

Glorifying God

Glorifying God by Fellowship

1 John 3:11-24

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Scripture

One November day in 2002, Jim Sulkers, a 53-year-old retired municipal worker from Winnipeg (Manitoba, Canada), climbed into bed, pulled the covers up, and died.

Nearly two years later, on August 25, 2004, police who had been called by concerned relatives entered Jim Sulkers' apartment and found his body in a mummified state. Everything else in his tidy one-bedroom apartment was intact, although the food in his fridge was spoiled and his wall calendar was two years out of date.

Mr. Sulkers' death went undiscovered for several reasons: he was reclusive, estranged from family members, and had a medical condition that prevented his body from decomposing and emitting odors. In addition, automatic banking deposited his disability pension and withdrew utilities and other expenses as they came due, and so people thought that he was alive when in fact he was dead.

Terence Moran, who co-founded the Media Ecology program at New York University, said, "For many practical purposes, this man was virtually alive throughout that time. This man's life was extended for two years by the technology he used. Neil Postman would say that what you have here is a lack of community."¹

The fact is that you and I have been created by God to live in community. It is a profound tragedy when someone dies and no one notices for two years!

We live in a world in which people are lonely and disconnected. Moreover, so many people value the wrong things.

Some years ago a survey reported that in fifteen years of asking high school students in America whether they would save their dog or a stranger first in an emergency situation, most students answered that they would save their dog and not the stranger.

¹ Lianne George, "A High-Tech Ghost Story," *MacLean's* (9-20-2004).

“I love my dog; I don’t love the stranger,” they always say. People do what makes them feel good, not what is right.²

But the good news of the Gospel is that we were formed for God’s family. When God transformed us by his grace he made us part of his family. One of the ways we know we are part of God’s family is the love we have for one another.

Our text for today is found in 1 John 3:11-24:

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.

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 ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (1 John 3:11-24)

² Dennis Prager in Good News (July/August 1993). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 37, no. 12.

Review

Our ultimate goal in life is to glorify God.

The first question in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What is the chief end [or goal] of man?” The answer given is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

The reason we exist is to bring glory to God. God created us and all things for his own glory.

The mission of our church is “to bring people to Jesus Christ and *membership* in his church family, develop them to Christ-like *maturity*, equip them for their *ministry* in the church and life *mission* in the world, in order to *magnify* God.”

Our mission as a church is to glorify God in each of five key areas: *membership*, *maturity*, *ministry*, *mission*, and *magnification*.

Interestingly, each of these five key areas corresponds to how we glorify God in our personal lives too.

First, we bring glory to God by worshiping him. We studied this key area last week. This key area corresponds to *magnification*.

Second, we bring glory to God by loving other believers. This is what we are going to look at today. This key area corresponds to *membership*, which brings us into fellowship with one another.

Third, we bring glory to God by becoming like Christ. This key area corresponds to *maturity*.

Fourth, we bring glory to God by serving others with our gifts. This key area corresponds to *ministry*.

And fifth, we bring glory to God by telling others about him. This key area corresponds to *mission*.

Introduction

Today, we want to examine how we bring glory to God by loving other believers, which is glorifying God by fellowship.

Author Philip Yancey says that he learned an enduring lesson about love from his church’s response to Adolphus, a young black

man with a wild, angry look in his eye. Every inner-city church, he says, has at least one Adolphus.

Adolphus had spent some time in Vietnam, and most likely his troubles started there. He could never hold a job for long. His fits of rage and craziness sometimes landed him in an asylum.

If Adolphus took his medication on Sunday, he was manageable. Otherwise, well, church could be even more exciting than usual. He might start at the back and high-hurdle his way over the pews down to the altar. He might raise his hands in the air during a hymn and make obscene gestures. Or he might wear headphones and tune in bebop music instead of the sermon.

As part of the worship service, LaSalle Church had a time called “Prayers of the People.” Members would stand and spontaneously call out a prayer—for peace in the world, for healing of the sick, for justice in the community around them, and so on.

“Lord, hear our prayer,” the congregation would respond in unison after each spoken request.

Adolphus soon figured out that Prayers of the People provided an ideal platform for him to air his fantasies and concerns.

“Lord, thank you for creating Whitney Houston and her magnificent body!” he prayed one morning. After a puzzled pause, a few people chimed in weakly, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

“Lord, thank you for the big recording contract I signed last week, and for all the good things happening to my band!” prayed Adolphus. Those who knew Adolphus realized he was fantasizing, but others joined in with a heartfelt, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

A group of people in the church, including a doctor and a psychiatrist, took on Adolphus as a special project. Every time he had an outburst, they pulled him aside and talked it through, using the word “inappropriate” a lot.

Over the course of time the congregation learned that Adolphus sometimes walked five miles to church on Sunday because he could not afford the bus fare. Members of the congregation began to offer him rides. Some invited him over for meals. Most Christmases he spent with the assistant pastor’s family.

Boasting about his musical talent, Adolphus asked to join the music group that sang during Communion services. After hearing him audition, the leader settled on a compromise: Adolphus could stand with the others and sing, but only if his electric guitar remained unplugged (because he had absolutely no music ability).

Each time the group performed thereafter, Adolphus stood with them and sang and played his guitar, which, thankfully, produced no sound.

The day came when Adolphus asked to join the church. Elders quizzed him on his beliefs, found little by way of encouragement, and decided to put him on a kind of probation. He could join when he demonstrated that he understood what it meant to be a Christian, they decided, and when he learned to act appropriately around others in church.

Against all odds, Adolphus's story has a happy ending. He calmed down. He started calling people in the church when he felt the craziness coming on. He even got married. And eventually, Adolphus was finally accepted for church membership when he finally trusted Christ and embraced the grace of God in the Gospel.

Grace comes to people who do not deserve it, and for many Adolphus came to represent grace. In his entire life, no one had ever invested that kind of energy and concern in him. He had no family, no job, and no stability. Church became for him the one stable place. The members of LaSalle Church accepted him and loved him in spite of all that he had done to earn rejection.

The church family of LaSalle Church gave him a second chance, and a third, and a fourth. Christians who had experienced God's love transferred it to Adolphus, and that stubborn, unquenchable love is an indelible picture of what God puts up with by choosing to love the likes of us.³ Moreover, it is a picture of believers bringing glory to God by loving others. As we have received the love of God, so we love others with God's love.

³ Philip Yancey, "Taking My Stand with the Church," *Leadership* (Spring 1996).

Lesson

Today, I want us to see that *we bring glory to God by loving other believers.*

John MacArthur suggests that there are four possible levels of relationship in our text. I would like to look at each one briefly. These four levels of relationship are:

1. Murder (3:11-12)
2. Hatred (3:13-15)
3. Indifference (3:16-17)
4. Love (3:18-24)

I. Murder (3:11-12)

The first level of relationship is murder.

Murder is the lowest level on which one may live in relationship to someone else.

The apostle John uses Cain as an example of murder. He says in verse 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.”**

Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God (Genesis 4:1-16). God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s. Cain became so angry that he murdered his brother—and became the first murderer in history.

It is important to note that Cain is not presented as an atheist or non-religious person. He is in fact very religious. He is worshipping God. But he is worshipping God with a wrong heart. His heart is not right with God. He is more concerned about himself than he is about God or others.

The level of relationship for Cain toward his brother was murderous. Since he could not get his way with God, he resorted to murdering his brother.

II. Hatred (3:13-15)

The second level of relationship is hatred.

When we were living in State College some years ago I was awakened early one summer morning by an excited wife and children. “Look! Can you see it?” they said.

“See what?” I mumbled, trying to wake up.

“The bear! And her two cubs!”

There in our back yard was a black bear with her two cubs! They had spent the night in our yard. When it became clear that the mother bear and her two cubs were not going to leave our yard, one of our neighbors called the State Game Commission. We saw that the mother was limping because she had been hit by a car.

A few hours later, the State Game Commission came to our yard and shot the mother bear with a tranquilizer. When she was asleep, they put her in a large cage. After some time, the cubs joined their mother in the cage. Then the Game Commission Officers closed the cage and took the bears to a safer haven.

While the mother bear was asleep in the cage, my son Jon went to the cage and petted the sleeping bear. Now, do you think that he would have petted the bear if she were not asleep? Of course not! Jon felt safe petting the bear because she was asleep *and* because she was behind bars. Awake and in the open, there is murder in the heart of a mother bear towards anyone who would want to approach her or her precious cubs. The bars and the tranquilizer, you see, made for an effective protection.

The only reason many people have never actually murdered anyone is because of the “bars” that have been put up: the fear of arrest, the accompanying shame of being caught, the penalties of the law, and the possibility of incarceration or death.

Many of us, if we knew that we could get away with it, would not think twice about murdering another person. However, since we know we are not likely to get away with murder, we resort to the next level of relationship, which is hatred. Interestingly, Jesus says that hatred is equal to murder (Matthew 5:21-22).

The apostle John says that same thing in verse 15: **“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”**

Murder is hatred in action.

The first level of relationship is murder. The second level of relationship is hatred.

III. Indifference (3:16-17)

The third level of relationship is indifference.

Jesus is the example of what true love is. The apostle John says 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.”**

Christian love involves sacrifice and service. Jesus did not simply *talk* about love; he died to prove that he really did love his own (Romans 5:6-10).

Our supreme act of love is to lay down our lives for someone else. However, not many of us are asked by God to do that. Far more common is the more mundane task of helping someone in need. The apostle John says 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?”**

It is easy to *talk* about laying down our lives for another and yet *not lift* a finger to help a brother. Christian love is personal and active. It is not indifferent to needs in our church family.

The first level of relationship is murder. The second level of relationship is hatred. The third level is indifference.

IV. Love (3:18-24)

The final level of relationship is love.

When God makes us members of his family he wants us to love others in his family personally and actively.

The apostle John says in verse 18: “**Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.**”

To love **with words** is simply to talk about a need. Jesus’ brother, James, gives us an example of loving **with words** only: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 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?” (James 2:15-16).

The opposite of loving **with words** is loving **with actions**. This is the kind of love to which Jesus calls us.

Love **with actions** is love that cares, love that supports, love that does something. It is picking up a telephone and letting someone know that you are thinking about her. It is writing an email saying that you are praying for him. It is inviting someone over to your home just because you care. It is rearranging your schedule to help take care of an emergency.

One of my favorite illustrations of loving one another comes from the Special Olympics. As you know, Special Olympics features mentally and physically disabled athletes from around the world competing in various athletic events.

One of the most memorable events that happened during the Special Olympics was a foot race among a group of athletes, each of whom had Down’s syndrome. The runners were close together as they came around the track toward the finish line. One of them stumbled and fell. When that happened, the rest of the runners stopped. They went back as a group, helped the runner who had fallen to stand up, made sure that he was okay, and then they all started running the race again and completing it.⁴

To love with actions means just that: love with actions!

To love with the **tongue** is the opposite of loving **in truth**. To love with the **tongue** means to love insincerely. To love **in truth** means to love a person sincerely, genuinely, from the heart, and not just from the **tongue**.

⁴ James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 116.

In the middle of the 18th century, John Fawcett was preparing to move. At age 32, he was leaving the small Baptist church in Wainsgate, England for the prestigious Carter's Lane Church in London.

Fawcett was orphaned at the age of 12. He was forced to work fourteen hours a day in a sweat shop. He taught himself to read by candlelight and studied continuously. When he was ordained at the age of 25, he moved to Wainsgate. For seven years he served the church of 100 members before receiving the invitation to become the pastor of the prestigious church in London.

The last of his possessions were loaded on to the moving cart as Fawcett began saying his good-byes. Tearfully, he bade farewell to the church family he had loved for the past seven years. They returned his tears and his love. However, Fawcett discovered that he couldn't break "the tie that binds."

It was too much for the young preacher. London would have to wait. Unloading the cart, he decided to stay.

Fawcett never did move to London. In fact, he never left Wainsgate. He died there in Wainsgate—54 years later!

It was his love for the family of God and their love for him that kept in Wainsgate. It also prompted him to write a hymn we sing even to this day:

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.*

Conclusion

Our ultimate goal in life is to glorify God.

We bring glory to God by loving other believers. Let us not love one another with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. Let us find practical, sincere, sacrificial, tangible, real ways to love one another. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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