

## **"Do I Love People?"**

(Love for one another; evangelism)

**Dr. Jerry Nelson**

**I Thess 3**

**July 16, 1995**

**"From the moment God's Spirit touched his heart at age twenty three, Tom Taylor has been a different man.**

**He was not looking for God, not wanting religion, not seeking an experience, but after reading his childhood Bible for many hours one day, he was overwhelmed with his sin against God and wanted to make it right.**

**All he knew to do was kneel down by his bed and cry out for help and salvation.**

**After that his habits and his language changed, and he read his Bible regularly.**

**There had been a great void in his heart that the Holy Spirit of God filled.**

**It was soon after that Sherry met this quiet man and when they were married they wanted to obey God and do His will.**

**What form that would take, or what their lives would look like exactly they didn't know.**

**During the first two years of their marriage they gave a couple of evenings each week and many weekends to invite young men from a military base over to their home for recreation and food.**

**They did that first right here in Denver.**

**And later when they moved to Canada they continued the practice.**

**Sherry writes that her basically reserved husband began to spend time with people daily, building relationships and looking for opportunities to tell people about Jesus.**

**Tom and Sherry often had people into their home for a meal - just to spend time with them.**

Moving to another city in Canada, Tom and a friend would stand in the busiest interaction on the campus of Queen's University and ask students if they wanted to use the Bible to discuss life's issues.

They started with just a few but before long they had dozens of young men and women sitting in their home week after week talking about the Lord.

A few years later, after yet another move, Tom was spending his lunch hours downtown having lunch on the mall with a friend who together with him would strike up conversations with whoever sat down near them.

And most often they would direct the conversation naturally to a discussion of the Lord's impact on their lives.

And many of them would then come to their home.

Tom and Sherry had four daughters during this time and they drew them into their ministry of just loving people.

(From p 81 In Search of Hidden Heroes Dueck & Moore, 1995)

What would cause a man and a woman to give up their free time to befriend others?

What would cause them to open their home to strangers?

What would cause them to apparently think all the time about ways to serve others?

To me, Tom and Sherry Taylor obviously love people!

I'm attracted to that kind of love.

But it forces me to ask of myself - "Do I love people?"

Not just "Do I do my duty to those for whom I'm responsible?" -be it family or neighbors or others -But "Do I love people?"

What do I care most about? Others or me?

What has my heart, my attention, my money, my energy - the good of others or me? God's goals for people or my goals?

When I first read the text of Scripture that we will look at today, I was gripped with the same question - "Do I love people like this?"

I'm embarrassed to say how often my convenience or my schedule dictates my response to people -  
at least my felt response even if I do or say something else.

And so when I saw the Apostle Paul as I see him in these verses, I said to myself, I want that - I want a love for people that is as genuine, as giving, as spontaneous, as unadulterated as his love for the Thessalonians.

Look with me please at I Thessalonians 2:17 and following.

Stand please for the reading of God's word and listen carefully for the heart of this man Paul, as he spills out his affection for these people.

READ I Thess 2:17-3:13

I. I want you to think with me first this morning about the "feelings" of love.

Yes love is a decision (we'll look at that more just a little later).

And yes love is actions. A decision that is acted on.

But love is also affection.

Paul was in the city of Corinth when he wrote this letter.

He had been in Corinth for several months after having been in Thessalonica for only a few weeks.

During those very few weeks he, Timothy and others had led many people to Jesus - Those Thessalonians had responded to the grace of God and they formed a church.

But the authorities of the city had forced Paul and the

others to flee for their lives - leaving behind this fledgling church.

Now look at Paul's description of his feelings for these people.

1. 2:17 "Out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you.
2. 2:18 "We wanted to come..."
3. 3:1 "When we could stand it no longer..."
4. 3:3 "We didn't want you to be unsettled..."
5. 2:8 "We loved you so much...we shared our lives with you because you had become so dear to us.'

Those are not words of obligation.

Those are not words of forced compliance with some set of expectations.

Those are words of affection.

I want more of that kind of affection for people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in Germany before and at the beginning of WWII.

He and other pastors had been pressed to sign a declaration pledging allegiance to the Fuhrer and agreeing with the odious policy of racial purity.

Due to his books he had, by 1939, become fairly well known and was given opportunity to travel abroad.

At that point in time, escape from Germany was still possible and when the pressure to do so was greatest - Bonhoeffer was in America having been invited to take up exile here - thus avoiding sure persecution back in Germany.

The possibility of pastoring German refugees here in America was presented to him and for a few days he weighed carefully what to do.

Then on June 21, 1939 he made up his mind and shortly wrote a

letter to the American clergy that wanted him to stay.

In the letter he wrote:

"I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.

Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security." I must return.

On July 8 he left America and headed home to Nazi Germany.

It wasn't long before he was imprisoned - and then after years of being moved from one prison camp to another, on April 8, 1945, just weeks before the end of the war, he was executed by hanging.

His affection and commitment was so great that he was willing to leave the security of America to be with those whom he called, "My people".

He loved his people! - Do I love people? - Do you?

Love is not just duty it is also affection - feelings.

II. But this morning I want you to not only think about the feelings of love for people I want you to see the goal of love for people.

What was failure to Paul?

Look at 3:5 "I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you..."

Later to the Corinthians he wrote, "Who is weak and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"

Failure to Paul was people not knowing Jesus and people not following Christ.

**What was success to Paul?**

**3:8 "Now we really live since you are standing firm."**

**2:19-20 READ**

**3:9 "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you."**

**Success to Paul was people standing firm in their faith and love.**

**I want you to consider carefully how Paul evaluated success and failure in his life.**

**He was not concerned with how he was personally evaluated in his ministry skills.**

**He was not ultimately concerned with the number of churches established or the programs started.**

**Success for Paul was the spiritual welfare of others - that's the goal of love.**

**Is the welfare and especially the spiritual welfare of others what I value most in life? - is that the goal of my life.**

**That's the kind of love for people I want - the kind of love that has as its highest goal not my agenda but their spiritual welfare.**

**Do I love people? - Do you?**

**III. Paul not only demonstrates the feelings of love and the goal of love but he also demonstrates the actions of love for people.**

**Love doesn't just feel and wish - it acts.**

**Look at 3:10.**

**What is the first thing love does? READ 3:10**

**You pray for people you love!**

**Not just quick, cheap, easy prayers but intense, frequent,**

earnest prayers.

And notice what you pray for people you love.

READ 3:11,12

Notice what is and isn't included in the prayer:

First what is included:

1. "May God clear the way so we can be together so we can help you" We want to be with you.

2. "May God make your love increase"  
Paul prays about their relationships

3. "may God strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy."

Paul is praying that their faith in Jesus will be strong enough that they will live righteous lives and that they will be set apart for God's purposes.

Moral and purposeful lives - for the advancement of God's kingdom.

That's how love prays.

Notice what is not included in this prayer:

Deliverance from suffering or other lesser issues.

These people were in a town where the authorities hated them.

And surely these people had the normal difficulties of life like any people - loss of income, sickness, disappointments and the like.

And it is not that God says we shouldn't pray for those those things in our lives - we should and have every right to - but Paul spent his prayer time addressing the most important issues of life: their spiritual welfare and their effectiveness in ministry.

And why would Paul concentrate his prayer attention on those issues?

Notice the perspective of Paul's prayers - 3:13 "When our Lord Jesus comes..."

In Paul's mind values are determined in this life based on the coming of Jesus.

His value-system is shaped by the coming of the Lord. He lives with that perspective always in mind.

Because then, health, wealth, influence, and fame will be irrelevant - what matters most now is how people are related to Jesus Christ.

So that is what fills Paul's prayers.

Do I love people enough to pray for them?

And do I pray for them about what matters most?

Love not only feels and has a goal but love also acts.

The first thing love does is pray.

The second thing I notice Paul does for those he loves is encourage them.

One of the most humbling and encouraging things I hear from people in this church are these words:

"I pray for you every day." WOW!

I have come to understand that apart from the grace of God I can't accomplish anything of significance - I can't truly do anything for the Kingdom of God - I need his undergirding strength every day.

And when people write or speak of their prayer for me - it is one of the most encouraging things I could possibly hear.

This entire letter to the Thessalonians was one great encouragement of them.

Paul honestly commends them and thanks God for the grace that had borne fruit in their lives.



He speaks of his delight in them personally and spiritually.

And most of all he prays for them with words that mean something - prayers that are significant.

Love encourages! Do I personally and particularly encourage people? Do I love people enough to not only pray for them but encourage them?

In Chuck Colson's book Loving God, he tells about an incredible 91 year old lady by the name of Myrtle Howell.

One of her sons had died and the other was very sick. She was stuck in a highrise for the elderly in Columbus, Georgia and wishing that God would just let her die.

In one of her prayers she told God that if he didn't have anything more for her to do here on earth, she was ready to go.

She claims that as clearly as can be, God spoke to her and told her to write to prisoners.

Obediently, she wrote her first letter:

"Dear Inmate,

I am a grandmother who loves you and cares for you who is in a place you had not planned to be.

My love and sympathy goes out to you. I am willing to be a friend to you. If you'd like to hear from me, write me. I will answer every letter you write.

A Christian friend, Grandmother Howell

The prison chaplain in Atlanta received that letter and returned a letter to Myrtle with the names of 8 inmates.

Over the next several months Grandmother Howell wrote to hundreds of inmates in that prison.

Her letters were light into a dark place.

Most of all her letters were hope into hopeless lives.

One inmate, illustrating the encouragement Grandmother Howell brought to so many, wrote,:

Dear Grandmother,  
I received your letter and it made me sad when you wrote that you think you may not be alive much longer.

I thought that I would wait and come to see you and then tell you all you have meant to me. But now I've changed my mind. I'm going to tell you now.

You've given me all the love and concern and care that I've missed for years and my whole outlook on life has changed.

You've made me realize that life is worth living and that it's not all bad. You claim it's all God's doing but I think you deserve the credit.

I didn't think I was capable of feeling love for anyone again, but I know I love you as my very own precious grandmother."

Myrtle Howell was living out the truth that love encourages.

But love not only prays and encourages it also sacrifices.

In 3:10 Paul makes it clear his plan is to actually come to them and "supply what is lacking" - to give to them.

And in 2:8-9 when Paul described how he related to them when he was with them earlier he writes, "we gave our lives to you and we worked hard for you..."

This love sacrificed for their good.

I was reading a book recently, by Pastor David Jeremiah of San Diego and in it he cites an incident in the life of Bob Pierce who founded World Vision.

Pierce was a man with great compassion for the hurting people

of this world.

Shortly before his death by leukemia, Bob Pierce had the opportunity to go to Indonesia once again - this time to see a dear friend.

His friend was taking him around to the different relief centers in the country when they came to a river near one of the clinics.

As they approached the river, they saw a girl lying on a bamboo mat in the mud.

Pierce asked what she was doing there and his friend explained that she was dying of cancer - and had only hours or days to live.

Pierce felt himself instantly angry and demanded to know why she wasn't at the clinic with someone caring for her.

The director said that she had asked to be placed by the river where it was cooler.

At that Pierce went over to her, got down on his knees by her, took her hand and prayed for her.

Of course she didn't understand what he was saying but she nonetheless looked up at him and spoke.

Pierce wanted to know what she had said, and so an interpreter responded that she said, "if only I could sleep again, if only I could sleep again."

Her cancer was so painful she couldn't sleep.

With tears in his eyes Bob Pierce reached into his pocket and took out a bottle of special sleeping pills - the very ones he used to endure the pain of his own cancer.

He was ten days away from the place where he could get more medication but he told the director, "you make sure this young lady gets a good night's rest as long as these pills last."

That's love in action. Do I love people? - Do you?

**Love prays, love encourages and love gives - even sacrificially.**

**Where does such love begin?**

**If I know that I don't have that kind of compassion for people, if I know that my love is lacking - where do I start?**

**Certainly if Paul could pray for the Thessalonians that their love would increase and overflow - it is appropriate for us to pray that even for ourselves.**

**I think developing a love for people starts with prayer - prayer for ourselves - "Lord fill my heart with love for people"**

**But don't pray that prayer lightly - If God answers that prayer it will not only mean days of great joy but it will also mean days of great sorrow as you cry for people who aren't responding to Jesus.**

**If God answers that prayer it means your life will change - what you do with your time, how you spend your money, and what matters to you will change.**

**"Change my heart O God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart O God, may I be like you.**

**Developing a love for people starts with prayer - Lord, give me a love for people.**

**Secondly, developing a love for people begins with prayer but continues with action - doing something for someone.**

**Several years ago I was speaking with a very wise lady in our church about this subject of a passion for people and I clearly remember her words:**

**"If you want to develop a love for people - get with people - prayerfully and intentionally reach out to them - the love will come.**

Five or six years ago Eddie Carswell wrote a song that became popular for quite a while - "Light your World" was the title

Two doors down one rocking chair is rocking  
She sits there all alone, her husband dead and gone  
The best years of her life they spent together  
he was always strong, but now she's on her own.

And the telephone never rings,  
No one laughs, No one sings,  
It's quiet there, Does anyone care?

A knocking at the door breaks the silence  
She looks out to see, the little boy from down the street  
She cracks the door surprised that he came over  
Flowers in his hand, like a little gentleman  
he said I picked these just for you.  
Hope you like the color blue  
I could stay awhile, I love to see you smile

It only takes a little time  
To show someone how much you care  
It only takes a little time  
To answer someone's biggest prayer.

Light your world  
Let the love of God shine through  
In the little things you do  
Light your world  
And though your light may  
reach only two or three  
light your world.

Will you love people?