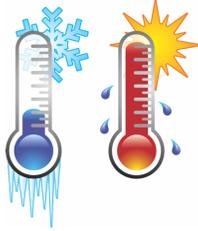


"What's the Temperature?"

Allan Pole



Theme: Sensitivity helps to ensure that your gift is appreciated.

Text: Proverbs 27:14

Here's a thought: An Italian proverb observes, "He who praises you more than he was wont to do, has either deceived you, or is about to do it."

"Tigger And Eeyore" 2:45 video clip at www.youtube.com/watch?v=tB-Sd0qRL-Y.

King Solomon summarizes a profound principle for relationships in Proverbs 27:14, "If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse." NIV

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible is not a dull, religious book with no drama or humour. It is exceedingly practical, earthy and relational. Even though this statement was written 3,000 years ago, it is still very relevant and helpful today! I have quoted this verse at camp after a rough night as a counselor with a cabin full of kids and at Bible school while living in residence with a bunch of rowdy guys.

Relationships sometimes need a:

Thermometer



Solomon observes with a hint of sarcasm that without sensitivity, your "blessing" can be received as a "curse". You can enter a room with a big wide smile and an enthusiastic "good morning" expecting to receive the same in return. Surprisingly, if the other person does not share your headspace you

might be slicing up cold shoulder or hot tongue for your toast.

Solomon expresses the same principle in a different way in Proverbs 25:20, “Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.” NIV

Recently Brenda and I went to a funeral and a birthday party in the same afternoon. As you can imagine the mood at each occasion was vastly different. How do you suppose it would have gone if we had tried to cheer up people at the funeral or calmed down the revellers at the birthday party? We were called to “be there” for each family.

In the midst of teaching how to express love for one another, the Apostle Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” NIV

I am more of a nighthawk than a morning person. My family will tell you that I would prefer to listen to the news on the radio and to be left alone while I eat breakfast. I would rather ease into my day by going through my morning ritual than by engaging in stimulating conversation. I don't want someone bouncing into the kitchen talking too loudly or cheerfully.

I get the feeling that Far Side cartoonist Gary Larson can relate:



An Italian proverb observes, “He who praises you more than he was wont [inclined] to do, has either deceived you, or is about to do it.”

Do you ever wonder about someone and think that he or she is just a bit too happy? Sometimes they can come off like the guy Solomon describes in Proverbs 26:24-25:

24 A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. 25 Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. NIV

When someone is “over the top”, unnaturally happy, I start to question their sincerity. Their words take on less weight, as I doubt if I can truly believe what they say. Perhaps they are not really being honest about their feelings or they are trying to get something from me.

It is amazing how we can extend the benefit of the doubt to ourselves but not to others! We are usually quite confident of our motivation while we question others. While we can justify our insensitivity with all the burdens we carry, we want to bite off the head of someone who is short with us. You might mean well but it might not be received well. The *interpretation* of our words can be just as important as the *intention*.

One of my favourite Bible verses happens to be the shortest so I encourage you to memorize it. In a crowd of people mourning the death of Lazarus, our Lord matches their emotions in John 11:35, "Jesus wept." NIV

Cyril of Alexandria (c. 375-444 A.D.), in his Commentary on the Gospel of John, gives us his thoughts on Jesus weeping at Lazarus' grave:

The Jews thought that Jesus wept on account of the death of Lazarus, but in fact, he wept out of compassion for all humanity, not mourning Lazarus alone, but all of humanity which is subject to death, having justly fallen under so great a penalty. (From

http://blog.thrivingpastor.com/march-27-2017/?refcd=485301&utm_campaign=Model+Happiness%3A+Why+Dating+Is+Important+To+Your+Church+Culture&utm_medium=email&utm_source=nl_thrivingpastor)

Even though Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He was so moved by the sadness of those around Him that He too was brought to tears. Having come from heaven to live amongst us, the Lord was so burdened with the brokenness of sickness and death that permeates creation as a result of the curse of sin that He broke down and cried. By doing this He identified with His friends and endeared Himself even further to them. He did not rebuke them for their emotions but felt them *with* them like a thermometer feels the cold of winter and heat of summer.

It is wise to take the temperature of a room occupied by someone or a group of people before you try to influence the temperature. As you watch and listen you can be effective in adjusting the temperature with your words and counsel. Is there joy, gladness and celebration? Is there sadness, discouragement and long faces? Is there anger, frustration and shouting? Each requires a very different response. Taking the time and being sensitive to others will influence conversations and relationships a great deal.

I remember from my childhood a family friend and tenant who lived next door for a few years. Henry loved Jesus with all of his heart but in his zeal, he was not always the most sensitive, entering rooms and houses speaking loudly without watching or listening to what had been happening there before his arrival. He was an early riser and my mom was not, so he would irritate her

with his loud singing in the yard. Even though his heart was filled with love this lack of sensitivity drove some people away. Rather than attracting people's gaze he would sometimes cause them to roll their eyes.

Timing is everything. I have yet to attend a funeral where the family has hired an entertainer. Although we try hard to suck it up and celebrate someone's life, we are fooling ourselves if we feel no sadness & shed no tears when a loved one dies. Compassion can build strong bridges into people's lives. By empathizing with others who are in pain we can develop trust and credibility. People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

When you meet someone, are you more inclined to engage your mouth or your ears? Would you ask the Lord to help you to be more sensitive to others?

Relationships sometimes need a:

Thermometer

Thermostat



Sometimes you have to decide if you will be a thermometer or a thermostat in a conversation. You either *take* the temperature of the other person's emotions or you try to *adjust* the temperature of the other person's emotions. Knowing which option is the best for the occasion can draw people in or push them away.

Love has two sides – a soft side and a hard side. The people closest to me know when to put their arm around my shoulder and when to kick me in the behind. Sometimes I need someone with skin on to feel my sadness, frustration or discouragement and sometimes I need – but not necessarily want – someone to encourage, correct and challenge me. We can actually do someone a disservice by helping them throw a pity party. There are times when we need to lift up our countenance and invite others to do the same.

Mary was having a tough day and had stretched herself out on the couch to do a bit of what she thought to be well-deserved complaining and self-pitying. She moaned to her mom and brother, "Nobody loves me ... the whole world hates me!"

Her brother, busily occupied playing a game, hardly looked up at her and passed on this encouraging word, "That's not true, Mary. Some people don't even know you."

The story doesn't end with Jesus weeping in John 11:35, so let's continue in John 11:38-44:

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." NIV

Did you catch what happened there? A guy was raised from the dead after four days! This did not happen somewhere in the back room with no witnesses but in front of a whole bunch of onlookers. Jesus matched the emotions of those grieving, but ultimately there was another plan to be fulfilled. At this point He shifted from being a thermometer reflecting the temperature to being a thermostat changing the temperature. Whether it's raising the dead, healing the sick, sharing the Good News, giving, helping out or dishing up a compliment, we all have opportunities to affect the interpersonal weather around us.

Perhaps you have read the children's classic, "Winnie the Pooh" by English author A. A. Milne (1882-1956). Two of Pooh's closest friends are Tigger, a perpetually bouncy, excitable, happy cat and Eeyore, a long-faced, pessimistic, depressed donkey.

Gretchen Rubin asks "Are you a Tigger?" ("Are You Annoyed by Excessively Cheery People? Or Extremely Gloomy People?" at www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-happiness-project/201010/are-you-annoyed-excessively-cheery-people-or-extremely-gloomy):

People say, "True, it's no fun to be around someone who's in the dumps all the time. But it's also annoying to be around someone who's unfailingly cheerful and chirpy, a Pollyanna who refuses ever to acknowledge that the glass is half-empty or to be realistic about things."

What's puzzling to me: I never seem to encounter people like this. Tiggers, to me, don't seem to be nearly as common as Eeyores. (And lest

you imagine that I myself am a Tigger - I'm not. I'm a hurried, distracted, reserved kind of person. Not overly sunshiny. One of the reasons I started a happiness project was to be more positive; as they say, research is me-search.)

What was less puzzling: the people who complained about the Tigger/Pollyanna types seemed to be on the downbeat side — Eeyores — themselves.

Still, I wondered, where were all these Tiggers, and why did others find them annoying?

Then, it dawned on me — and here's what may be a big insight — perhaps the Tigger emerges in response to the Eeyore, and vice versa. To offset the Eeyore's complaining, downbeat, and pessimistic attitude, the Tigger becomes ever more bouncy and insistently cheery. And of course, in a frustrating cycle, the Eeyore feels the need to interject some realism and bite into the situation. Which drives the Tigger to take an ever more upbeat attitude.

This dynamic demonstrates the importance of the resolution to acknowledge the reality of other people's feelings. If Tiggers insist, "Hey, it's not that bad," or "There's no point in worrying about it," or "Look on the bright side!" Eeyores feel all the more emphatic on insisting on the correctness of their attitude. The more Eeyores say, "Life isn't fair," "It's best to be prepared for the worst," and "You're not facing reality," the more frantically Tiggers act as cheerleaders. Tigger and Eeyore feel increasingly frustrated by the one-sided attitude of the other — and increasingly determined to offset it. If Eeyore and Tigger could acknowledge the truth of each other's feelings, they might slacken the tension.

If you're annoyed at home or at work by the presence of an unfailingly chirpy, cheery person, ask yourself: Is someone causing a negativity imbalance that's demanding a positivity counter-balance from this person? A spouse who suffers from depression, a boss who is a constant nay-sayer? In fact, if you're particularly annoyed by the Tigger in your midst, could you be the source of this imbalance?

The lesson for Tiggers may be this: you can't "make" someone happy, and don't exhaust yourself trying; in fact, it may be counter-productive to try. The more you point out the reasons to see the glass as half-full, the more you may cause a person to dwell on the reasons to see the glass as half-empty, as a counter-balance to your well-intended cheer.

The lesson for Eeyores may be this: don't try to force other people to adopt your point of view, even if you think it's more realistic or more philosophically worthy. You can't "make" someone see things your way, and you may actually make them shut their eyes tighter to what you're trying to show.

I love our Lord! He experiences and expresses the full gamut of emotions from happiness to sadness, from anger to delight. He calls His people to do the same.

Would you like to know how God is feeling about the people and situations you face? Will you ask the Lord to express His emotions through you?

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