

Hope Shaped Love

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[0 : 00] My thoughts and prayers are with you at this difficult time. I wish you well. I hope everything is okay.

These are all very common ways of expressing that we support someone. But I wonder if they often don't turn into action. I see it all over social media.

Someone will express a hard time that they've been going, and people will often respond, my thoughts and prayers are with you. But do people actually put any thought into a friend situation? Is there any seeking to understand a crisis that happens? Like in France last year, there was a lot of people saying, my thoughts and prayers are for France.

And when people say my thoughts and prayers, do those people even believe in a God, let alone actually pray to him about the situation? I think this sentiment has become a nicer version of good luck.

[1 : 07] It's a hope that you'll figure things out on your own. I wish you well, but I'm not actually going to do anything about it. It's a message that can say, I love you, and I support you, but I'm not actually going to get up and support you.

I wonder if it is because it is so much easier to actually just say words than to be motivated to engage and to help. We who know how much Jesus has done for us, his love and his sacrifice shown on the cross, we too can fall to this same temptation.

The temptation to say, oh, look, I know I should forgive, but it's hard, and so I'm just going to say those words, I forgive you, and then I'm going to hold a grudge for years.

Oh, I know I should give generously, and you know, I'll pledge, but I really want to hold on to my money, just in case something happens tomorrow. Look, I say that I'm not a racist with my words, but do you know what?

With my eyes, I judge people who have different skin than me. Can you imagine if Jesus was a thoughts and prayers savior?

[2 : 23] If he said, you know, oh, look at you guys down there on earth, I see all of your sin, I see your hardened hearts turned away from God, and look, I'm thinking about you guys, if that helps.

We would be nowhere if Jesus was just a thoughts and prayers savior. The challenge for us today is to turn our good intentions into actions that express God's love for us.

We are in a series called Share Hope, and we want to share the hope that we have in Jesus. We want to also share the hope for today with people in very practical ways.

And today, we're going to see that our love is shaped by our hope in God. Love in deed and action, and not just in words.

We're going to be looking at a letter written by the apostle John, and he outlines what this kind of love looks like. So please have your Bibles open, have your St. Paul's app open.

[3 : 28] There are notes that you can be taking for this sermon. And the first thing that we're going to see as we have a look at 1 John, is that we are loved. We're going to have a look at 1 John 3 verse 1.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. God has shown his wonderful love through his adoption.

He has taken a lost and hopeless people and brought them into his family. Now all those who love Jesus are in God's family, and are to be on about God's mission, to do the same thing as God, to love others.

What we love is shaped by the one who has loved us. Verse 11, For this is the message that we heard from the beginning, we should love one another.

Love one another. John contrasts this with an illustration of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's first two sons. Have a look at verse 12 with me.

[4 : 38] 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 brothers were righteous.

Cain murdered his brother, proof that he was influenced and shaped by Satan. Our actions, the things we do, point to the one who shapes us.

They can either show that we're being shaped by Satan, or that we are being shaped by God.

Verse 14, We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other.

Anyone who does not love remains in death. John is saying that hate and murder is a marker that we don't know Christ. But love is a mark that we have died with Christ, and we have been raised with him.

Growing up in Sydney, I am very much a product of this culture. The things that this culture here in Sydney loves, I have found myself loving as well.

[5 : 45] I can't help but find that when I take my kids to McDonald's, I get a little bit excited about a Happy Meal, because it's got the good food, but it's also got a toy.

And that still excites me, even though that's just for my kids. But I continue to love the things my culture loves. I love the movies that my culture tells me to love. I love the TV shows.

I love the food. I love what my culture has shaped me to love. And to a large degree, it's consuming capitalistic products and being entertained.

But when we become children of God, our culture changes. The most influential culture changes.

We go from being something called ethnocentric.

Ethnocentric means that our ethnicity, our culture is our center, ethnocentric. So we go from

thinking that everything that our culture loves is good to love.

[6 : 46] Everything our culture does is right. And everything every other culture chooses to love is wrong. When we become children of God, we become shaped by Christ.

We join a Christ culture instead of thinking that our culture is right. And so before anything else, I am a Christian. My loves and the things I dislike are to be shaped by Christ.

They trump what my culture says. One example of this is that in the Australian culture, an Australian male wants to show that they are strong.

They don't want to show weakness. They don't want to show emotions. And definitely don't cry.

Unless it's at the football, that's okay. Whenever the football goes back. But Christ shows his own weakness when he died on the cross.

And I can be upfront about my own weakness and how much I need his salvation and how flawed I am. The hope we share is shaped by the one who has loved us.

[7 : 54] John encourages us to love because we have been loved. This is a new culture that we are to be part of. And so the second thing that we see this morning is that we have been loved to love.

Have a look at 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 and sisters.

He, Jesus, laid down his life for us. And John pushes this to be a principle for us. It is not just that Christians are saved by his generosity, even to death, but we are to show the same generosity, the same love.

We should also lay down our lives for people. I don't think I've ever actually had the chance to lay down my life for someone else. I say to my kids, you know, I would jump in front of a bus for you.

And I think I would, but I've never actually had that opportunity. So it's really easy to have this thought up in the cloud, up in the back of my brain somewhere that, you know, I'd lay down my life for someone, in particular my kids.

[9 : 09] But John immediately grounds this love for us. Verse 17. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need.

John makes this hope that we have incredibly simple and practical. If we have a material possession and a brother or sister is in need of it, we share it with them.

Let's not make it more difficult than that. We see a need, we have that material possession, we meet that need. But if we see a need that we can meet and instead we close our hearts, we turn away and only offer, say, thoughts and prayers, well, John questions us.

Let me read verse 17 again. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

How can the love of God be in that person? Have they heard the gospel? Are they actually following Jesus? If we can't love with the love that we've been shown, do we know God's love?

[10:21] If there is a person in front of us and they need something that we have and we don't share it, do we know God's love for us? Are we still operating like our own culture dictates instead of operating by a Christ-shaped culture?

John knows the importance and difficulty of the reality of this. And so to encourage and also challenge us, he writes in verse 18, Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

He starts with dear children. This is a recurring phrase that comes up in John's letters. It's an expression of closeness and love and affection. It's the parent that says to a child, little child, share with your brother.

Little child, I forgive you and I love you, but don't disobey. Little child, it's okay. Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

Love with actions and in truth, not just with words. Let's not just be thoughts and prayers type Christians in just words or some words we've typed on the computer, but let's love with actions and in truth.

[11:51] Loving in action is truth because when it's just words, it can show to be false and hollow. And so to be able to love other people, we have to know God's love for us.

We have to know how loved we are to love. Romans 3 is a great place to be reminded of how amazing God's love is for us.

It paints a picture of our sin and our rebellion, and yet God chooses to show his love. He chooses to show his righteousness. Let me encourage you, go and spend some time meditating on God's love for us.

Because when we are reminded of all that God has done, sharing his love is so much easier. A couple of weeks ago, as I was preparing for this series on sharing hope, thinking about what it means to love others and to show mercy, it was just as isolation was starting to ease.

And my family, we went out, we went through Chatswood for the first time in a while, and we went down the road and we bought ice cream. And as we were walking down through the Chatswood shops area, I noticed somebody on the side who was homeless, and they were clearly in need.

[13:11] But my heart and my eyes have built up a callus against people and their needs. I've gotten used to ignoring people's needs. But as we walked past, I noticed the eyes of one of my children watched this person, and I could see the compassion they had on them.

And so as we walked back up, I said to this child, do you think we should help out this person? Do you think we should help them with their needs? And thankfully at that time, I actually had some cash in my pocket, which I don't often do.

And I said, I have some money. Do you think we should give it to them? And my child said, yes, I think we should help them. And so we walked over, and we shared what we had with them.

Now, I know that that was a very small thing. It was not much help in the long run. But I had a chance to share this part of the Bible with my kids, to show that we have been loved by God so much, that we are called to love others.

He has been so generous to us. We are called to be generous to others. And the reality is, we can do it. We need to have that connection between how awesome God is and how much He has loved us.

[14:33] And when we do, it is so much easier to share His love with other people. So we have seen that we have been loved. We have seen that we have been loved, and now we are to love other people.

And now we are told to do that. Go and do that. Don't just do that in words or speech. Actually love with actions. But the third thing this morning, well, what does this look like?

How do we love? Earlier, I was putting down the idea of being a thoughts and prayers Christian. But I think it's actually a good place to start.

When we look at the world right now, the problems seem so big. They seem insurmountable. How are we supposed to meet all the needs of the bushfires, let alone the needs of all those people impacted by coronavirus?

There's a number of cafes around here who are all doing it particularly tough because their businesses just disappeared. And even if I went to four different cafes and bought two coffees a day, the reality is it's not going to help them that much.

[15 : 42] And I'll just be buzzing from caffeine. Now, I pushed hard against the idea of being a thoughts and prayers Christian. But if we start with those two, it's actually a really wonderful thing to think about an issue, to actually spend time investigating and researching a friend's problem, an issue overseas, a problem in our country, we might realise we actually can help out.

We can serve somebody. Maybe something we give will actually make a difference. And if we can't, just understanding, seeking to understand, helps us to empathise with others and love them more. And so the first thing we can start with is thinking deeply about an issue. And the second thing is prayer. Prayer is a good and wonderful thing to do because we have a God who is in control of all things.

There are plenty of problems in our world right now, in our country as well, that seem too big for us. But they are not too big for our God because He is sovereign and in control of all things.

Prayer is an effective way to love people who are in need. And so the next time you're tempted to just type, oh, you know, my thoughts and prayers are with you, well, do those things.

[17 : 03] Take a moment to investigate and to spend some time in prayer to God. But the call and the challenge for us today is that deep thinking and understanding and real prayer to God is not where it should end.

I found it really difficult watching what's been happening in the US with the protests and the riots after the death of George Floyd almost two weeks ago in police custody.

I've been horrified by both the rioters and by some of the politicians. With an issue like widespread racism, it is just one of those big things that I don't even know how to start dealing with.

And I don't just want to support in words and not in actions. Tuesday week that just passed in the week, it was branded as Black Out Tuesday to show that Black Lives Matter.

And many people change their image on Facebook or Twitter to just a blank image of black to show that Black Lives Matter and to show their support.

[18 : 19] I thought about doing the same thing because I believe that black lives do matter. But I stopped because I thought that it almost would have been too simple because for me, if I had done that, that would have been the only action that I took.

I would have just changed a picture on the internet and that's where my action would have ended. For me, that's all it would have done.

Now, there's nothing wrong with doing that. There's nothing wrong with supporting our African brothers and sisters and people of African descent in that way. But for me, I think it would have been a problem because that's all I would have done.

It's easy to think that racism is just a problem overseas and it's easy to support in that way because it's far away. But the reality is, is that racism is alive and well in Australia too.

We only have to think of our indigenous community. People from an indigenous background are put in jail at rates far higher than the rest of the population.

[19 : 32] In 2015, an indigenous man died in jail in very similar circumstances to George Floyd. We only have to go back to the start of the coronavirus spread in Australia a couple of months ago to be reminded of the racism that came out to people from an Asian background.

There was abuse and beatings on the streets of Sydney that just stemmed from racism because people looked different.

Part of the action that we are called to do means calling out racism when we see it. We are all raised to think in an ethnocentric way, to think that our culture is right, but Christians should seek to bring Christ to bear on all that we do, what we love and what we allow to influence us.

The love that we share is to be shaped by the love God has had for us and to love in action. I want to encourage you to do two things if you are in the same place that I have been concerned about what has been happening in Australia, Australia, let alone overseas.

The first thing is to write a letter. Earlier in the week, I wrote a letter to those who can make change in our state.

[20 : 56] I wrote to two members of our state parliament, to the Minister for Corrections and the Minister for Police, the Honourable David Elliott and the Honourable Anthony Roberts, employing them to make a change because they have significant influence and power.

You can get a template for the letter that I wrote. You can go to a website called commongrace.org.au. It has a lot of information there for Christians about supporting indigenous people in our country.

Or you can even contact me, contact the church. I can send you my letter and you can send that as well. The second thing that you can do is be aware of your ethnocentric bias and change what you do.

Be aware that we are all ethnocentric. We all, just the way we are brought up, are raised to think that our cultural way of doing things is right.

And we need to be aware of that and move away from that. Because it is very easy to go from thinking our culture is right to being racist and saying that people who are different are wrong.

[22 : 09] There is no one race or culture that is more Christian than all the others. This is one of the reasons why we speak of being a trans-cultural church.

We don't just want to be an Australian culture church. We don't want to be a Chinese culture church. We want to be a church that is shaped by a Christ culture.

One that is united in our diversity. And this is really difficult. One of the small ways I've noticed that I need to change my ethnocentric preference is just in the way I give people nicknames.

If you've ever met me, I have probably given you four different nicknames in the space of four minutes. It is one of my favourite things to do. And we have a dear colleague at work, Adrian, our missions pastor.

His last name is Wong and I call him Wongi sometimes. And I did that with another brother, another Christian brother of Chinese background and he was shocked because it is not a respectful thing to do.

[23 : 23] And I had this moment where I just went, ah yeah, but I'm Australian and this is what I do and this is fine. And Adrian's okay with it but I realised that my preference was not actually loving my brother.

Not actually loving people who are from a different culture who don't, who understand that it is not respecting people. We need to be aware of our own biases and to instead be shaped by Christ and to change our behaviour.

to love in action and not just in words. Verse 18, Dear children, let us love with words, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

So, we should first of all be thoughts and prayers Christians. We should be thinking deeply about other people's problems and bringing them to our Lord. And we should also be prepared to help those around us in need.

seeking to bring real healing to people's lives who are damaged from sin, who are damaged from their own sin and other people's sin. Their needs could be from psychological trauma, from social instability, from economic or physical pain.

[24 : 40] I want to encourage you to come and drop off food for the Anglicare Food Drive. That is a really wonderful thing to do. Be supporting Sam and Sally financially as they seek to plant their church and see many people on the Gold Coast come to know and love Jesus.

Give money to support the people in Narrabri who are continuing to find life difficult after the floods and bushfires. These are all great things to do.

I commend them to you and I will be financially supporting all of them. But let's not think that when we do those things we have met the call for the Christian to love in action.

God has called us to meet the needs of the people that are around us. Brothers and sisters, we can give to every worthy cause but we can also ignore the people God puts in front of us.

Let's not only love with words or speech but love like we have been loved in actions by God himself. Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for your love to us.

[25 : 54] I thank you that you did not leave us alone but that you sent your Son and that he acted to die on the cross the greatest expression of love ever.

Heavenly Father, help us to love like you have loved. To love when it is difficult, to love when we see people's needs in front of us and not just give loving words but to love in physical needs, Lord.

Father, help us to be able to support the many things that we are seeking to support this month.

Father, continue to be with Sam and Sally. Help us to support Anglicare as they support many people and Narrabri as well.

But Lord, open our eyes to the people who are in front of us who have needs. Change our hearts that we would love like you love us, Lord.
Amen. Amen.