

CHAPTER 46

'GENUINE LOVE IS SPONTANEOUS'

The time was about 5:00 last Thursday afternoon. Traffic was heavy, and people jammed the streets, struggling to get home after a day's work. As a salesman and I discussed the merits of various items in one of Pasadena's furniture stores, we heard the terrifying squeal of brakes, the howl of tires on the pavement, and the shattering of glass and bending of metal as two cars collided at the intersection. Both of us rushed to a window to survey the situation as one of the cars careened up on the sidewalk.

In the middle of the street was a small foreign car with the front end smashed like an accordion and inside sat a woman, dazed and addled by the accident. Immediately, pulsating streams of blood ran down over the left side of her face and into her eye from a deep gash on her head. The injured lady struggled to free herself from a jammed door, finally managed to step outside, then immediately retreated to her car as dozens of gawking motorists sped by. As the crowd gathered, we could see her anguish and pain, but no one stepped forward to help.

The furniture store salesman and I ran outside the building and through a roaring parade of cars to give assistance until the police and ambulance arrived.

The impact of this gory accident didn't hit me until several minutes later.

Two lessons were driven home.

First was the cold indifference of the crowd to the sufferings of a fellow human being. The people standing idly by did not lift a finger to help — they nonchalantly stared. There was no coming to the rescue, no concern to help or comfort. The general reaction was one of apathy — each doing his own thing, going his own way, and not wanting to get involved.

Secondly, I learned something now about the spirit of service. Even though the salesman and I went to her aid, there was still a degree of reluctance on my part to hold back and not get deeply involved either. And even though we tried to help her, as I think about it now, more could have been done. At the time I didn't have a handkerchief with me — at least I could have asked for one from somebody to wipe the blood from her eye and face. More comforting words could have been said instead of just doing what my conscience said was my duty.

The personal lesson driven home by the accident was the need for love to be spontaneous, automatic, instinctive and true to all in need — not just reserved for our personal friends or members of the Church. Yet, this expression of Godly love can only be accomplished through the constant STIRRING of God's spirit (II Timothy 1:6), and by practicing love toward neighbor.

Paul admonished in Galatians 6:10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.' Clearly, we should not limit our love to just the Church, it should encompass 'all men.' Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan also teaches a similar lesson. Christ said further, 'And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the Publicans so?' (Matthew 5:47). As followers of Christ, we should do much more than Publicans. Our love and concern should be fervent, vigorous, and spontaneous, reaching out to the entire world. When a mother hears her baby cry, she has an automatic impulse to go to it, love it, and protect it. Isn't this the way we should respond to the needs and sufferings of fellow human beings?

It is true that proper caution and prudence needs to be exercised in giving aid to others out the compassion that motivates us needs to be an instantaneous reaction — part of our very being. It is not something we should stew over or artificially and mechanically try to work up. Instead, as we stir up God's Spirit and allow Christ to live in us, His way of love, compassion, empathy and concern for others will become automatic and habitually flow out to others.

Then when a situation arises such as the accident I just described, we will not have to work up the courage to act. Our response will be easy, natural and spontaneous, for it's the pattern of life we have been following.