



## Be my valentine . . .

In my work with couples preparing for marriage, I ask them to consider what is their "love language". Author and therapist Gary Chapman suggested a number of years ago that all of us have a primary "language" through which we express (and receive) affection. He identified five "languages":

- Words of affirmation (e.g., "I love you")
- Acts of service
- Physical touch
- Gifts
- Quality Time

It is helpful to know your own language, and that of your partner (or kids or parents, for that matter), so that when you are trying to show someone you care, you do so in a way that they can understand (and if they don't "get it", you have an idea why not). And I believe that this works . . . in individual relationships.

The theory runs into rocky ground, however, when the care we feel transcends the individual. The counter-slogan might be "Don't talk the talk if you won't walk the walk." In other words, those "three little words" don't necessarily accomplish much in serious situations (such as Haiti). I remember hearing a prayer for the needy once where the individual said "and let those who are needy be taken care of by You". Somehow their sense of concern ended in words directed upwards, rather than recognizing that "taking care of the needy" is a very physical, this-worldly, action, encompassing "acts of service", "physical touch", "gifts" and "quality time." I'm not minimizing prayer at all, simply echoing Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh's words:

The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves "inside the skin" of the other. We "go inside" their body, feelings, and mental formations, and witness for ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their suffering. We must become one with the object of our observation. When we are in contact with another's suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us. Compassion means, literally, "to suffer with."

When we observe deeply in this way, the fruit of our meditation will naturally transform into some kind of action. We will not just say, "I love him very much," but instead, "I will do something so that he will suffer less." The mind of compassion is truly present when it is effective in removing another person's suffering.

(Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace in Every Step: the Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, New York: Bantam Books, 1991, pp. 81-2)

While the traditional association of the Christian St. Valentine with romantic love seems to go back only to the fourteenth century and Chaucer, it is clear that one of the real St. Valentines (there are several in the record) was martyred in the third century for giving care to Christians under persecution. Love, for him, was action-even if it were to lead to death. So, love mightily -- whether it's your sweetie, your kids, your parents . . . or the world! Speak love, certainly. AND, act love! **BE** a Valentine!

Blessings,

Gary

PS: If you're interested in knowing your "love language", there's an on-line quiz [here](#).