has done for you and be intentionally thanking God for the work that he's done for us in Christ." That's what he starts with in verses 3 to 12. After the salutation in verses 1 and 2 of the chapter, in verses 3 to 12, the next 10 verses, he deals with all the things that we have to be thankful for. He gives seven different glorious blessings that we've received. He says, actively thank God for this. This is foundational. And then he moves in the next section, verses 13 to 25, which we are completing this morning, to four foundational pillars, as it were, that you build on that foundation of gratitude, that foundation of thankfulness for what God has done. Now you build four pillars and we've noted that there's four key Greek imperatives in these verses that really are like the pillars that he wants us to build upon. He says in verse 13, to fix your hope on the grace to be given to you at the return of Christ. That is, fix your hope on the Second Coming. Fix your hope on eternity and what God is going to do for us. That's the first pillar. The second pillar in verse 15, the imperative, be holy. That is, see yourself as set apart unto God, belonging to God, that your whole being, your whole life belongs to God and is set apart unto his purpose. That's what it means to be holy, to be set apart from the common to that which is sacred. Then last time we saw the third imperative, the third pillar is to conduct yourselves in fear, that everything that we do, remember conduct yourself means when you go here, when you go there, whatever it is you're thinking about as you do whatever you're doing that God is watching you. Conduct yourselves in fear is those who call upon a Father who judges all without partiality. He's looking at our work and so we should be living everything that we do, bring it into the presence of God. And today we come to the fourth imperative which we're going to see in verse 22 and that is to love one

another fervently. To love one another fervently. And so the title of the message is "The Lasting Work of Love." The lasting work of love or the lasting works of love which we are called to.

The imperative we're going to see that we're focusing on is love one another fervently. What does that mean? We're going to see that he exhorts us to love and reminds us that this is the the most enduring thing that we can do is to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. You want to leave a mark on the world? Then labor to love your brothers and sisters. This is the force of what we're going to see Peter is calling us to see this morning. Enduring work of love.

So let's read, we'll read the entire section, verses 13 to 25, but we're focusing on verses 22 to 25 and the command to love one another fervently.

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, 25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to You in need of grace mindful of our sinfulness, mindful that apart from the blood of Christ we can't come into Your presence; we rejoice that we can through His great sacrifice. Come boldly though and we come now boldly asking that You would give us the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts, that You would make Your word which is living and active, make it alive and active in our hearts, that You would send forth Your light and Your truth and You would let them lead us to Your

holy hill to the place of Your habitation and for the glory of Your Son. We pray this in His name. Amen.

So the lasting value of the work of love is what we want to look at this morning. He says in verse 22 love one another fervently from the heart, fervently love one another from the heart. What I want us to do is, first of all, we've got three points this morning and the first point is the exhortation to the work because it's really he's calling us to the work of love. It's the lasting work. This is a key part of what he's doing. It's that which will not perish. This is why he brings up and with great emphasis the word of God at the end, that it's the living and enduring word of God. You've been born again not of perishable seed. The reason he brings that up in this context is to tell us you have a new nature that is imperishable and when you love one another you are building on the imperishable work in your life and the life of other believers and it will last forever. And so it is of supreme importance. And so the first thing we want to look at is the exhortation to the work. It's a command. It's an imperative. It's one of the four Greek imperatives in this passage. It looks like there's more commands in the English because the way it translates from the participles but really there are just four commands in the original language from verse 13 to verse 25. Those are the ones I mentioned earlier, verse 13, 15, 17, and 22. And here today the command is love one another fervently from the heart.

Love one another. To understand this we, first of all, need to understand what love is and the word used here translated love in your English Bible is the Greek word "agapao" which is a verb form of the noun agape. Agape love is different than normal human love. It's a word that was not used much outside of the New Testament and it was not used much in Greek culture. It was a word that they had but they didn't use it very often and when they did it was related to supernatural context, divine love. And so though it wasn't used much because the Greek gods weren't really characterized by love that much anyway even though this word was used sometimes in that context, the New Testament authors as they take the message of what Jesus Christ has done, what God has done for us in Christ, they take that word "agape" and they bring it to fill it with all of the biblical glory of love that we see in the Scriptures. And agape love is something very different from what we can do. In fact it's an impossible command in reality. The exhortation to the work, it's an impossible work humanly speaking. You cannot love like this apart from the grace and power of God.

So this love, there are four things I want to share with you. This is under really kind of one, the exhortation to the work. We're going to talk about what love is. That's A, 1A. Then we're going to talk about how we're to love, that's 1B. And then we're going to talk about where it comes from, that's 1C. So we're on 1A, what love is, and you've got four subpoints under that. So you work it out. I just wanted to kind of give you a little bit of what love is.

Biblically agape love is, first subpoint under what love is, supernatural. It is supernatural. It's what I've been saying. It is that which is outside the realm of human ability, impossible to do in human strength. The second thing that's true of agape love, it is self-originating. What I mean by that is it's an act of the will to love. It's not drawn out by the

object who is loved, it originates in the person who loves. God loves us not because of anything in us, he loves us because he loves us. It's all in him. If it was up to us, if it was anything in us, he has nothing but wrath toward what we are based on what we call out of God. But the reality is God is love and he loves those who are unlovely because he loves.

And so agape love, when we're called to do it, it must be supernatural and it must be self-originating. That is, we're called to love other people who are unlovely. We're called to love other people regardless of how lovely they are at that moment. That's what agape is. And so when we're called to love one another fervently, he's saying you're called to exercise a supernatural love that originates in your own heart. It originates ultimately, of course, through the power of grace coming through your heart. So it's supernatural, self-originating. It seeks, thirdly, it seeks the highest good of the beloved. The one you love, agape always seeks the highest good for that person, the one that you love. It doesn't give them what they want, it seeks their true benefit, their ultimate good. God loves us by not giving us what we would want or what we think we need, he gives us what is best for us. This is what agape love does. So you and I are to love one another in the same way as Jesus said, as Paul says in Ephesians 5, we are to love as Christ has loved us and given himself for us. We're to love in the same way God has loved us.

So it's supernatural, it's self-originating, it seeks the object's highest good, and fourthly, it's sacrificial. Agape is willing to sacrifice for the good of the one who is loved. This is how we know what love is, 1 John 3:16. This is how we know what love is. This is how we know what agape is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. You want to know what love is? It's that. It's sacrifice. You see why it's impossible to do in human strength. It's not in our nature apart from the new nature and the power of Christ. It's not in human nature, fallen human nature, to be able to sacrifice for the ultimate good of someone else. You can sacrifice to manipulate, you can sacrifice to get what you want, but you can't sacrifice for the good of the other person and the glory of God apart from the power of God changing you.

So that's what love is. That's what we're called to do. One other thing I want to say about it is love actually, there's a fifth subpoint. Bonus, I feel like we were short on subpoints, didn't you? It is an action. Agape is an action. So important, sometime this week just review, many of you have seen it, but if you haven't seen it, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. That's where we're told what love is. It starts off love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous, love does not brag, is not arrogant. That's the first five. There's actually 16 different attributes of love in those four and a half verses from verse 4 to verse 8. And what you see is, though they're translated with adjectives, love is patient, you see, it's saying love is the adjective of patience, love is patient. In the Greek, it literally says, love suffers long. What I'm saying is, it's actually a verb in the Greek. It's not a being verb with an adjective but translated into English is tough, because if I just say love suffers long, that doesn't make sense to us. We don't use that kind of language. But it's actually a verb. Love suffers long. Where it says love is kind, it really means love demonstrates kindness. It's a verb. Love acts with kindness. And so the point is, all 16 attributes of love are what love does or it doesn't do. It's all about action, godly action and not selfish action.

So love is an action. So it's supernatural. It's self-originating. It seeks the highest good. It's sacrificial and it's action. It's active. That's what love is. So we're commanded to love like this. This is what you're commanded to do. Now, how are you commanded to do it? 1B. That was what love is, 1A, now 1B. The text says fervently, love one another or fervently love one another. The NIV says deeply. The ESV translates that adverb earnestly. In the New American Standard and King James, fervently. The idea, this adverb comes from a verb which means "to stretch out after something." You know, extend your hand, extend your arm, extend your neck as you're lunging for the finish line. It's love one another fervently. It pictures again the active nature of love. He's emphasizing it's not something that you do and kind of wait till you feel it. "I don't feel it, I'm not going to do it." No, if you're a Christian, you're called to love one another fervently whether you feel it or not. In fact, feelings often follow, they don't lead Christian service. If you wait till you feel it, you won't do it. And so love one another fervently, intensely, earnestly. That's how you are to love.

So we've seen what love is, how we're to love, and then 1C) where does it come from. He says from the heart. It's interesting. He emphasizes fervently love one another from the heart. It's really beautiful the balance here. I said love's active, love does things, but it's not just merely the doing of things. Do you see that? It's the doing of things that comes from the heart. We can do things, now this is where this balance, you don't wait till you feel it, but listen, part of what you're going to see is this emphasis on the inner man is really quite striking. If you look at it, the text, since you have an obedience to the truth, purified your souls, soul is a word for the inner man, now fervently love one another from the heart, another word for the inner man. He's saying that God wants us to love from the inside out. From the inside out. The heart biblically when you look at it's the most important word in all of Scripture for the inner man, used nearly a thousand times in the Bible, and it speaks of three different things. When you look at what the heart does, the heart thinks, as a man thinks in his heart so is he. The heart wants, this is, you know, the desires of the heart. So you could say it's the thoughts, thinks it wants, that's the desires or affections or emotions, all kind of three different ways of describing what the heart wants. And the heart chooses, that's the will. When you look at the Scripture, that's how the Bible uses it. You purposed in your heart to do these things. This is the way the Bible uses the word "heart."

So this is what the heart is. So he says, love one another from the heart, that is, from your thoughts, your desires, and your choices, it needs to come from deep within as you love one another. Now what this means, practically as I said, you don't wait until you feel it because you often don't feel like sacrificing for someone else, but what he's telling us is that we need to understand that when we acknowledge that, like say, okay, if I need to show love to Patty and I are dealing with something and I know I need to be kind to her and do something for her that I don't want to do naturally. You know, I rub her feet or her shoulder. I don't know, it seems like I notice that a lot of brothers have this ministry that we have, men tend to be the ones to rub the feet of our wives and it's because they're the weaker vessel. I think it's just the way that God has made it in general. I don't really need my feet rubbed. Are you guys like me? I just never think about, "I wish I'd get my feet

rubbed." But anyway, I didn't mean to go off there, honey. I'm sorry to make so much of this. It was really just a tangential touch point. But what I say is I may not feel like doing it, and I can do it by simply making myself do it, right? And I can do it in a selfish, manipulative way to make her happy so she will treat me better or whatever, or I can, in that moment that I realize I don't want to do it, I can repent at the heart level. Not just change the action, but I can repent at the heart level and say, "God, I ought to want to serve my wife. Forgive me. Make me like Jesus." That's not something I say out loud where she hears that, it's happening in my heart to the Lord. "Make me like Christ to be delighted to serve this precious woman that You've given to me to walk through life together with."

What a privilege and honor it is to serve. You see, that's repenting at the heart level, though. Too often we just do the right thing. That's not Christian obedience. Christian obedience is from the heart level, and it means you repent at the heart level. It's a really important thing. There's so many applications to this where evangelicalism is really messed up on this today. A lot of people, let me give you one example, just came to mind, and that is in the Revoice Movement. This is basically a movement of, started out as a movement of professing evangelicals who came together to say, look, we have homosexual orientation and desires, but we're living, we're determined to live purely. It started in 2018. It's been going on, and the movement's declined even since it began, but it had a fundamental flaw at the beginning and that is this, and I think there are a lot of good people that are just confused. I'm not saying they're not believers. Many of them are. Some of them are deceived, but we need to have compassion, but this is how we would help a brother like this. They were saying, "I have these desires. I've had these same-sex desires for years," they would say, "and it seems it's who I am, but I want to glorify God, and so I'm living celibately as a gay Christian." That is an ungodly mindset that has been incorporated into the world, from the world into the church. This is reality: we all have evil desires in our flesh, and when we get a new nature, what we do is we learn to repent at the desire level, not the external behavior level, and so you repent that, "I have same-sex desires. This is evil, God. Make me like You want me to be." Do you see the difference? It's not merely abstaining from the sin, it is mourning over the sinful desire. That is the key to repentance.

And so the same thing with love. We don't just try to do the right things that are loving, we ask God to change and make our hearts more like Christ so that we are loving from the heart and when you do that and you look to Jesus, his power infuses your work and then you really are loving from the heart. You find his love flowing through you, and then your spirit, if you belong to him and his love's flowing through you, your spirit rallies alongside that and says, "Yes, this is what I needed to do. This is what I really wanted to do if I wasn't so dumb at times."

So from the heart, that's the exhortation, love one another, that is, do practical good, willing to serve, willing to get into the dirt and grime with other people and minister to them in real practical ways, fervently, with an intensity. It's hard work and it comes from the heart. That's the exhortation to the work. Now, the second point we have in the passage is the enablement for the work. That's number 2 now. The enablement for the

work. This is the great emphasis of the text, actually. He spends a lot of words explaining this part because he knows he's calling us to do something that's impossible, humanly speaking. The enablement for the work. He writes, I'm reading the New American Standard, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, now love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable." What he does, the main verb in this paragraph is the imperative command "love one another fervently from the heart." That's the main command, love one another, right? But there's two participles in the Greek that are translated where you can tell their verbs, and these verbs support the main action that we're called to. And basically, it'd be better, I think, if they translated these participles like this and the ESV gets the first one better than the other translations. I think it should say "having purified your souls," having purified your souls, that's the first participle and he's going to say "by obeying the truth unto a sincere love," but the idea is "having purified your souls, now love one another." You see, the verb is the main thing here. Having purified your inner man, now love one another fervently. And then the second participle is in verse 23 and it is you've been born again, "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable." And it really could say this, "having purified your souls, and having been born again, love one another." That's the force of the grammar here in the original. Because you have, you could say it this way, the word "because" isn't there, but that's the force of these participles. They're explaining, you know, how you can do it, why you can do it, having been purified and having been regenerated, now love one another.

Look at those two, A and B. We're going to talk about those two participles. This is the enablement that we have. He says, first of all, you have been purified. That's why you're able to love. You have been purified. Having been purified, now love one another. Having been purified. This word "having been purified, purified" is a word not used a lot in the New Testament and it's a word actually that's usually reserved for temple worship and the purification rites of those who would participate in temple worship. In fact, you find this a number of times in Acts where Paul is purifying himself, goes through the Jewish temple purification so that he can go into the temple; even though he knows these things are past, he's trying to reach the Jews and he does that. And so "to be pure" means "to be cleansed from defilement," and now you're able then to do, to take part in worship. And this is the connotation he's wanting us to see. You've been purified. You used to be unable to do this but now you can because you've been purified. You were completely unable to love like this until you were purified. Now that you've been purified, you can. And I think it's interesting. The temple association is going to come up big time here in a few verses in chapter 2 when he talks about the body of Christ is the temple. You're a stone in the temple in verses 5 to 8 of chapter 2.

So he's saying you and I, because we have been purified, we can love other stones in the temple. We can do the work in the temple that we're called to do. You have been cleansed and enabled and made ready to do that. And part of what that enablement did was it gave you, we're still on 2A, the enablement for the work, purified, being purified unto or for a sincere love of the brethren. You have been purified from what you were formerly. Now you have a sincere love of the brethren. It's interesting, this word "love" is not the word "agape." This is actually the translation of the phrase "love of the brethren" is the Greek word philadelphia. That's the whole phrase. In fact, philadelphia means philo love,

adelphia brother or adelphos brother, love of the brethren, philadelphia plural. You have now a sincere love of the brethren. You didn't have it, but now you do. You've been purified and you've been given this sincere love of the brethren. Now it's not agape that you have been given yet, that has to come by moment by moment grace and power through Christ, but your nature has been changed that you now have an unfeigned, unhyprocritical, genuine affection for other believers. That's what he's talking about. If you've been born again, you now have, you've been purified from a human love that always wants to use people and now you have a genuine, deep affection for others who name the name of Christ. But don't stop there. That's just gets you to the starting line. Now, because of that, go after loving fervently in the agape style. You see, you're able to do that because you put away all of the self-seeking and all of that and you can, through the power of Christ, die to that daily and you have this genuine affection that already gets you kind of moving toward other Christians. But you can't just coast in that. You've got to draw on the power of agape love.

So that's the first enablement is having been purified. A, 2A, 2B, when he transitions at the end of verse 22, love one another from the heart "for you have been born again." Because you have been born again and I said "having been born again." It's like both of these on the front and the back, he surrounds that main verb, "love one another fervently," with "because you have been purified and because you have been born again." And not just that you've been born again, but you've been born again by imperishable seed. What's happened to you, if you know Christ, if God has opened your eyes to the gospel, and you've come to see that there's nothing in you or in your works that can make you able to stand before a Holy God, nothing can you do to cleanse yourself, only what Jesus has done but what he has done is more than enough, and you trust in his work of paying for your sins, bearing God's wrath on the cross in your place, and you believe he rose from the dead and you go to Christ and you say, "Save me Lord, I believe in You and I trust in You completely," then what happened was you were born again in that process. God's word worked in you to give you new birth and because you have been born again, you now can love. The enablement is in the new nature. You could not do this if you didn't have a new nature but if you have received Christ, good news, you have a new nature. That's what he's saying.

The enablement is in who we are in Christ. We can love any believer no matter how difficult we find them and, listen, let's be honest, we all find each other difficult at times, don't we? Just hang around longer and we'll be able to figure that out. You know, people look better from a distance. The closer you get to them, what do you find out? You see the flaws. That's the way it is in the body of Christ. If you're new to Providence and you're excited about our church, temper your expectations. It's just true. We will disappoint you. Jesus won't, but his people will. And so we have to have this understanding that we must love one another fervently over the obstacles that are a part of being fallen people who are being made slowly more and more like Christ and that's the exhortation. But we have the power. It is there. You already have a new nature and you have access to the love of Jesus and access to the love of God. The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5, by the Spirit and we can love one another.

That is the enablement. So no matter how difficult that believer is, you can love them. You can have supernatural love for them. You can have a love that is self-originating, that seeks their highest good, that sacrifices for them, and that actively serves them. And there's no reason you can't except your own lack of faith or obedience. The problem's not in them. I mean, yeah, there may be problems in them. There probably are if you're reacting. But no, the ability to love them is completely up to you and the grace of God. God's grace is there. Will you love them? This text is saying you must fervently love them from your heart.

So the enablement, we have been exhorted to the work. We have the enablement for the work. And then what he does is he stresses, number 3, the importance of the work. The importance of the work and this is where we get to the abiding value of love and the labors that we exert in love. Now, Peter goes into, as he talks about love, says love one another from the heart "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." And he can't help at this point but go into quoting Isaiah 40 and to tell us, "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off." And he does that because in the Spirit of God, God wants us to see with this word picture in this glorious Old Testament passage what really matters in life. This is so urgent for us to see this. What he's saying is, everything else, everything that we see as important as we go about our lives, except the word of God and the souls of men, everything else is worthless. It is corruptible. It is perishable. It is passing away. It's not to say that it's truly worthless in the sense that there's value in all the things that we do for the glory of God but relatively speaking what he's saying is when you minister, particularly to another Christian, when you meet the need of another Christian in love, you are doing something of eternal lasting value that's so far above anything else that we tend to think is important. And this is why he camps out on this because the word of God is that which is eternal, and it's the word of God that produces new life in us, and it's the word of God that keeps sanctifying us. Jesus said, "Sanctify them in thy word. Thy word is truth." The word of God working in us is that which drives us toward each other in love and the word of God produces things that last forever.

I mean, you think about the imagery of the Isaiah passage he quotes, "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass." He says, you look around and all flesh, he's basically saying, look at all people. Look at the splendor that you see in the world. Look at the physical beauty you see in the world of people that are really attractive. Look at the successfulness of people in the world. Look at the skills that people develop that really are of great value. Look at the contributions that people make to the well-being of man. These things are important but relatively speaking, they're like grass and like the glory of grass. They're like a beautiful flower. They are so temporary. We tend, because we live in this world, be tempted to overvalue those things. He's saying if you could see correctly, the only thing that matters is loving and serving other people who belong to Christ.

Now listen, there are other places where the Bible talks we serve others. We love the world. Yes, we're supposed to love all people because God does. But this passage is saying, listen, I want you as you build your life for stability in the midst of a world that is

going to pot, he says, I want you to love one another fervently. I want you to see that all that matters, all that's going to be mattering to you in eternity is what you did to serve other Christians in need. When they had need and you moved to meet those needs, these are things that aren't like the grass and the flowers that fade away. These are the things that live and endure forever. I mean, think about that. Let's think about how you apply that. You know, like I said, it's not that these other things are unimportant. They're important but it's relative importance.

So think about how busy life is. I mean, it's one thing that you find everybody thinks their life is busy. You young people, teenagers, young adults, you think your life is busy and it is but you ain't seen nothing yet. Isn't that true? Those of you that are older, you know what it was like. You thought when you were in college and you had a term paper due and you had a test on Friday, "Man, I got no time." You remember this? "And I've got no time. How can I possibly get everything done? I'm so busy." Then you get out of school and you go to work and you're like, "I wish I could go back to college. It was so carefree back then." And then you get married. Wow. I thought I had no time before I was married. I didn't have any idea how much time I had because now everything is shared. And it's listen, I'm not saying these are all good improvements in your life but the reality is you become much, much, much, much more busy. And let's just add on, now you have a child. Everything changes. That's right. Maybe you have twins.

So the point is life is busy. There are always important things to do. And these things are important. But what's most important? I mean, you have to balance and you've got to make wise choices. There's places you have to make priorities. You've got to do your your work but he's saying, "Listen, have a heart that values what will last forever." And so you feel too busy and there's a Christian in need. A Christian brother calls up and he's distressed. He's in great anguish. And you hesitate to even answer the phone because you don't have time. And you pick up the phone and you have a choice. And you see that there's a need. What this passage is saying is, I think I've got this responsibility. I've got to deal with this plan I had going, a lot of times it's it's this time of relaxation, I finally was going to get a minute to myself, but I have an opportunity to serve a brother in need, to listen, to ask questions, to be genuinely interested in how's he doing, what's he feeling, what's he struggling with, how can I pray for him? It doesn't mean you have to spend all day. No. But it means you genuinely move toward him. You surrender to God in that moment. "Lord, let me serve this brother. Let me listen well. I don't want to, Lord, in myself. I confess in my heart I'm not where I should be. But motivate me with the love of Christ. Give me Your love for him." And the more we let the Scriptures inform our thinking, the more our spirit quickly rallies to that. "Yes, this is what matters." You may speak a word that in eternity we'll be talking about. I don't know how that's going to happen but we will have lots of time in heaven and we will be celebrating the great works of God and we're going to get rewards for the things that we've done that have been done by the grace of God for the glory of Christ, and we will see in that moment the beauty of the things that we did that seemed so from the world's perspective meaningless and unweighty, but from God's perspective of the greatest value. That's what he's saying. Think like God thinks about what really matters and what really matters is what lasts. That's it. What really matters is that which is eternal.

You know, if we find ourselves, give you an example of another thing we could find, you know, they were going to experience where they're going to have brothers in prison soon. Other people around the world, our brothers and sisters in Christ, other places are imprisoned for their faith. And to visit someone in prison means that you put yourself at great risk and you think about the power of the government and the bluster and the glory of what they can do, their apparent greatness in this world. And we can tremble before that but if we're thinking biblically, we can go visit that brother in prison and minister to them, even knowing we may suffer consequences because the one thing that we can do, if we can encourage them and let them know we're praying for you, we love you, we're bringing you some food, we're bringing something for you. This is what they did in the first century, we're bringing this to serve you and we're bolstering their faith. We're helping them cling to Christ in the dark moment that they're in. Jesus is saying, "That is precious to Me." That's what he wants from us, to be willing to do whatever we can to serve one another, to meet pressing needs and to do it from the heart.

Everything else is fading away. The government that looks so powerful in its pomp and its arrogance, it's a drop in the bucket. The great men of history Scripture talks about, God wipes them away, you look for their place and you can't even find it. But if you do something to one of Jesus' people, at the judgment, Matthew 25, when he separates the sheep from the goats, the sheep on his right hand, the goats on his left, the issue is, "What did you do for Me?" Remember? He says to the goats, "You did not do this unto Me. You saw Me naked, you saw Me hungry, you saw Me in prison, you saw Me thirsty, you didn't feed Me, or give Me drink, or visit Me, or clothe Me." And they say to him, "Lord, when did we see You like that?" And he said, "When you saw one of the least of these My brethren and you didn't do it to them, you did not do it to Me." And he'll look to the sheep and he'll say, "Blessed are you because I was hungry and you fed Me. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was naked and you clothed Me. I was in prison and you visited Me." And we will say to him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or in prison?" And he will say, "When you did it unto one of the least of these My brothers, you did it unto Me." Every service, every work of love done to encourage another believer, Jesus is noting it, remembering it, because you are doing it literally to him. We are the body of Christ. He's the head. We're the body. So if you minister to another part of the body, you're ministering to the head.

God's saying this is how we're to live. We are to labor in love and the motivation, he says here, is because it's the one labor that lasts. You've still got to do the other things you've got to do, but make this your greatest passion, to love one another fervently from the heart. And when people, the unbelieving world sees us willing to love each other like that, they will know we're his disciples by our love one for another. May the Lord help us to passionately pursue that.

Let's go to him in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the great love that You have poured out upon us in Christ, You've lavished on us in Jesus. Not treating us as our sins deserved but according to the riches of Your grace, You chose to love the unlovely. You demonstrated Your love

for us in while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And then You commissioned us with the call to love all people, to love our enemies like You, to be like You and do that, but especially to love our brothers in Christ. Lord, we just want to confess that we acknowledge that we fail so often to love like this. We sometimes go through the motions in shallow service to one another. We sometimes turn away from needs and ignore them. We stay preoccupied with our own interests. But we repent, Lord, help us repent fully. God, give us more Christ-like love. Help us to love like Jesus loves. Holy Spirit, empower us with Your grace and grant that we would love one another fervently from the heart. Help us to love our brothers and sisters all around the world more, Lord. Every single one that belongs to You, no matter where they are, no matter what they're going through, to love them and to serve them in some way is loving and serving You, Lord Jesus. Help us. Father, we pray that You would sanctify us in Your truth, that You would make Your word, which is living and abiding forever, bearing its fruit in our lives in the fruit of love, and that You would show the world the glory, the glory of Christ's love by showing it in our love for one another.