

A Mother's Love  
1 John 4:7-11

Dr. Tony Campolo is a well-known and highly-respected inspirational speaker. Over the years, Tony Campolo has spent much of his time traveling around the world on speaking tours. Meanwhile, his wife, Peggy, has chosen to stay home and give herself and all that she has to raising their two children. On those rare occasions when Peggy does travel with Tony, she finds herself engaged in conversations with some of the most accomplished, impressive, influential, sophisticated people in the world.

After one such trip, Peggy told Tony that sometimes as she visits with these powerful people... she finds herself feeling intimidated and sometimes even questioning her own self-worth. Tony said to her: "Well, honey, why don't you come up with something you could say when you meet people that will let them know that you strongly value what you do and you feel that it is dramatically, urgent and crucial and important.

Well, not long after that, Tony and Peggy Campolo were at a party... when a woman said to Peggy in a rather condescending tone, "Well, my dear, what do you do?" Tony Campolo heard his wife say:

"I am nurturing two Homo Sapiens into the dominant values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in order that they might become instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia God envisioned from the beginning of time."

And the other woman said: "O, my, I'm just a lawyer."

I like that story because it reminds us that there are a lot of important jobs in the world today but not one of them is more important than the job of being a mother. After all... who has a better opportunity to shape and influence and impact young lives... than a mother? Today, we celebrate Mother's Day and I want to share with you something I found this week in anticipation of Mother's Day. It's called "Somebody Said" --

Somebody said it takes about six weeks to get back to normal after you've had a baby...  
Somebody doesn't know that once you're a mother, "Normal," is history.

Somebody said you learn how to be a mother by instinct...  
Somebody never took a three-year-old shopping.

Somebody said being a mother is boring...  
Somebody never rode in a car driven by a teenager with a learner's permit.

Somebody said you don't need an education to be a mother...  
Somebody never helped a fourth grader with her math.

Somebody said you can't love the fifth child as much as you love the first...  
Somebody doesn't have five children.

Somebody said the hardest part of being a mother is labor and delivery...  
Somebody never watched her "baby" get on the bus for the first day of kindergarten or on a plane headed for military "boot camp."

Somebody said your mother knows you love her, so you don't need to tell her...  
Somebody isn't a mother.

Now, of course, the common thread that runs through all of these sayings is obvious. They are all about the love of a mother... and how that love can be expressed in words, attitudes and actions.

Now, that is exactly what we see in our Scripture lesson today from 1 John 4. John writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

On Mother's Day we think naturally of love – the love that our mothers have shown to us. The expressions of love and appreciation we offer to our mothers today. And of course the source of all love is God. We know what love is only because God first loved us. He proved his love for us by sending his Son to save us from sin and death. Sin separates us from God, but Jesus paid the price for our sin at the cross and brought us back into a loving relationship with the Father. Today we rejoice and celebrate the fact that we are forgiven and redeemed children of God.

God loves us with an unconditional love. We don't deserve His love, but he loves us anyway. We sin, we disobey, we fail to listen to his voice, we wander off our own way. But God loves us anyway. The challenge for us is to love others the way God loves us – with a sacrificial love, a love that doesn't stop to count the cost, a love with no strings attached.

It's hard for us to love that way, isn't it? It's part of God's nature, but it doesn't come to us naturally. People from Eastern cultures and people from our Western culture have different perceptions of life, language, and relationships. Researchers have used this little exercise to understand the differences between people from East and West. People were asked to finish this sentence: "I love my mother, but . . . ."

People raised in Western culture said things like:

"I love my mother, but . . . . she can drive me crazy!"

"I love my mother, but . . . . she absolutely cannot cook."

"I love my mother, but . . . . she couldn't grow a dandelion if her life depended on it."

"I love my mother, but . . . she tends to smother me with her love."

In other words, in Western culture what comes after "I love my mother, but . . ." is usually a negative remark. Our love is tempered by our knowledge of our mother's human foibles and frailties.

But the Eastern answer is typically quite different.

"I love my mother, but . . . I will never be able to show her how much."

"I love my mother, but . . . I can never repay what she has done for me."

"I love my mother, but . . . she works so hard for her family."

The "Eastern" answer does not use "but" to water down the love. The "Eastern" answer does not use "but" as an eraser to what preceded it. Instead, the "but" adds more feeling and flavor to the love. It seems we have much to learn when it comes to love. Love is not supposed to be safe. Love is not supposed to be easy. The ones we love are not supposed to be "perfect."

The presence of a parent's love is a child's whole world. The absence of that love creates a terrible alternative universe. I'm sure lots of Moms received treasured gifts this Mother's Day.

Flowers ripped out of the flowerbed.

Breakfasts of burnt toast and runny eggs.

Mysterious clay creations whose purpose has not yet been determined.

Hugs and kisses that came with their own flavor and degree of stickiness.

And I'll bet not one Mom here this morning frowned at the flowers, bemoaned her breakfast, or pitched her pottery. Not one sticky kiss or muddy hug was rejected.

Love accepts the love that is offered to it. A child's expression of love for Mom on Mother's Day is accepted with an overflowing heart, no matter how imperfect that expression might be. That's exactly how God loves us. We are definitely imperfect. We sin. We disobey. And yet every time we turn back to God and confess our sins, He welcomes us with open arms and loves us and forgives us.

Our text this morning is about love – God's love for us demonstrated so beautifully in the gift of His Son Jesus. This day is about love – as we remember the love we have received from our mothers. Today we are challenged to love others as God has loved us. I want to share with you now three important ways to express love.

I. We express our love with WORDS

Love can be expressed with words. It seems like it would be so easy to express our love with words, but the truth is that precious few people do that well. Why is that? Why do we have trouble speaking the words of love? If we only realized how powerful words are, I think we would work harder at the task of expressing our love with words.

Some years ago, a woman was dying in a local hospital. She was in her mid-80's. Her son flew in to be with her. I happened to be present when he arrived and entered the room. He walked over to the bedside of his dying mother. He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. Then, touched by that tender moment of seeing her so weak and vulnerable and dying, he said to her: "Mom, you have been such a good mother to me. And, I want you to know I love you."

And, through tears, she said: "Son, that's the first time you've ever told me. Last Friday was your 63rd birthday and that's the first time you ever told me." Isn't that something? It took him 63 years to say "I love you" to his mother.

Let me ask you something. Is there a word of love you need to speak today?

Those of you fortunate enough to still have your parents... how long has it been since you told your Mom or Dad how much you love them and appreciate them?

Or, how long has it been since you told your spouse? I don't mean a quick, routine, matter of fact "I love you"... but a real heart-to-heart expression of your love in words.

And parents, how about you? How long has it been since you told your children how proud you are of them and how much you cherish them? Let me suggest something. For one week, write down every word you say to your children and then ask: How many of these words are words of love, encouragement and appreciation... and not just words of correction or discipline? I know as parents we have to be referees sometimes and that is a loving thing to do, but also we need to be cheerleaders. We need to say "I love you."

There is no question about it. One of the best ways to express love is with words.

## II. We express our love with ATTITUDE

We can express our love with our attitude toward life. Some people go through life with a terrible attitude – always negative, always complaining, everyone's out to get them. And yet God has called us to be different than people of the world, our attitude toward life is different. We know that God is with us, we know that He will take care of us. We know that life is about more than money and material things, that God has given us everything we truly need for this life and the next. And that affects our attitude. Christ fills our lives with hope and joy and peace and love. And we live with an attitude of love.

Some years ago in a mining town in West Virginia... a 17-year-old-boy took a summer job in the coal mines. Being a "coal miner for the summer" sounded adventuresome and macho.

However, the second week on the job, he got lost deep down in the mines. He had been working with a group of veteran miners. They had warned him. They had cautioned him. They had told him to stay close to the group because it would be so easy to get lost down there in the numerous caves and treacherous passageways of the mine.

But he was 17-years-old... and one day he, absent-mindedly, wandered away from his work-team... and he became lost... completely lost! He screamed for help, but the miners had moved on to another location and no one could hear him.

Then, suddenly, his light went out and he was in total darkness. He was absolutely terrified. He began to cry. He thought to himself:

"This is how it all ends for me. I'm going to die down here.  
I don't know which way to go. I don't know how to get out."

He dropped down on his knees to pray:

"O God Help Me!" he said out loud. "O God Please Help Me!"

Then he noticed something. As he was kneeling there to pray, he felt his right knee touching something hard. He felt it. It was a railroad track. He realized that if he kept his hand on that track and followed it, it would lead him out!

That's what he did. He held onto the track and followed the track and eventually it brought him out of the dark, out of the depths of the mine... to light and safety.

There's a lesson in that for us.

If we will hold onto the track of God's love and God's Word and follow wherever it leads,

If we will make love our attitude in life, no matter how dark some moments may be... the love-track will bring us out and lead us to the light.

As "cliché-ish" as it may sound, it is still profoundly true... "Love is the answer," so we would do well to hold onto that track... and live by that attitude. As Christians that is our calling... to live always by the spirit and attitude of love. We can express our love with words and with attitude.

### III. We express our love with ACTIONS

In 1 John 3 Jesus says: Let us not love only with words or tongue, but with actions." That's so important. It's one thing to say "I Love You." It's another thing to show it, to prove it. (That's what God did in sending Jesus as our Savior)

Years ago a girl from Borneo came to America to go to college. Her name was Annie Wong. Her grandfather had been a head-hunter. When she was in high school, Annie Wong went one night to a youth program led by a Methodist college student. That night she was converted. She accepted Christ as her Savior and dedicated her life to him.

But then she had a problem. How would she tell her parents about her new-found faith? She decided to not tell them in words, but rather to show them in deeds of love.

Here's how she described what happened. She said:

"Before Christ came into my life, I was spoiled and selfish. I was irritable and impatient. I was disrespectful to my parents. My room was a mess and my attitude was worse. But after Christ came into my life, I changed. I was kind to my parents. I cleaned up my room. I helped with the house-work. I spoke with tenderness and respect to my parents. I was loving toward everyone.

My parents noticed and they said to me: 'Annie, you are different! Why? What has happened to you?'

She said to them: 'Yes, I am different because I have been re-born! I have Christ as my Saviour. I am a Christian now and Christians always live by the law of love.'

And her parents said: 'Tell us more of this religion. Tell us more of this Christ. If He can change people like that, we want to be Christians, too!'"

That's the way it works. God changes us from the inside out. He pours His love into us and then we in turn share that love with others. We can share it with words, with attitude, but most powerfully, most dramatically, most meaningfully, with actions!

God loves you. He proved it when he sent his son. He kept his promise to save you from sin and eternal death. He claimed you as his own in baptism. Now he invites you, he calls you, he give you the power through His Spirit, to love others, with words, with attitude, and with actions. Amen

