

Chapter Three

Love Deep

Two hundred young inner-city Baltimore boys were interviewed by a sociology class. The students were instructed to interview each young man, to create an evaluation of their future potential. In all two hundred cases the students concluded, 'he hasn't got a chance in the world.' Twenty-five years later another sociology professor stumbled across the study. He decided to assign his students a follow-up study, to trace what happened to each boy.

The new study uncovered something remarkable. Of the initial two hundred boys, twenty had moved away or died. Of the remaining men, 176 had become more than moderately successful lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. These findings so astounded the professor that he broadened the study to try to determine the secret of these men's success. Interviewing them, he asked each one, "How do you account for your success?" In every instance, the men would answer "There was this teacher..." They all referred to the same teacher. Fortunately, she was still alive, and living in the area.

The professor called upon her. He asked the old but alert woman what magic formula she had discovered to equip these boys to overcome the slums and become successful men. The teacher's face beamed, "It's really very simple. I loved those boys."

This Baltimore teacher lived a life that outlived her own. She knew the key to embracing a generation into greatness was love. My strong hope is that everyone reading her story will

believe and love the next generation into greatness. You do not need special talents or skills. All you need is intentionality. Multiple studies have proved that the deciding characteristic in changing the life of high-risk children is someone who cares.

When it's all said and done, all we ever wanted was to know we were truly loved and cared for by someone.

Can you imagine a world where every trace of love is suddenly and completely erased? Love songs on radio, love stories in books and movies, young love, mother love, love of beauty, the spontaneous love of children, the fierce love of God...all completely eradicated from our memories and culture. Would there really be any reason at all to keep living? Could anyone contemplate thriving in such a wasteland? All we've ever really wanted was to know we were truly loved by someone. Love, or the hope of eventual love, keeps us alive, keeps us breathing. We were hardwired to be loved and to love.

The curious thing is how bad we are at loving. Someone once described Panda Bears as ridiculously clumsy and inept at making love. Of course, they were talking about Panda's lack of skill at procreation. While humans may be more artful in physical love, yet we like Panda's, are ridiculously clumsy and inept at love overall.

Part of our clumsiness is that we don't always speak someone else's love language. Dr. Gary Chapman, author of a deeply significant book, *The Five Love Languages*, believes all of us interpret love in one of basically five languages. He lists them as physical touch, acts of kindness, gift-giving, affirming words, and quality time. (If you don't have Dr. Chapman's book, I strongly suggest you skip lunch today and go buy it). Fifty months on the best seller list, Dr. Chapman's book has helped millions of people express their love in ways that can be received.

Unfortunately, we often express love in a foreign language and then we're puzzled when they don't understand. My love language is affirming words in writing. When close friends

who know me want to bless me, they rarely get me gifts, because they know that for me something written means more to me than all the gifts in the world. (I have received very meaningful gifts from my friends like a kayak, and a trip to Yosemite, but for the most part gifts do not spell love to me).

But words...words from the heart I treasure. Sometimes a short note, email or letter can empower, amazingly renewing lapsed courage. Sometimes a letter can change history. We have many examples through time.

William Wilberforce was deeply discouraged. After years of provoking Britain's Parliament about the need to abolish slavery, he felt he could not go on. But then a letter arrived. It was written by a dear old friend. The friend had written it with trembling hands from his death bed. The letter said;

"Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it."

Wilberforce's resolve returned with the encouraging letter. The writer, John Wesley died six days later, but Wilberforce fought for forty-five more years and in 1833, three days before his own death, Wilberforce saw slavery abolished in Britain. Words are a powerful love language.

One of my young friends, love language is quality time. When she comes to town, we try to clear our schedules, take walks on the harbor, and tell stories from our lives. People whose love language is quality time just enjoy being with you. They could just sit on the front porch and watch ice cubes melt in the glass. You don't have to be regaling them with amazing stories or pour out Solomonic wisdom. They just want to be with you.

My friends Dan and Jamie Collins, have a house full of twenty somethings who just love to hang out with them. Some nights

they like to all just sit together on the couch and watch movies. Dan and Jamie have learned well the art of welcome. Their door is always open, and there is always a large pot of soup on the stove. Their house is a refuge in a conflicted confusing world.

For this generation cooking often means caring. In Africa there is a proverb that until you hear the lips eating food, you cannot hear the lips cry. Once I asked one of my young friends to invite her friends to our house for dinner. Although our budget was slim, I barbequed thick steaks and fourteen young people ate like there was no tomorrow. They felt deeply loved and cared for by just simply throwing steaks on a grill. My friend Marcia was making banana bread and a young man exclaimed "you're making banana bread? You mean it's something you could make?"

Hospitality of heart and life are a missing art, and when this generation sniffs the slightest aroma of either, they're immediately engaged.

Acts of service of kindness are not limited to food. My husband Joey leaves a trail of fixed things all over the house. If it's broken, he quietly fixes it. No fanfare, no trumpets. Often, I've come home from speaking in another town, and walked into a room, to find a fireplace mantle gracing our library, or a room full of shutters. Joey is positively verbose in his quiet acts of service. (I know some of you reading are jealous...you should be).

In a litigious society touch has become associated with perversion...while there are many legitimate reasons why this so, it's a great loss that prevents innocent touch...touch that says; "I know you're here, I care about what's happening in your life." I remember as a young child someone I deeply respected just putting their arm around my shoulder. It meant so much to me. Her gesture tacitly said to me "I am standing in solidarity with you, I realize you have an innate dignity as a fellow human being. You are not despised, nor distained." Here I am almost forty years later still remembering her arm around my shoulder.

Some people go for a week or more untouched. Studies have shown the physical benefits of touch. There are emotional, spiritual, dimensions as well. When physical touch is someone's love language, we need to find appropriate and non-sexual ways of speaking.

For those whose love language is gifts, the gifts do not need to be expensive or rare, they just represent an attentiveness to what someone might love. My friend Lionel was always on the alert looking for gifts that would surprise and delight his friends. When we were building our house, Lionel created an exact model, so we could see the final product. For a friend who loved comics, Lionel spent weeks designing a complete comic book with the friend being the hero of the story.

There are many postures of embracing this generation into greatness. Words, quality time, acts of kindness, touch, gifts. My young friend Munju says;

"It's not complicated...be initiators...be intentional; carry out simple acts in each person's love language. After reading this chapter I was like, "I can do this, Anyone, can do this." But then I had a question, "Why isn't everyone doing this?"

Love Endures

Love is a marathon runner who no matter how tired, exhausted, no matter the weather doesn't stop till the finish line. There are many people who run while the weather is pleasant. There are others willing to run if there is honor and acclaim attached to the race. But love, true love never fails. Love doesn't stop when it gets inconvenient. Love pays up front and demands no guarantees. You will probably at some point find yourself out of love.

Recently I faced the sprint like nature of my capacity for love. After a particularly sweet time of investing my life in a young friend they fell off the map. No calls, no evidence they were still alive. It was as if they'd died. I was confused. I made a determination that even if I never saw them again, I would commit to love them for the rest of my life. I missed them

terribly.

Eventually they reappeared, and we traveled together, and then they disappeared again. (Being a bear of little brain, I am starting to realize this might be a cyclical pattern). Then we spent a weekend together with some mutual friends, and they were distant, as though we had little history together. I was pained at how many tests my heart failed that weekend in loving well.

My young friend while ignoring me, started reaching out to one of my dearest friends. I was baffled. I was confused. I kept reminding myself it wasn't a personal referendum on my desirability as a friend. It felt as if our friendship was just a comfortable rest stop on the freeway of life. Obviously, there's no need to maintain a relationship with a rest stop. Perhaps our friendship was merely a momentary convenience. The challenge was to keep loving even in the face of it all looking futile.

If you commit to love a young person into greatness there will be times when you feel you're doing all the reaching out, you're doing all the hard rowing. You are not alone. Many young people are clueless that continual withdrawals of love without any deposits can lead to relational bankruptcy. Self-absorbed, immature, their emotional debit cards only go one way. It takes great maturity on our part to commit to keep loving.

Embracing someone into greatness may be simple but it will not be easy. While your love may be hearty and determined, at some point it will run thin and be easily exhausted. It's at these times it's important to realize that true love prevails, it endures, love never fails.

When you've come to the end of your loving, (and you will), other friends committed to embracing people into greatness can come along side and encourage you. Embracing someone into greatness is no job for lone rangers. It takes a community.

Simple, Not Easy

Love involves so much more than great feelings. True love costs. It's expensive. Love is hard, difficult, complex, daunting. True love will sometimes take every ounce of your strength. If you have children of your own, you already know this. I have a stellar friend who is an emergency room physician. Dr. Cheryl used to get up several times each night to her screaming child who suffers from a severe case of excema. She and her husband Dennis often had to change the bloody sheets of her child's bed more than once. She had to explain to the neighbors the heart piercing screams of their lovely Hannah in the night.

Parents of children with illness, spouses with ill mates, all know the high cost of love. The very thing we most desire, is the thing that costs us the most.

I am privileged to love awesome young emerging leaders. They are delightful to be with and Joey and I love having them in our hearts and home. But embracing a generation into greatness sometimes means embracing someone at the very worst possible time in their lives. For us as a family that has meant embracing Skye.

Skye's 5-month-old little boy died in her arms when she was 17. While most 17-year-olds were about to graduate from high school and were planning on going to college, Sky had been on hard drugs for 5 years. She was street wise to the core, knifing every air chamber of her lifeboat. We loved her, we prayed, we advocated for her, we reached out, we agonized. Skye kept getting worse. Life was taking its toll on Skye. It was certainly taking a toll on our family.

Skye's story is on an upward trajectory. She is taking responsibility for her decisions. We are proud of her. She has taught us many things, and I imagine she has more to teach us. One of the most important lessons is that love sets boundaries.

Other people's drama and heartache cannot become yours. I

have seen people embrace every need they ever encountered, and it destroyed their own capacity for love and a sane household. If your family is getting the leftovers of your love, you are without question, out of order.

If boundaries do not come easily to you there are some excellent books full of wisdom on the subject. When you set your heart to intentionally embrace a generation into greatness, you are going to need clear boundaries, because this generation often has no boundaries. If you become consumed with their needs, you'll not be doing them any favors. You'll just create unhealthy dependencies that will postpone their maturity.

Love One

Maybe all this talk about the cost of love is exhausting you. Maybe love is just too expensive. Perhaps the idea of embracing a generation into greatness seems overwhelming. Just trying to wrap your mind around the concept leaves you wanting a latte. Here's a little secret that might help; love one. Just one. Love the next young person presented to you.

Yesterday I was writing this little book to you in a coffee bar. I was just about to pack up my computer, when in walked a young man I'd met a couple of times in the past. I invited him over to my table and we briefly talked. He offered to critique this book and walked me to my car a few blocks away. I invited him to dinner with my family and gave him one of my earlier books. The whole exchange was probably less than 30 minutes. But I felt so enriched by the moment. Love the one, the next young person you see. Right now, is not too soon to start.

Ponderings;

1. What is the costliest love you've ever experienced?
2. What memory do you have of feeling authentically loved when you were young?

3. Of the five love languages, physical touch, acts of kindness, affirming words, gift giving and presence, which is your personal love language?
4. What's one way today you could find out the love language of someone close to you?
5. What have you done in the past when you felt out of love?
6. What are some good boundaries you've set in seeking to love others?