



continuous conversion

LOVE SOMEONE TODAY

by Sara Tusek



It being February, the month of “love” as expressed on Valentine’s Day in the US, it seems appropriate to consider what it means to love someone.

SOWING SEEDS

Recently at church (Christ the Redeemer in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida) our pastor, Bishop Daniel Williams, spoke on sowing seed. He made the very clear and simple point that a seed will reproduce itself. It would be lunacy to expect that a seed would grow into something other than what it is.

So why don’t people realize that, to receive more of what they want, they need to sow the proper seed? Isn’t this logical?

Bishop Williams made some pretty pointed remarks to illustrate the ways in which people violate the basic principle of sowing:

“They want more love, and they sow . . . complaints!”

“They want more time, and they sow . . . hurry and hassle!”

“They want more money, and they sow . . . stinginess!”

We all laughed as Bishop Williams parodied our human frailties, but we sat up straight and listened when he told us the way to gain love—by loving more. “Love someone if you want more love,” he implored. This struck home.

AVOIDING HURT

Think about the last time you loved someone. Did that person love you back? Immediately, and gratifyingly? Did the person gaze at you with loving eyes and praise your loving nature?

Maybe. Or did that person not even notice your tremendous act of love? Was he or she so preoccupied, so immersed in his own world, that he didn’t even notice your heroically loving gesture?

Maybe he or she was so hurting inside that he met your love with sarcasm, or a biting retort. Has this ever happened to you? Your loving remark was taken as insincere, or as a veiled insult, especially when your remark was addressed to someone whose past experiences with you have not always been full of love.

Ouch! That hurts! Having your love rejected or even turned against you in anger is a painful experience. Better not to take the risk of being hurt—better not to be TOO loving, as you may look like a fool or be perceived as insincere.

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FAILURE TO LOVE?

Any normal person probably thinks twice before being loving. Especially in situations and relationships that have a history of unpleasantness, we would rather avoid the possibility of pain—or, on the other hand, of too-eager acceptance of our love. I once gave \$20 to a man begging on the street. He took it, pocketed it and proceeded to vigorously scold me for not giving him more money. When he realized I was a Christian, he demanded that I pick him up on that street corner every Sunday and take him to church with me. When I didn't say "yes" immediately, he became angry and verbally abusive toward me; he told me, not very politely, that I was a fake.

I'm somewhat ashamed that I didn't give in to his needling remarks on my lack of real love. Although he was clearly "socially incorrect" to take my gift, given in love, and use it to try to blackmail me into giving him more, I still wonder if he wasn't in some way right. Am I willing to remake my life to help someone who is in obvious need of help? Apparently, that day I was not.

PRAYER AS SOWING SEED

One response to the hard, personal work of actually loving someone is to say, "I'll pray for the person" and leave it at that. Praying, while scripturally correct, can be a convenient way to remain at a distance from someone's needs. Yet sometimes more is asked of us than the act of prayer.

Obviously I am not advocating that we give up prayer. Our Lord went into the wilderness to pray, and He showed the disciples how to pray. His relationship with His Father was built on prayer.

I'm asking if prayer alone, without other action, is always the most Christ-like way to love. Jesus prayed, and He also expressed His love in practical ways. He healed, fed and com-

forted people. He changed the weather to ease the disciples' fears; He raised the dead, in response to a woman's distress.

Jesus' love was poured out in the most everyday ways. As they say in counseling psychology, he "met people's felt needs." Rarely did He debate with the people who gathered around Him, pleading for help; He didn't spend much time lecturing people and trying to get them to see that their expectations were unrealistic. He didn't tell them to stop what they were doing and sit down while He held a prayer meeting. He felt compassion for people and acted in love to address their requests. Can we do the same?

SOWING SEEDS OF LOVE

To get more love, sow the seed of love. The safe way to sow is to love those who already love us—family, friends, people who are not terribly needy. A quick "I love you," met with a smile, would be pleasant for all concerned.

However, I don't think that Bishop Williams was referring exclusively to this kind of "easy love." He wasn't on a campaign to get us all to relax more, and love the loveable.

Most likely, he means for us to be like Christ—to seek out and love the unlovable. On the less objectionable end of the "unlovable" scale, this would mean loving those people we already know but don't like very much. Instead of avoiding people who rub us the wrong way, we'd give them a cheery "hello" and be friendly. Great idea!

But on the far end of the "unlovable scale" we find people who are just plain scary. Hateful, fanatically vengeful, mentally unbalanced—how do we love these people? It seems to me that, from a Christian perspective, these are the only people who really need our love. These are the people we should be thinking of when we hear in church to "love our neighbor as ourselves." I'm not at all sure I can do this; I definitely need Christ to do this through me.

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