

Thoughtfulness and Tact

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the vital role of thoughtfulness and tact in fostering positive relationships and effective communication, exemplified by Christ's approach to others.

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1, Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 2:4, Colossians 4:6, James 1:19, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Thoughtfulness", "Tact"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of thoughtfulness and tact in our interactions, illustrating how a kind word or action at the right moment can profoundly impact others. He contrasts those who, despite good intentions, fail to be effective due to a lack of tact, often causing more harm than good. Miller highlights that true tact is rooted in love and understanding, as exemplified by Christ, who always spoke the truth with gentleness and consideration. He argues that tact is essential for effective ministry and relationships, as it fosters goodwill and opens hearts to the message of Christ. Ultimately, Miller calls for a cultivation of this gift, which can be developed through a heart filled with Christ's love.

Transcript

"Evil is wrought by lack of thought--as well as lack of heart."

Some people have a wonderful way of always speaking a kind word or doing a kind act, at the right time--just when it is most needed and will do the greatest good. No matter when we meet them, they seem, as by some unfailing inspiration, to understand our mood and to have something precisely suited to it--a bit of sunshine for our gloom; a word of cheer for our disheartenment; a gentle but never offensive reminder of duty--if we are growing remiss or neglectful; an impulse to activity--if our zeal is flagging; or a word of generous commendation and delicate praise--if we are weary and overwrought.

There is a wondrous power in fitness. A kindness that, standing apart from its occasion, seems utterly insignificant, takes on importance and assumes an inestimable value, because of its opportuneness. It multiplies one's usefulness a hundredfold, a thousandfold, to know how to speak the right word, or do the right thing--just at the right moment and in the right way.

Many people with the very best motives and intentions, and with truly large capacity for doing good--almost utterly fail of usefulness and throw their lives away--because they lack this gift of tact. They perform their kindest deeds in such an inappropriate way as to rob them of nearly all their power to

comfort or cheer. They always come a few minutes too late to be helpful. They speak the wrong word, giving pain--when they wanted to give pleasure. They are always making allusions to themes--on which no word should be spoken. They are ever touching sensitive spots. When they enter a home of sorrow, drawn by the truest sympathy--they are almost sure to make tender hearts bleed the more--by some lack of fitness in word or act. They are continually hurting the feelings of their friends, offending nearly every person they meet and leaving frowns and tears in their path. Everyone gives them credit for honesty of intention, and yet their efforts to do good mostly come to naught--or even result in harm!

The sad part of it all is that their motives are good, and their hearts full of benevolent desires. Their lives are failures because they lack the proper touch and do not know in what manner to do the things they resolve to do.

Others may not have one whit more sincere or earnest desire to be useful. Their interest in people may be no truer, their sympathy no deeper, their love no warmer. They may have less--rather than more natural power, to give help. Yet because of their peculiar and gentle tact--they scatter gladness all about them and are ever performing sweet ministries of good. Their suggestions of kindness do not come to them as after-thoughts, when it is too late to render any help. They do not blunder into all sorts of cruelty, when they try to alleviate sorrow. They come opportunely, like God's angels. Their thoughtfulness seems intuitively to understand just what will be the best word to speak, or the kindest and fittest thing to do!

When they are guests in a home, they have a way of showing a grateful appreciation of the favors and attentions bestowed upon them, and yet in so delicate a way as never to appear to flatter. When they feel it necessary to remind another of some remissness in duty, they do it so gently as not to lose the friend--but to draw him all the closer. They possess the art of manifesting an interest--not fake--but sincere--in each one they meet, and succeed in leaving a pleasant impression and a gracious influence upon all.

There are some who regard 'tact' as insincerity or hypocrisy. They boast of their own honesty, which never tries to disguise a dislike for a person, which bluntly criticizes another's faults even at the price of his friendship. They believe in truth--in all its bare ruggedness, no matter how much pain it may give; and condemn all that thoughtful tact which regards human feelings and tries to speak the truth in such a way that it may not wound and estrange.

They love to speak the 'woe' against those of whom all men speak well, and that other saying of our Lord's--that he had not come to send peace--but a sword. Their favorite prophet is Elijah, and they refer often to the biblical condemnation of certain who prophesied smooth things! They mistake bluntness for sincerity. In the name of candor--they employ sarcasm, and sharp and bitter attack on people. When others are grieved or hurt or insulted, they answer, "I am a blunt man; I say what I mean, and you must excuse me!"

Frankness is to be honored--but this is not frankness; it is impertinence, cruel unkindness, the outbreak of bad nature in him who speaks; which, instead of doing good, works only harm!

A true appreciation of the story of the teachings of the gospel, will reveal the fact that our Lord himself exercised the most beautiful and thoughtful tact in all his mingling among the people! He was utterly incapable of rudeness. He never needlessly spoke a harsh word. He never gave needless pain to a sensitive heart. He was most considerate of human weakness. He was most gentle toward all human sorrow. He never suppressed the truth--but he uttered it always in love. Even the terrible woes he

pronounced against unbelief and hypocrisy I do not believe were spoken in the tones of thunder, trembling with rage which men impart to their anathemas. I think we must read them in the light of his tears over the city of his love, which had rejected him, pulsing and tremulous with divine and sorrowing tenderness.

His whole life tells of most considerate thoughtfulness. He had a wondrous reverence for human life. Every scrap of humanity was sacred and precious in his eyes. He bore himself always in the attitude of tenderest regard for everyone. How could it be otherwise, since he saw in everyone a lost being, whom by love he might win and rescue; or whom by a harsh word, he might drive forever beyond hope? He never spoke brusquely, or made truth cruel. He saw in every man and woman enough of sadness to soften the very tones of his speech and to produce feelings of ineffable tenderness in him. He moved about striving to impart to everyone, some comfort or help.

If we can but realize, even in the feeblest way, the feeling of Christ toward men--our bluntness and rudeness will soon change to gentleness. And this is true tact. It is infinitely removed from cunning. Cunning is insincere. It flatters and practices all the arts of deception. It professes a friendship and interest which it does not feel. It seeks only to promote its own ends. It is selfish at the core, and utterly wretched and debasing.

True tact--is sanctified common sense. It is Christian love doing its proper and legitimate work. It is that wisdom which our Lord commended so heartily to the disciples as they went out among enemies and into a hostile world. It is at the same time as harmless as a dove. No one can read the New Testament thoughtfully, without seeing how love moves everywhere as the queen of all the graces. Truth is everywhere clothed in the warm and radiant beauty of charity. Positive, strong and mighty, it is ever gentle as the touch of a child's finger. Someone has said that whoever makes truth unpleasant, commits high treason against virtue. The remark needs a qualification. There are unpleasant truths that must cause pain when faithfully spoken. Yet truth itself is always lovely, and we are not loyal to it when we present it in any way that will make it appear repulsive.

Christian tact is wise and loving thoughtfulness. It is that charity which is wisely gentle to all, which bears all things, which seeks not her own, which thinks no evil. It has an instinctive desire to avoid giving pain. It seeks to please all men for their good. It knows very well, that the surest way not to do men good, is to antagonize them and excite their opposition and enmity; therefore, as far as possible, it avoids all direct attack upon the life and opinions of others. It shows respect for the views of those who differ in sentiment or belief.

A wise writer has said, "When we would show anyone that he is mistaken, our best course is to observe on what side he considers the subject--for his view of it is generally right, on his side--and admit to him that he is right so far. He will be satisfied with this acknowledgment that he was not wrong in his judgment, though inadvertent in not looking at the whole of the case." How much wiser and more effective this method, than that of violently assaulting the position of one who differs from us, as if we were infallible--and he and his opinions, were worthy only of our contempt! We can accomplish by indirection, what we could never do by direct methods.

In no class of work is this wise tact so much needed, as in trying to lead men to Christ. There is somewhere a 'key to every heart', and yet there are good and earnest men, to whom no heart opens. They have zeal without knowledge. Sanctified tact shows its skill in a thousand little ways, which no rules can mark out--but which win hearts and find acceptance for the living truth, and for the wondrous love of

Christ. I believe it will be seen in the end, that many lives which might have been saved by the gentle methods which love teaches--have drifted away from Christ and been lost, through the unwisdom of workers.

Tact has a wonderful power in smoothing out tangled affairs. A pastor, with it, will harmonize a church composed of most discordant elements, and prevent a thousand strifes and quarrels, by saying the right word at the right time--and by quietly and wisely setting other influences to work to neutralize the discordant tendencies. A teacher possessed of this gift, can control the most unruly pupils and disarm mischief of its power to annoy and disturb the peace. In the home it is a most indispensable oil. Quiet tact will always have the soft word, ready to speak in time to turn away anger. It knows how to avoid unsafe ground. It can put all parties into a good humor, when there is danger of difference or clashing. It is silent--when silence is better than speech.

Nothing else has so much to do with the success or failure of men in usefulness, as the possession or non-possession of tact. A man with great gifts and learning accomplishes nothing; while another, with not one-half of his natural powers or acquirements, far outstrips him in practical life. The difference lies in tact--in knowing the art of doing things. We need more than brains, and erudition. The talent of all which tells most effectively in life--is that which teaches us how to use the power we have. One person will do more good without learning--than another with his brain full of the knowledge of the ages.

Tact is no doubt largely a natural endowment--but it is also partly an art, and can be cultivated. The awkward man who is always swinging himself against someone, or treading down some tender flower--may acquire something of the grace of easy carriage. The harsh, brusque man may get a softer heart, and with it a softer manner. The man who is always saying the wrong word and paining someone, may at least learn to be silent on doubtful occasions. There is no better way to acquire this wonder-working tact--than by becoming filled with the spirit of Christ. Warm love in the heart for all men, unselfish, thoughtful, kind--will always find some beautiful way to perform its beneficent ministries.

A delicate kindness moves us--more than the sublimest exhibition of power. Gentleness is mightier than noise or force. The tiny flower growing high up on the cold, rugged mountain, amid ice and snow, impresses the beholder more than the great piles of granite that tower to the clouds. The soft shining of the sun can do more than the rude wintry blast--to make men unfasten their heavy garments and open their hearts to the influences of good.

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