

The Universal Language of Love

It is estimated that more than \$18 billion was spent on **Valentine's Day** cards, roses, candy and gifts in 2013. This year the highly commercialized Valentine's season is in full swing. Seductive roses and heart-shaped boxes line shopping aisles while jewelry commercials and promises of romance and love blanket television sets.

Love is the universal language understood by all. All humanity longs to find true acceptance for who they are as a person even when their bent is not mainstream, popular, politically correct or as varied as the candies made by Russell Stover. The one language that is never foreign or misunderstood is love, and it often is best spoken without any words.

Love is communicated and shown with actions of respect, acceptance, kindness and tolerance. Yet, this true example of love is lacking in our world today. **Tolerance** is both the most "in fashion" word of the day and the most hated. It is loved and despised by us all – even if we don't choose to admit it. We stand for it when it benefits us and shoot at it when it is not.

We want to put a silencer on any barrel that is firing a different bullet than our preferred caliber. Yet isolating others with differing perspectives than our own only shrinks our ability for education and growth.

Few of us would admit to being intolerant and there is no other moniker we would more hate to be given. However, the guilt is obvious and on display in every facet of our culture. Politics, sports, television and religion have a window shop of such concrete-minded poster boys.

By definition the meaning of **intolerance** is defined as the

inability to accept others views, convictions or opinions because they oppose your own. However, many who are the most outspoken about tolerance of others are the ones speaking with a forked tongue. They want others opinion's heard as long as they are rowing in the same boat. When there is a different stance the fault line is often exposed and verbal volcanoes erupt.

Just recently we saw how the Olympic games become a battlefield of intolerance as the Russian government seeks to muzzle the LGTB community from having a voice. Gag policies never cultivate **understanding** or peace in any relationships whether personal or corporate. Silencing others or trying to get a louder bullhorn is never a bridge to peace. Sadly, protests may be looming at the singular worldwide sporting event designed as a congregation of world unity. And while like everyone, the LGTB community deserves a platform, so do those on the other side of the coin.

Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty is a classic case. He became embroiled in a firestorm after comments in a recent media interview. Regardless of his opinions he should have the right to state them and drive a stake in the ground without being marginalized as an intolerant redneck.

Cannot **understanding** and **compassion** be learned from both camps without putting a stereotypical label on either as a sinner, saint or psycho? If the last 10 years of traveling the world have taught me anything it's the need to release my pious attitude and embrace those with whom I don't share much real estate. I have often learned the most from those I understand the least.

I have a family member who I love dearly who has a different sexual orientation from me. Our **relationship** has enabled me to grow in understanding and taught me how to relate to her community of friends. This person's influence has taught me more about compassion and patience than probably any other

relationship I've ever had.

This week I spent time with a person whose beliefs about **God** were the antithesis of my own. One hour later we shook hands and planned our next meeting. We are scheduled for lunch tomorrow. In our meeting, there was no jockeying for position of higher ground but an approach to understand beliefs neither of us had ever possessed. By conversation's end, we were both forced to examine what we believed and why we believed it.

One of the strongest evidences of **character** and personal impact is the relationship one has with his fellow man. Maybe the recognition that I am not always right is the best process of growth and can equip me to listen to others whose opinions or convictions I may not like. Agreement and surrender are not mandatory but compassion, respect and openness must be.

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