

# “Love Does”

1 John 3:11-18

## **Do. Act. Love.**

There are certain biblical teachings that are essential to understanding our faith. One goes like this: “Love is what you do, not what you feel,” This point is well-made by Bob Goff in his aptly titled book, *Love Does*. Goff is a good storyteller and has many stories to tell, as he helps readers grasp that love is a verb for us all. As he writes:



On Tom Sawyer Island [*one of Goff's happy places*], I reflect on God, who didn't choose someone else to express His creative presence to the world, who didn't tap the rock star or the popular kid to get things done. He chose you and me. We are the means, the method, the object, and the delivery vehicles. God can use anyone, for sure. If you can shred on a Fender or won “Best Personality,” you're not disqualified—it just doesn't make you more qualified. You see, God usually chooses ordinary people like us to get things done.<sup>1</sup>

### ***The Bible and love***

In our culture, “love” has become a word used so freely, to express so many different ideas and feelings, that it has become almost useless. I “love” God, I “love” my family, I “love” my dog, I “love” peanut butter (ok, I do!). We need to take a fresh look at the biblical use of “love.”

In the Old Testament, our love for God is focused on the delight and joy we find in God. Our love for God is our seeking after God himself. Our love for God is bound up with our obedience – with our readiness to care for others, to do justice, and to protect the weak. Much more than simply affection for God or others, love encompasses the whole person – our heart, soul, mind, and strength – and our hands and feet.

In the New Testament, Jesus builds on the Old Testament understanding of love but makes it completely unconditional. Our love for God represents total commitment and trust. Our love for neighbor is extended to all humanity and cannot be separated from our caring for the marginalized in our society. Jesus even makes clear that our love for neighbor is extended to our enemies – all are included!

### ***Yes, love really is a verb***

Some years ago, I came across a passage from the classicist Dr. Sarah Ruden, who set out to read Paul in the context of his first-century Greco-Roman language and culture. This excerpt from her book is a bit long, but very worthwhile. I think I have shared it with you before, but it is worth it, so I am sharing it with you again.<sup>2</sup>

What is agape [love], then? Paul begins to answer this, with several sharp shifts in focus.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

<sup>1</sup> Goff, Bob. *Love Does* (p. xvi). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ruden, Sarah (2010-02-10). *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (Kindle Locations 2821-2836). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Paul has been speaking in the first person, but now moves to the third. Love is something outside himself, but really more like a someone, since it does so many things and has so many human characteristics...[We] find nothing that can apply directly to a relationship with God, only to relationships with other human beings— unless we can somehow imagine that God needs kindness or patience. Only at the end do more-religious words come back: rejoicing in the truth, believing, hoping. But the repeated “all things” (or “everything”) in verse 7 suggests that the goal is still to deal with the everyday world in an exemplary way...

It’s more or less a necessity of our language that the standard translations here contain a lot of adjectives. But the Greek is extreme in not containing a single one. Instead we have a mass of verbs, things love does and doesn’t do. This is the ultimate authority for the saying “Love is a verb.”

Since the wording is so simple, I can translate this piece fairly literally without creating nonsense. I am also going to take out spaces between the words, punctuation, and the distinction between capital and small letters— none of these would have appeared in the original ancient manuscript. Below is an English version of what Paul’s readers saw on the page. To get a sense of what it sounded like when read aloud . . . read three times as fast as you would normally, in the typical manner of a Mediterranean language. This will produce something closer to the original machine gun of verbs:

THE LOVE ENDURES LONG ACTS KINDLY THE LOVE NOT ACT  
 S JEALOUSLY NOT ACTS BRUTALLY NOT BOASTS NOT GETS  
 FULL OF ITSELF NOT DISGRACES ITSELF NOT SEEKS WHAT I  
 S IT SOWN NOT GETS IRRITATED NOT RECKONS UP THE EVIL  
 NOT REJOICES IN THE INJUSTICE BUT REJOICES TOGETHE  
 R IN THE TRUTH ENDURE SEVERYTHING BELIEVE SEVERYT  
 HING HOPE SEVERYTHING ENDURE SEVERYTHING THE LO  
 VE NEVER FALLS

So manically verb-centered is the passage that Paul takes two adjectives and creates a one-word verb from each (neither verb being attested previously in Greek); and he creates yet another verb, in Greek a one-word metaphor:

1. “[is] kind” (verb: “kinds”)
2. “[is] boastful” (verb: “boastfuls”)
3. “[is] arrogant” (verb: “inflates-like-a-bellows”)

If we take the meaning from the form, we could say that he is preaching, “You know the right ways to feel? Turn those feelings into acts and perform those acts, ceaselessly. You know the wrong ways to feel? Don’t, ever, perform the acts that spring from them.”

We can be mere observers or commentators, but God has always called his people to be doers, to make love concrete, to reach out in service even to those we might despise.

### Daily Bible Readings - *More on biblical love*

<b>Monday</b>	Leviticus 19:1-18	God instructs Israel on love as caring. See esp. v.18
<b>Tuesday</b>	Isaiah 56:1-2	What does God really want from us?
<b>Wednesday</b>	Matthew 15:31-46	The sheep and the goats face judgment
<b>Thursday</b>	Luke 6:27-36	Jesus talks about loving those who are the hardest to love.
<b>Friday</b>	Acts 9:36-46	Tabitha is the one who has cared for the widows and now she has died.
<b>Saturday</b>	1 Timothy 5:4-8	Caring for widows (the most marginalized group in ancient cultures) and for one’s own family