



The Journey of Thomas

Sensitivity

By John J. Smid

Prov. 15:23

A man finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word

Prov. 16:24

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones

I love you! How many times in your life have you heard someone verbally say they love you? How often as a child did you hear your dad or mom say these words to you without shortening them to “luv ya”? Or did you hear this at all? I find that it can’t be said too much.

It is so important when showing the love of Christ to others that we develop an awareness of how much people need to know they are loved and cared for. Affirmation is so important and it is much more significant when it is attached to something specific.

John 13:34

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

God loves us, period.

God’s word here says basically two things: First, God loves us, period. Second, it says that we are asked to share that love with others through personally loving them.

This kind of love isn’t necessarily romantic, nor is it intended to be erotic. In our contemporary world, the word love is so misunderstood because it has so many meanings. The love shown here is a command that may or may not have a mushy, affection attached to it. It is the kind of love that we chose to give away. It may be very sacrificial! In fact, most people that we chose to love will likely bring us to a point of sacrifice at some point or another in our relationship.

Some of us have received a comment such as “good job” for things we have done well. Or maybe we have received kind words of thanks when we have given something to someone as a gift. And in some cases, we might have heard “I Love You” from unexpected places. But what about affirmation of whom we are as God has created us to be?

This love is not connected to performance!

I was at a weekly men’s support meeting at my church about 12 years ago. I was in a really tough spot and feeling a lot of self pity. One of my friends spoke emphatically to me about how I really needed to “get over it”. His words were true and I received them in the spirit in which they were meant. I was thankful for his response which was intended to somehow “shock” me into a better reality. But, at the end of the meeting my friend said, “John, maybe I was too hard on you and it might have been better if I had just told you, “I love you.” Wow! That was powerful for me to

receive. I was moved to tears hearing this man spare his own machismo to tell me clearly and succinctly that he loved me.

One of the most meaningful kinds of love is unconditional love. This kind of love isn't attached to what we have done or given, it is just that we are loved by God and as His children we are commanded to do likewise, love each other just because we are called to, because He loves them.

If you happen to be a parent, check to see how often you tell your kids, "we love you" as though you and your spouse are one person. While it is very important to be united and show you are a team, in marriage, it is also important to show your kids you are individuals too. Try to tell them you love them as a dad, or mom separately from one another. "I Love You!" There is a lot of meaning in a son hearing from his dad, "I love you, Son." There is a lot of significance for a daughter to hear this from her dad or vice versa as well. The eye to eye, verbal, with personal contact, "I L O V E You" is very important.

This certainly doesn't mean we are to avoid giving affirmations on behalf of a group or couple. Being sensitive to that is very important as well. Showing appreciation for someone's involvement in our lives is equally important – however it may be easier because of less vulnerability involved.

The power of a poignant pause.....

Think about it just for a minute. It can be very personal to enter someone's day with an "I love you" that just hangs there and isn't associated with a tradeoff nor does it expect something in return. This is the love of Jesus, His love for us without us giving anything in return and expecting nothing in the future. Sounds a lot like the Gospel, doesn't it?

The Blessing – without it we may search in all the wrong ways to find it!

There is a book by Garry Smalley and John Trent called *The Blessing* which I have found teaches an important lesson on sensitivity. This little book is powerful and effective in showing us how to truly bless one another, not by affirming something we have done, but rather affirming the character that God built into us when He created us.

When blessing an adult child, as a parent, it is important to think of them when they were growing up. There are times when we are looking at our adolescent or adult children and a blessing is far from our minds. We may be really challenged by their lives or choices. But this may be the most significant time to share a blessing; at times when they may not feel they deserve even a kind word—much less a blessing.

What kind of person were they when they were 7 or 8 years old? What was their natural bent? How did they see their world or other people? This may have been a time before they were wounded or hurt by the world. It might have been a purer time in their life for their personality to have shone.

A blessing for them when they are grown would contain many of these characteristics within it. The same would apply to a child blessing their parent. Look back over your life and see if you can find things about their character that you can bless regardless of their current behavior.

Blessing people in general

Sometimes we have challenging relationships with others that might require us to dig deep for a blessing to be written or shared but it is possible if we put aside surface things we see and look for the positive character traits that we have observed over time.

As we learn to live honestly, entering into one another's lives, we must learn to become more sensitive in regards to loving each other. This is not a perfect world and we are certainly not perfect people, but God asks us to love each other actively.

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18

If we have been honest, put aside our rights for a special time, heard their hearts, and released our judgment, it becomes so much easier—maybe even natural—to sacrificially love someone else.

Physical Affirmation

I grew up without much physical affirmation. When I was a teenager I felt hungry for hugs. I thought this through and figured the easiest person to get a hug from would be my Grandma Smid. I was at her home and when we left I reached out and sought a hug from her. It was so well received; I thought “who would be next?” So one by one I reached out to other family members and found that when I hugged them, they typically responded with a warm hug in return.

Later in my life, I went too far with hugs. I lost all sense of healthy physical contact and moved into inappropriate physical contact and sexuality. When I was convicted to return to a healthier lifestyle those simple hugs didn't seem to mean anything anymore. I was starved for the way it felt to hug my grandma but my excessive physical boundary crossing had damaged my physical receptors.

I was in a really good church where hugs were often given and I received them with resentment due to my unhealthy hunger for more. But over time, something amazing happened! As my flesh detoxified from the abuse of touch, I found that God had healed my failed nerve endings. Simple hugs, holding hands to pray, and a pat on the shoulder became a lifeline to my soul, healing many places that were damaged.

I never thought it would happen, but the hunger was finally satiated. Today, I give physical affirmation to others rather than trying to manipulate it from someone else. I realize how important physical touch is when it is healthy. I know how many may be starved for the touch of a trusted friend who isn't looking for something in return.

Seeking permission to touch

I have also learned that some people may be wounded in such a way that touch may be something they can't accept from someone they don't know or without their permission. For some, physical touch can feel unsafe and potentially dangerous to their personal circumstances.

I learned that it was vital when at church, or in a social setting that if I don't know someone I need to ask permission to hug them if it is healthy in that setting to do so. I also learned that there are safe ways for people of the opposite gender to hug. A safe “side to side” hug can not only communicate healthy physical touch but it can also communicate that I desire to protect them by not assuming they are comfortable with other types of physical hugs.

Learning sensitivity for others hearts, souls, and physical boundaries is vital in developing respectful relationships.

Prayer for today: Father, help me to learn what it means to truly love another person. I am so used to ignoring my responsibility to show my love and assume others know I love them. I need your help to love those that are difficult to love. I also need your help to speak out my love for those with whom it is really vulnerable to do so. I cannot love without Your love in me. I ask you to show me Your love so I can give it to others.

Practical Application: Write a blessing for someone very important to your life. In this blessing share with them the character you see in them without talking about their accomplishments or things they have done for you.

Find three people that you really care about and the next time you see them or speak with them, and say "I Love You".

If you have a challenging conversation or interaction with a friend or relative this week, finish the conversation with "I Love You". Maybe you will find a change of heart through those words.

Write three feeling statements regarding the subject of Sensitivity:

"I feel _____

About writing a blessing for someone I love

Because _____"

"I feel _____

About saying "I love you." After a challenging conversation

Because _____"

"I feel _____

About loving people that have hurt me

Because _____"

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