

Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	
<i>Gary Chapman</i>	11
Loving Lavishly	
<i>Tamara Vermeer</i>	15
A Simple Cup of Cheer	
<i>Steven L. Brown</i>	23
Drinking Milk with a Spoon	
<i>Doris E. Clark</i>	29
The Hug I'll Never Forget	
<i>Rebecca Willman Gernon</i>	35
Between Mountain Streams and Ferris Wheels	
<i>Sheila Farmer</i>	43
The Little Girl Who Changed My Life	
<i>Laurie A. Perkins</i>	51
Opposites Attract—Then What?	
<i>Emily Osburne</i>	61
The New Love-Room	
<i>Betty J. Johnson Dalrymple</i>	67
Better than Chocolate	
<i>Midge DeSart</i>	73
Who's Winning the War?	
<i>Laura L. Bradford</i>	79
The Girl Who Pierced My Heart	
<i>Barbara L. Scott</i>	89
A Wounded Heart Set Free	
<i>Amy Chanan</i>	97

Just Call Me Babe <i>Donna Smith</i>	103
When Sara Taught Me Freedom <i>Nancy Page Sheek</i>	111
The Good with the Bad <i>Sheila Farmer</i>	117
Everyday Adventures with Mom <i>Faith Waters</i>	125
Trials and Errors <i>Billy Cuchens</i>	133
It's Not About Me <i>Christine McNamara</i>	141
Silver-Boxed Kindness <i>Pamela Dowd</i>	149
A Spring Tulip in Frozen Ground <i>Gena Bradford</i>	155
All She Needed Was Time <i>Katherine J. Crawford</i>	163
The Day My Husband Prayed I'd Die <i>Laquita Havens</i>	171
The Battle of the Dishwasher <i>Susan Stanley</i>	179
The Weather Kitten <i>Nancy J. Farrier</i>	185
Say Goodbye to Your Mistress <i>Jennifer Devlin</i>	191
The 50/50 Proposition <i>Sandy Cathcart</i>	199
For Richer or Poorer <i>Chris Wright</i>	207
Pulling Weeds on Blossom Trail <i>Connie Pombo</i>	215
About the Contributors	223

Loving Lavishly

TAMARA VERMEER

Tony walked into our office one day where my husband, Tim, counsels disabled veterans. His brilliant smile lit up his face. He was no taller than my fourteen-year-old—bald, rail thin, and in his late forties. He was so charming, the kind of charm that I’m sure his mother couldn’t resist even if he’d been bad. He had this laugh, a half giggle that came so easily I almost laughed too—I couldn’t help it. I met him only briefly, but he left an imprint on my heart that at first I didn’t even realize was there.

Later that week Tim asked me, “Do you remember Tony?”

“Sure,” I said, as I sorted mail.

“Let me tell you a little more about him. He has HIV, is a Katrina refugee, was relocated here to Denver, and from what I can tell he’s completely alone. He’s been homeless but recently found subsidized housing. However, he’s pretty sick, his apartment is basically empty, and he’s sleeping on the floor. He doesn’t even have a bed.”

He doesn’t even have a bed—no bed, and he’s sick. The words echoed through my mind. *No bed, no bed.* I pictured little Tony

curled up on the floor. I've heard of desperate situations like this before, like we all do, and it always grips my heart and I feel terrible. But this time it was like someone shook me and yelled, "He doesn't have a bed! Look at all you have!"

Our family has always enjoyed helping the less fortunate—Christmas gifts to people in hardship, bringing meals to families with someone in the hospital, money to a child in Africa. But those were "safe" ways to help, and then we'd go home; our lives had never intertwined with them.

My stomach tilted and I felt a little shaky. I had to get him a bed. I don't know why this time I had to act, but God knew. And it had to be a new bed! For some reason, I wanted to love him *lavishly*. But even as I felt so driven to help him, I wondered what I was getting myself into. I'd never done anything like this before.

We delivered his bed and brand-new bedding that my girls and I had picked out. I was pretty nervous. He sat on his new bed, smoothed out the covers, and smiled. Then emotion overcame him and he sobbed. Coughs wracked his thin body.

"Thank you. Thank you so much—I don't know what to say. I . . . I . . ." His words drowned in the tears. This bed seemed to be a light in a very dark, deep pit. He looked at us with something like grateful confusion. I don't know how else to describe it. He didn't know us at all.

"Tony, dear! What's goin' on in here?" Juanita, his grandmotherly neighbor from across the hall, walked in. "I'm sure not lookin' right to meet new folks, but I wanted to see what's goin' on!"

She saw his bed and looked at Tony, shook her graying head, and said, "Honey, I told you God would take care of you. He

heard you; yes, He did.”

Our friends and family jumped right in—new pots and pans, dishes, towels, microwave, money—you name it! And to top it off, my sister Laurie bought him all-new furniture—not everyone’s throwaways, but brand-new, matching furniture with a matching rug.

“Laurie,” I said, “I’m kind of nervous about your spending this much money. We don’t really know him, and he could sell it or someone could steal it or . . .”

“I want to do this, and whatever happens, happens,” she said with a smile. Lavish love.

I called one day to check on him. He always had a positive twist on everything. “Well, I’m pretty good, pretty good today. Did you know tomorrow is my birthday?”

“Tony, let’s have a birthday party!” My family came, along with my parents and even my daughter’s friend. We wrapped the remaining things people had given in colorful bags and brought a cake. He sat on the couch, sandwiched between my parents, and the tears flowed. “I’ve never had a party like this before! I’m one of fourteen kids, you know.”

I had no idea. Where was his family? Little slices of his life started to tumble out.

As we drove home, my daughter’s friend smiled as she looked out the window and said, “That was the best day ever.” When I returned later to take him some food, he had stapled all the gift bags onto his wall.

Tony started to get sicker. He had a lot of chest pain and difficulty breathing. I called to check on him one Monday morning. “I’ve been in the hospital three times this weekend, Tamara. I had terrible chest pain.”

“Oh, Tony!” I felt terrible. “How did you get there?”

“I took the bus, but I had to walk a mile to the bus stop. They said they couldn’t find anything so they sent me home, but I wasn’t any better so I went back two more times.”

They never even helped him get home! I was livid. In my world I had family to take me, and a car, and they never would have sent me home like that. In his world he was alone, and they didn’t care.

I realized he needed a medical advocate, so Tim and I decided to step in. Perhaps because of his history, perhaps because he was alone, he continued to be treated as if he were not worth the medical professionals’ respect or effort. He was hospitalized over and over, and I can’t tell you how many times I roared to the hospital when I heard how he was treated. The nurses would ask, “And who are you?”

I’d act offended and say, “Well, his big sister, of course! Can’t you see the resemblance?” He’s black and 5’6” and I’m white and 5’10”.

Tony got worse. I sat with him as he waited to see an oncologist one day. Tony was scared. He turned to me and said, “Why are you doing this? You don’t really know me and the things I’ve done.”

I smiled and said, “Well, you don’t really know me and the things *I’ve* done.”

“No, really,” he urged.

“I think I just happened to be listening to God, Tony. He knew you needed someone to walk beside you right now and just love you.”

Tony had lung cancer. We didn’t know how much time he had left, and my sister felt an urgency to reunite him with his

family. We urged him to call his mom. She lived in Mississippi.

“Oh, I don’t want to worry her. She’s almost eighty,” he said. But wistfulness edged his voice. That was the first we’d heard of his mother, Lucille.

My parents started to visit him at his apartment and at the hospital. He called them *momma* and *papa*, and he often cried when he talked to them on the phone. I think he missed his own *momma* so much.

One night around eight o’clock he called from the hospital. “The doctor is here and . . .” His voice cracked and my throat constricted as he said, “It’s not so good, big sister.”

He tried to laugh, but it turned to sobs. The doctor took the phone and told me, without emotion, that Tony had stage-four lung cancer, and maybe six weeks to four months to live. I was so angry I was shaking. I had asked the people at the hospital to call me so I could be with him when they gave him the prognosis. To be told such news all alone is even more devastating.

We rushed to the hospital. To my surprise, Tony smiled, held my hands, and this time the tables were turned—he comforted me! I cried and cried.

“I know you think that doctor is mean, but I needed to hear the truth, and no one would tell me,” he said.

I realized then how much I really loved Tony.

Tony told me later that after he’d gotten that news he left his room, walked downstairs, and had planned to walk out the door of the hospital and disappear for good. “I went back upstairs because I told you I’d be here and I didn’t want to let you down. If it wasn’t for you guys, I wouldn’t be here now.”

He called the next day and sang on my answering machine. And he laughed that laugh that made me laugh and then made

me cry. “I used to sing with the Mississippi Mass Choir,” he told me. Another slice of his life came out.

We continued to press him to call his family. He finally called his sister Cynthia. My sister, with her generous, lavish heart, offered to fly Cynthia to Denver *and* rent her a car. Cynthia had no idea he was so sick. “I don’t understand why he didn’t call us sooner! I would have come before this.”

He had distanced himself from his family for reasons they still don’t understand. It was obvious they loved him. But life had hurt him deeply somehow.

Cynthia came out, and one night at his apartment she shared her heart. “You know, I’ve had some back problems and I haven’t been able to work, but I’ve felt like there must be something I should be doing. ‘Lord,’ I prayed, ‘what is my purpose? What do you want me to do?’ Well, this is the answer. I’m supposed to take Tony home and take care of him.”

The Veterans Administration paid for Tony’s flight, and my sister paid for Cynthia’s flight. When Tony went home, I knew I would never see him again.

His family flocked to see their lamb that had strayed. His brothers and sisters came from all over the country, and his daughters came—yes, he had two daughters and four grandchildren! His story kept unfolding.

His mom never left his side. She called me one day and told me, “I had been praying for a miracle for my Tony, and you were that miracle.” Tony died that May. He fell asleep and never woke up, but he died with his family around him. He wasn’t alone anymore.

Tony’s family included our family photo in his funeral program with the following words: “We could not have had a better family than you to take care of our beloved Tony. Saying thank

you is not enough! You deserve more. May God bless you and keep you.”

I took a chance to tip my heart and let some lavish love spill out, and look what happened: a very unexpected love story.

Sometimes in life we take a chance on someone. That decision makes the stomach tilt and our hands a little shaky. We don't have to do it, no one will know if we don't, and our lives would continue the same as always. But when we start to love, not only as a tentative experiment but also lavishly, our lives are changed forever. When we love generously, we receive unforgettable rewards. And sometimes, that caring touches not only the other person but has a ripple effect, creating an “extended family” that becomes an experience of true community that we all long for.



THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES IN ACTION

Tamara and her family spoke three of the love languages fluently—*gifts, acts of service, and quality time*—and they spoke them to a total stranger whom God put in their path. One cannot read this account without sensing the deep sense of joy and satisfaction that came from loving lavishly.



LOVE IS A CHOICE

Would you pray that God would lead you to someone whom you could love by speaking one or more of the five love languages?

LOVE IS A CHOICE

Remember Jesus said that at the last judgment He would say to those on His right hand: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance. . . . For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” [Matthew 25:34–40 NIV]. To express love to others is to express love to God.

A Simple Cup of Cheer

STEVEN L. BROWN

I carefully parted the curtains and peeked out the window of the warm, dark motel room; I wanted our three young children to sleep just a little longer. White feathers of snow were drifting down to blanket the cars outside as the winter sun began to light the cold, blustery scene.

We had arrived in Carlsbad, New Mexico, the evening before with plans to take the children on a hike into McKittrick Canyon to see the fall foliage. This early snowstorm would cancel our hike, but we could still visit Carlsbad Caverns. A sign on the highway told us the cave was “56 degrees year-round.”

My wife and I bundled the kids, all under ten, into their warm coats and blue jeans. All three were giggling about the snow and anticipating the day’s adventures. After breakfast, we got them snuggled into the car under a warm blanket. We sang and laughed as we drove through the winter landscape toward the caverns.

The snow blew across the main highway without much accumulation. However, when we turned off the main road, the snow was deeper. A national park service car stood in front of the gate

to the seven-mile road into the park. Three rangers were sloshing through the freezing mush. As each of them stopped at the cars ahead of me, I noticed that some of the frustrated travelers seemed to be arguing with them.

When it was our turn, the young man who approached my window was wearing a park service uniform and a standard-issue jacket that looked better suited to the 56 degrees in the caverns than the current 26 degrees outside. Like the other rangers, he was in his early twenties. He looked tired, cold, and more than a little frustrated. I speculated that he was more comfortable with his usual job of answering interesting questions about the park than with today's job of delivering bad news.

"Good morning, sir. I am sorry; the conditions on the winding road into the park are not safe because of the snow. The park service has closed the park at least until tomorrow. You can call the park number for updated information."

"Thanks for telling us. I know it's cold out there. We appreciate your looking out for us."

He looked relieved. "Thank you, sir. You have a nice day."

We turned the car around to head back to the motel. On the way, I noticed a coffee shop.

"How about some hot chocolate?"

"Hooray, Daddy! That sounds great!"

As we walked into the restaurant, the aroma of hot chocolate and coffee embraced us. The tables were crowded with families dressed in winter coats, hats, and scarves. As we sat down, we remembered our motel had a heated indoor pool and decided it would be fun to swim while there was snow on the ground.

I looked back out onto the cold, snowy terrain and realized being together as a family, splashing in a warm indoor pool,

would be a lot more pleasant than what those rangers would be up against all day. Then I had an idea.

“Honey, why don’t we get those rangers some hot coffee?”

“That’s a great idea!”

I ordered three coffees to go and loaded up a cardboard tray with plenty of creamers and sugars. We got back into the car and headed to the entrance of the park. I pulled around the line of cars and stopped near the gate. Coffee in hand, I approached the nearest ranger.

“Hey, you guys look pretty cold out here. We thought you could use some hot coffee.”

Obviously taken aback, he stammered, “Well, thank you. Thank you very much.”

We watched him through the window of our car as he gave the coffee to his fellow rangers and gestured toward us. Seeing their happy faces was more fun than any hike.

As we drove back to the motel, we talked with the children about how cold those rangers must have been standing outside. We said our gift would give them warmth and encouragement that could last all day, because despite their important jobs, many people did not appreciate the work they did, and even made their jobs more difficult.

Later that day, I thought about the concept of random acts of kindness. Why is it such a rich tradition? Why is it so gratifying when we do it? Why is it so surprising to those it benefits?

If I’m honest, I’ll admit that sometimes I have been just as frustrated, and perhaps *almost* as unpleasant, as the travelers who argued with the rangers. We *all* go through life preoccupied with our own plans. We tend to view other people who disrupt us as *adversaries* rather than as those who are simply

trying to do their job. No wonder we treat them badly and ignore their feelings.

Why did I take the high road *this* time?

I was in a different mindset that snowy November day. I was focusing on my wife and children. I wanted *them* to have a good time. I was grateful for our time together, even though the weather had already changed our plans once. I was on vacation and didn't have much of an agenda. Perhaps because I was looking outward, I noticed the humanness of those rangers. I empathized with their problems and their suffering. *I saw them as people just like me.*

So many times I see people only in their roles as park ranger, salesclerk, bank teller, or whatever. I forget that they are mothers, daughters, brothers, friends. The lesson I learned that day was that when I interact with people, I need to look beyond their job descriptions and see them as fellow human beings, even friends. I have to realize that they have their own desires, plans, hurts, and stresses. I want to reach out and be an encourager. If I do a better job of loving strangers, they may be more loving to me and to others, and all our lives will be richer for it.

The next evening as we rode home together, we watched the sun set over the melting snow. Reflecting on our weekend, we decided our small gesture of serving coffee to the rangers warmed us as much as it did them.

"Each one, reach one."

"Reach out and touch someone."

"Let it begin with me."

Over the years, dozens of marketing slogans and even more songs have encouraged us to express kindness, understanding, and even love to others.

Our actions don't have to be grand gestures or extraordinary behaviors to make a difference in someone's day. They can be small things, such as a smile, a friendly word, or even a cup of coffee.

When we get in the habit and express these light touches of caring, not only do we make the world a better place, but we also make our own lives better. We become more loving people, and fostering such an attitude offers its own wonderful reward.



THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES IN ACTION

Steven and his family were on vacation, but they saw the park rangers as individuals and spoke *words of affirmation*. “Thanks for telling us. I know it’s cold out there. We appreciate your looking out for us.” Then later they did an *act of service* by purchasing coffee, a *gift*, and driving back and giving it to the park rangers. I’m guessing they were the only ones who gave coffee to the rangers on that day, and one of the few who spoke *words of affirmation*. Most of us have opportunities to express love to people we encounter in the normal flow of life, but often we are so involved in our own agenda that we do not think of loving others.

LOVE IS A CHOICE



LOVE IS A CHOICE

Would you ask God to open your heart to His love and let you be a channel of loving others?

Then look for an opportunity to share an affirming word with someone today.