

Natalie Bell
August 28, 2022

Do Love
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

*13 Let **mutual love** continue. ² Do not neglect to show **hospitality** to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in **prison**, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being **tortured**, as though you yourselves were being tortured.^[a] ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the **marriage** bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the **love of money**, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” ⁶ So we can say with confidence,*

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?”

*⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ **Jesus Christ is the same** yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ ¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to **do good and to share** what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

Does any of this ring true for you:

*Have you intended to do something loving, but failed to **follow** through?*

*Or have you ever expected something **in return** for love?*

Have you with the best of motives,

*done what you thought was loving only to find out later that **it wasn't the right** action, at the right time, ...and that you instead came across as insensitive, condescending, or manipulative?*

Have you tried to say loving, healing words only to find that what you actually said further perpetuated a relational rift?.”

Andrew Rankin. Do Love, Westbow: Bloomington, IN. pg. 3

Did you **say yes** to any of the above?

I did.

If you did too, you might be what's known as a 'love hack'—someone who's ability to love is flawed, broken, and fallen.

Or in other words, you might just be **human**.

Now see if this sounds *familiar*:

*We live with our grand delusion that we give more than we take,
that our intentions are nobler than they are,
and that our actions are more loving than they actually appear....*

Isn't there a lot of *truth* in that statement?

These thoughts are from a book by a former colleague, Dr. Andrew Rankin. He gave me a copy of his book a few years ago, and then we met to talk about it. The book is called: "*Do Love: A Love Hack's Path to Spiritual Maturity*".

The *premise* of his book is very simple:

Christians are called to not just *feel* love, or *believe* in love, or *say* they love—we are called to *DO Love*.

But we are fallen, so--we are all '*love hacks*' as he calls us, who don't necessarily know what it means to truly love.

Does that *sound about right*?

We're called to love---but we keep falling *short*?

Or we're called to love—but we're confused about what that *means*?

I think we all struggle on some level with *actually doing love*.

Thankfully, the Book of Hebrews offers some *concrete ways* that we can show love—as individuals, and as a church community and family of faith.

But before we even get to those examples, we need to look to our #1 example and model for love: Jesus. Sent by God—out of love.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn, but to save the world.

It was all out of love.

And Jesus came—*embodying God's love* in the flesh—
And *showing us the way to love one another*.

But it's a *tall order* to love like Jesus, isn't it?
And yet, that's what we're called to do!

Sounds pretty straightforward, until you really start doing it.
 Doing love—the love of Jesus Christ—is **NOT what comes naturally**,
 and it's definitely not the kind of 'love' that we are bombarded with in our **culture**.

Doing God's love **isn't easy**
 because **we don't see many examples** in our world of that real love.

What we see is a bunch of movies, tv shows, internet ads and books
 about "love" that set us up for heartbreak, depression, anxiety and pain!
 Because the 'love' we're seeing **isn't real**,
 and expecting our lives to look like tv isn't real, nor is it healthy.
 Yet how often have we tried to have the 'love' the world advertises?

A lot of the **messages we receive** in our culture about love
 Are actually **self-centered**,
 like what can I get, what do I want, what will make me happy...
 And thinking this way about love doesn't actually lead to any joy or happiness.
 In fact, it's a quick route to pain, not joy.

So what is real Love?
 What are we called to do?
 Pastor Andrew Rankin defines love as
an intentional act for the good of someone else.
 Notice the words **intentional**, and **for someone else**.

Which brings us back to our **Gospel lesson in Mark 12** today.
 When asked what is the greatest commandment, *Jesus answered, "The first is,
 "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your
 God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with
 all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 There is no other commandment greater than these."*

Real love is **self-less**, not self-ish.
Which is not easy.
 We naturally think of ourselves first,
 and loving only the people we feel like loving.
 So how are we supposed to love others, especially **if we don't feel like it?**

The great author and theologian C.S. Lewis had some fantastic advice. He says, *Act as if you did. Do not sit trying to manufacture feelings. Ask yourself, "If I were sure that I loved God, what would I do? When you have found the answer, go and do it...Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor, act as if you did.* C.S Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1952), 116, 117.

In other words—Do Love.

Even if you don't feel particularly loving.

Do love.

Love beyond yourself and your feelings.

Remember the famous words of Paul in *1 Corinthians 13*, to a community that was fighting and divided?

Listen again to his definition of love:

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant

5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends.

What if we looked for love based on whether it was love of God and neighbor?
And whether it matched the description of Paul?

Think about the *last relationship you saw* on TV or in the movies,

That was about *patience, kindness, no envy or arrogance,*
or rudeness?

Can you say that you saw loving people *who didn't insist on their own way,*
or act irritable, resentful or rude?

Usually, the answer is NO.

So if the world is confused about love, what can we do?

Well, what if we *fill our hearts and lives* with messages about real love?

With true definitions of love.

And what if we do that right here together, in this church?

What if we dedicated to time to **read** about it, **pray** about it, and then **do** it.

Paul encourages this in *Philippians 4:8-9*:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

When have you seen or heard something *truly inspiring about love*?

Who do you know, that demonstrates real love?

And how can we make an effort to *show that kind of love*?

In his book, *Do Love*, Andrew Rankin offers an interesting idea about how we might learn to really love. He calls it *The Love Flywheel*.

The flywheel has **4 steps**:

See, Experience, Commit, and Do.

He says First, we need to *SEE Love* in action.

The best place to see this is in the life of Jesus *Christ*.

If we wonder whether love is real—all we have to do is hold it up against Jesus' own life.

Is that the way he would love?

Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is our example, our ultimate model for love.

And he was, and is and will be that example—for all eternity.

So where do you see real love?

I see it all the time in this church, in spouses caring for each other, in children who care for their parents, or parents doing the very best for their children. In friends who are closer to one another than any blood relative.

Next, we need to *EXPERIENCE love*.

We have to know God's love for us—and experience it firsthand.

Which means we need time for *worship, and prayer, for Bible study, and fellowship with other believers*.

That's why the church community is so, so important!

Note that Hebrews 13 assumes we are in such a community!

When was the last time you experienced the love of God?

Sometimes it hits me during a *song* we're singing in worship, or as I'm hearing a Bible *verse*, or just *praying*.

We all need to experience that real love—of God and neighbor.

The Third step is to **COMMIT to love**.

We have to make a conscious decision to love other people.

So, what if we made a commitment to truly love each other here at FPC?

What would that mean? What would that look like?

Finally, after we **SEE it, EXPERIENCE it, and COMMIT to it, we DO love**.

Once we see it in action, and know it for ourselves,

Once we make a decision to live it out,

then we can DO it.

And **doing God's love is key**.

It's one thing to say you **believe** in love.

To **say** I love you.

It's different to **DO** that love, and put it into action.

And God wants us to actually **DO the love**.

*1 John 3:18 says: let us not love with words or speech but with **actions** and in truth.*

So--Love is a **verb**.

Love is **action**.

And God challenges all of us to **DO LOVE**.

Hebrews gives us a great road map for doing love.

*Let **mutual love** continue.*

² *Do not neglect to show **hospitality** to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

³ *Remember those who are in **prison**, ...and those who are being **tortured**, Let marriage be held in honor by all,*

*Keep your lives free from the **love of money**,*

Remember your leaders,

*let us continually offer a **sacrifice of praise** to God,*

*Do not neglect to **do good and to share** what you have,*

These are all things we can do!

And in the words of Pastor Gray Temple, when we do these things, we become

The 'front porch of God's kingdom'.

Isn't this what we want to be?

Gray Temple, Feasting on the Word, Year C Vol 4, pg. 16.

I once read a blog by a woman named Karen Ehman.
 With ideas about *showing love during Lent*.
 Listen to her great suggestions —they can be done anytime!

These are just a few ideas—and things we can do **over and over again!**

1. Write a note—a handwritten personal note of thanks and care (not just an email).
2. Make a phone call to check on someone
3. Lighten someone's load—do something just to help someone else.
4. Help a stranger—an act of kindness for someone you've never met before
5. Serve a servant—if you know someone who is always helping others--find something you can do to serve them! www.karenehman.com

We can all pick up a pen or the phone, or carry a load for someone else.
 We can all find someone to serve—every single day of our lives.
 This is what it means to be Christ, to really love God and neighbor,
 That is what it means to *Do love*.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel:
 We have been called to DO love, the love of God and neighbor,
 the kind of love that Jesus shows each one of us.
 May we *do more than* just **believe** in love, or **say** we love, may we *DO love*.
 And for the opportunity to love, all God's people can say, Amen.