

## CHAPTER 1

# More Than a Feeling

*It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular.*

*It is when general love becomes particular that we find it so difficult to love the man next door.*

Greville P. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

Renee Bach was only nineteen years old when she left rural Virginia to arrive as a missionary in Jinja, Uganda, in 2009, after a ten-month missions trip two years prior. She later recounted, “God was, like, ‘You’re supposed to go back to Uganda.’ . . . This sounds like such a white-savior thing to say, but I wanted to try to meet a need that wasn’t being met.”<sup>2</sup> That same year she founded Serving His Children, a nonprofit ministry dedicated to addressing physical needs among underprivileged children in the country’s southeast.

Those needs began to confront Bach directly, one notable encounter being with a nine-month-old baby girl in 2011 named Patricia, frail and swollen from malnutrition, whose parents presented her to Bach bundled in a blanket. Bach wrote later that she, ushering the girl and her parents into her facility, “hooked the baby up to oxygen and got

---

1. This quote is popularly misattributed to C. S. Lewis, but its actual source is the far lesser-known Methodist expositor, Greville P. Lewis, *The Johannine Epistles* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 86.

2. Ariel Levy, “A Missionary on Trial,” *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/04/13/a-missionary-on-trial>.

to work. . . . Took her temperature, started an IV, checked her blood sugar, tested for malaria, and looked at her [hemoglobin] count.” She continued, “I was attempting to diagnose the many problems that could potentially be at hand. . . . She needed a blood transfusion. And fast.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet Bach was not a physician. She was not a nurse. In fact, Bach had no formal medical training at all.

Between 2010 and 2015, Bach oversaw the treatment of 940 severely malnourished Ugandan children. She referred to the facility as a “clinic” on her blog. During this period, 105 children died under the organization’s care, reflecting a mortality rate of approximately 11 percent. In 2019, two Ugandan mothers, Gimbo Zubeda and Kakai Annet, whose children died following treatment at the center, filed a civil lawsuit against Bach and her organization. The case concluded in 2020 with an out-of-court settlement. Each mother received approximately \$9,500, with no admission of liability from Bach or Serving His Children.<sup>4</sup> As for Patricia, she survived—but only after receiving hospital treatment following a botched transfusion.<sup>5</sup>

Bach’s story bears multiple lessons for contemporary observers—from the perils of sending minimally trained, single female missionaries overseas with little oversight, to the perniciousness of so-called “white guilt” and its effects. But it also prompts us to raise several crucial questions. What is the Christian’s obligation when faced with immense need in a faraway place? How do one’s qualifications, ability, and proximity factor into such obligation? And at what point does helping actually hurt or charity become toxic?<sup>6</sup> Or, even more simply, what is love, and is it subject to any limitations?

---

3. Nurith Aizenman and Malaka Gharib, “American With No Medical Training Ran Center for Malnourished Ugandan Kids. 105 Died,” NPR, August 9, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/08/09/749005287/american-with-no-medical-training-ran-center-for-malnourished-ugandan-kids-105-d>.

4. “American accused in death of children in Eastern Uganda settles out of court,” The Independent, July 29, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.ug/american-accused-in-death-of-children-in-eastern-uganda-settles-out-of-court>.

5. Aizenman and Gharib, “American With No Medical Training . . .”

6. I am alluding to two influential works on this topic: Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor. . . and Yourself*

## Love and Its Limits

Few concepts are more overused and contested in contemporary society than the idea of *love*. Without blushing, the contemporary English speaker can unironically use the same word to describe his affection for his wife, his relationship to God, and his sentiments toward ballpark franks. An estimated two-thirds of all top-forty songs from 1960 to 2010 concern the topic of love.<sup>7</sup> From 1922 to 2022, according to the Google Books Ngram Viewer, the use of the word *love* grew roughly six times more than the traditional term *charity*—with *love* increasing by about 405 percent compared to *charity*'s 69 percent rise.<sup>8</sup> And from 2004 to 2024, Google Trends shows that internet search interest in the neologism “love is love”—a newspeak shibboleth wielded to silence dissent from any and all sexual perversions—spiked in the United States by 91 percent.<sup>9</sup> It would not be overstating the case to argue that the postmodern West has an idolatrous infatuation with love.

But this claim must be qualified. What the secularized, English-speaking world so highly prizes is not the vision of charity<sup>10</sup> set forth in Scripture, but rather an abstracted conception of love unmoored from any discernable moral framework and reduced, in effect, to mere positive feeling or infatuation. As to how we arrived in our predicament, Rusty Reno helpfully summarizes, in his popular 2019 work *Return of the Strong Gods*, the way in which the postwar consensus, following Karl Popper and others, recoiled from the horrors of twentieth-century totalitarian movements by opting instead for an international liberal

---

(Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009); and Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

7. Peter G. Christenson, Silvia de Haan-Rietdijk, Tom F.M. ter Bogt, et al., “What Has America Been Singing About? Trends in Themes in the U.S. Top-40 Songs: 1960–2010,” *Psychology of Music* 47, no. 2 (2018): 194–212, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617748205>.

8. Google Books Ngram Viewer, “love, charity, 1922–2022,” accessed May 24, 2025, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=love%2Ccharity&year\\_start=1922&year\\_end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=0&case\\_insensitive=false](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=love%2Ccharity&year_start=1922&year_end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=0&case_insensitive=false).

9. Google Trends, “Love is Love,” accessed April 26, 2025, <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=US&q=love%20is%20love&hl=en>.

10. Throughout this volume, I intend to use the terms *charity* and *love* interchangeably, in accord with their classic usage, to emphasize a traditional, Christian understanding of love in contrast with its modern cheapening.

order committed to openness and toleration (weak gods, says Reno) over traditional objects of loyalty (the titular strong gods).<sup>11</sup> This happened, ironically enough, under the guise and language of love itself. Such degradation, incidentally, is the case with all idolatries—that which is prized above God or regarded as ultimate in a given value structure takes on a caricatured, ghastly visage compared to its ordinary form as a gift or creature of God. Love is no exception.

At the risk of appearing pedantic, it is necessary to lay a theological foundation defining Christian love before proceeding further. First Corinthians 13, the biblical *locus classicus* on love, reveals that true love is self-effacing, self-forgetful, and ultimately self-sacrificing: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (vv. 4–7). By inference, we can define Christian love thus as *unconditional commitment to the ultimate good of another, even at cost to itself*. It is *unconditional* in that it depends upon the will of the lover and not the merit of the beloved. It is a *commitment* in that it is a conscious choice and not simply an emotional state. Its aim is the *ultimate good* in that it pursues the highest good for its object, which may or may not be comprehended by the beloved—such as the way in which God sanctifies us through suffering or a parent disciplines a child for his maturity. Love’s object is *another* in that its fundamental orientation is outward, not inward. And it does all this *even at cost to itself* in that it places the good of the beloved above its own.

Yet even that crucial passage focuses on love’s *expression* more than its *essence*. To understand the latter, we must backtrack to one of Scripture’s earliest and most prominent references to love—the Hebrew *Shema*: “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 might” (Deut. 6:4–5). This summons to all-encompassing devotion to the true and living God is the necessary precondition of

---

11. R. R. Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2019).

what the Lord Jesus identified as the second greatest commandment: to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). Human love cannot ultimately be understood without reference to God, who is most deserving of our love and who is Himself love (1 John 4:8). Augustine recognized this when he defined love as "that affection of the mind which aims at the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and one's neighbor in subordination to God."<sup>12</sup> He further explained that "what [love] does with a view to a neighbor's advantage is called benevolence"—distinguishing between love's expression and its root.<sup>13</sup> And, as to love's expression, we find no deeper demonstration than that of the Lord Jesus Christ's willing self-giving on the cross at Calvary. Indeed, "greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Returning to our initial illustration, virtually no one in the realm of mainstream evangelical missionary activity—including Renee Bach herself, presumably—would dispute any of the above. They would further argue that it is precisely this definition of love that impels them to cross land and sea to make even a single proselyte. But the way in which this biblical love unfolds contains a clue as to our limitations as creatures. Consider what the apostle of love, John, writes in his first epistle:

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:19–21)

The fruit of Christian love, with all the contours of virtue considered above, proceeds only from the root of divine love. Concerning this relation, John Calvin comments,

---

12. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. James Shaw, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), III.10.16, revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12023.htm>.

13. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.10.16.

As God has freely loved us, we also ought now to love him. But this love cannot exist, except it generates brotherly love. Hence he says, that they are liars who boast that they love God, when they hate their brethren. . . . [John] meant to shew how fallacious is the boast of every one who says that he loves God, and yet loves not God's image which is before his eyes.<sup>14</sup>

Note Calvin's final phrase. God has enjoined us not only to render Him love in the form of worship in spirit and in truth; He has also set His image before our eyes in flesh and blood—men, women, and children around us who bear the divine image. In this sense, we indeed love God by loving our neighbors. The only problem is that our sight, like our very selves, is limited; we are not capable of beholding the whole of humanity in our physical view at once, although perhaps we may do so in our mind's eye. Instead, those closest to us fill our view. We see God's image refracted like light through a prism—not all at once, but in glimpses, as reflected by each person we encounter. From our closest loved ones to a stranger by the roadside, every neighbor offers us a partial glimpse of Him. Thus, as we will explore further, our love must follow an ordered pattern, beginning with those directly before us—the ones whose ultimate good we are both able and responsible to seek. To love our neighbor means to love *particular* neighbors, individuals with faces and names, those with whom we can or should come into contact.

Yet in the twenty-first century West, to suggest that charity can or should be subject to limitation at all is virtually anathema. Love, understood fundamentally as the expression of individual preference and not as self-sacrifice, cannot be ordered, for to do so would be to constrain the free, expressive self. Love cannot express itself through distinct acts, duties, and responsibilities according to each type of social relation or sphere of life in which humans engage. Rather, it must be diluted and spread as thin gruel across vast populations through simplistic, ideologically driven social movements promising

---

14. John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 John 4*, accessed May 25, 2025, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1\\_john/4.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1_john/4.htm).

equity and justice—to the exclusion of individual, flesh-and-blood neighbors in proximity to one another. One need not look far back in our history to see that this has been the case. In the twentieth century, communist and socialist ideologies, despite their professed love for the benighted working class and great claims of compassion for the disenfranchised, left one hundred million dead in their wake. Beginning under the New Deal and continuing to this day, the modern welfare state in the United States makes great charitable boasts, yet despite these noble intentions, its perverse incentive system has contributed to intergenerational cycles of poverty, promiscuity, and lawlessness for millions of Americans.

In our recent past, the summer of 2020 stands as one of the consummate examples of this phenomenon. In the wake of the viral video capturing George Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020, while in police custody, riots starting as “mostly peaceful” demonstrations—conducted ostensibly in sympathy toward the African-American cause—killed at least 19 people, led to more than 17,000 arrests, injured more than 2,000 officers, caused more than \$2 billion in damages, and resulted in more than 2,400 incidents of looting, many of which detrimentally affected persons of color.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, baptizing a social movement in the language of love, empathy, and social concern is insufficient to guarantee the consequent good of its stated beneficiaries. And on the examples go, demonstrating the way modern society, like Esau trading his birthright for porridge, sacrifices tangible, particular love—or *loves*—for mere sentiment.

Where do we go from here? Or, put differently—how do we walk in love, not in word only but also in deed, among both our near relations and our more distant neighbors to the ends of the earth?

## A Particular Love

To live faithfully in a world of such increasing confusion requires a vision of love that is more than a feeling. We do not just need love in

---

15. Jeremy Carl, *The Unprotected Class: How Anti-White Racism Is Tearing America Apart* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2024), Kindle edition, 12.