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In Search of Sensitive Saints

930-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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I- IN AN AGE OF INSENSITIVITY...

Some people call this the space age. Some call it the jet age. Some call it the nuclear age. Some call it the computer age. In every case, the inference is that a whole new era of technological advances has blurred into obsolescence all of the traditions and standards and absolutes of the past, and life now has taken on a whole new tempo.

The gods of this age are speed and convenience, but the by-product of this age is the de-personalization of man. Man as a caring, sensitive, understanding necessity has been replaced by machines, recordings, robots, and picture tubes.

No longer do you pick up the phone in most cities and ask a real, live human being for a telephone number. Now a computer-simulated voice comes back in lifeless tones and, with robot-like precision, recites a pre-programmed message and with choppy coldness that defies questions, repeats the number you are supposed to be asking for. "Please make a note of the number." You can ask questions to your hearts content, but to no avail. Why? Nobody's listening!

Try calling for an airline reservation. A pre-recorded message tells you (even at 2:00 in the morning) that all of the lines are busy... but if you don't hang up—we repeat "don't hang up"... in due time, our super-automated no-nonsense machinery will plug you into a real live human being. Before you can so much as think, a musical interlude is coming your way to entertain you—but only, of course, for 20 seconds, when the music is interrupted to remind you not to hang up and to remind you that sooner or later you will get your turn to talk to no more, no less than a real, live human being. Again, the process repeats itself, until finally, mesmerized by this incredible form of automated boredom, you are stunned by the sound of a cold, calculated, but human voice that is so rushed and so impersonal, you feel

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embarrassed to ask your question. It usually goes something like this: “Late Arrival Air Lines... May I help you... No, we don’t have that information, you need customer assistance...please call our international watts line number between 10 am and 4 pm Monday thru Tuesday on odd months of the year, and they will be happy to help you...” “But”... you stammer, and with that, your long awaited contact with human reality ends to that shrill reminder of automation known as the dial tone.

Or try shopping at Z-Mart Shopping Village. “The Customer is King!” flashes the automatic rotating neon billboard. He may be. The trouble is, there’s no one there who cares to see the king. Rows and rows of goods hang from long racks, and aisles and aisles of items beckon, with no sign of such an unnecessary option as a sales person... “I beg your pardon, ma’am, do you have this shirt in size...?” “Sorry, sir, everything we’ve got is on the racks. Next...”

“But sir, this coat is defective.” “Defective merchandise see customer service,” he recites with cold detachment. “Where is that?” You ask sheepishly. With that, his beady eyes roll in your direction. “You don’t know where customer service is?” he insultingly replies. “Bankety Blank,” he mutters under his breath... supposedly giving you instructions. You don’t dare ask him to repeat it. All you want is some information, a little personal attention. But no one is listening.

What’s lacking? What’s wrong? What is the missing ingredient in this lightning-like world that’s traveling faster than the speed of sound into a technological utopia devoid of human participation? What’s missing is people—people who care.

The computer chip can triple the speed of completing a transaction and quadruple the efficiency with which that transaction is entered into the books, but it can’t take the place of a smile, a helpful answer, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring glance that says, “I know just what you need, let me help you.”

So this isn’t just the space age and the nuclear age, this is also the age of insensitivity. In our quest for speed and efficiency, we have forgotten how the heart works, and how the head works, when the heart is allowed to function.

Ah, but what an age for Jesus Christ to demonstrate the reality that there is still someone who cares, even in the midst

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of such an impersonal world. What a time for His children to wake up and pay attention to the fact that the world is looking, more than ever before, for real live people who, unlike their computerized counterparts, are actually listening to what they have to say and are actually caring about what they are hearing. This is truly the jet age, the space age, and the nuclear age all rolled into one, but it is also the Jesus age. Because Jesus is coming again soon!

As society races itself into oblivion, lonely confused humanity as it pulls off the side of life's freeway looking for answers, is in awe when Jesus Christ through the lives of listening, caring Christians, stops to pay attention to what they are saying. "Somebody is really listening," they say. "Somebody still cares." What an age of opportunity! What a cry for Christianity!

That, my friends, is why the world (and the Lord) is in search of sensitive saints. The book of Proverbs indicates that the problem is really not a new one nor is the solution a product of man's jet-age philosophy. The answers are in the Word of God, and it's time Christians take a fresh look at those age-old principles that make Christians decidedly different: different because Jesus Christ in them is not putting the world on hold, taping in taped music, and giving pat, recorded replies. Jesus is listening and caring.

So the title for this lesson is "In Search of Sensitive Saints", and the outline for our search looks like this:

- I- An Age of Insensitivity
- II- The Cry for Courteous Christians
- III- Proverbs Speaks About Sensitive Saints
 - A- The lost art of listening (Proverbs 15:28; 17:27,28; 18:21)
 - B- Reflecting or inflicting? (Proverbs 14:10; 14:13; 25:20,24,26; 27:14)
 - C- The danger of intrusion (Proverbs 25:6,7)
 - D- A worn-out welcome mat (Proverbs 25:17)
 - E- Broken hearts and broken promises (Proverbs 25:14,19)
 - F- Reach out and write someone (Proverbs 25:25)
- IV- The Master's Plan: In Search of Sensitive Saints.

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The purpose of this lesson is to take a long hard look at how God expects Christians to interact with other real live people...(especially in this age when real live people are at such a premium)...and to see that we all take some very real live steps to slow down our frantic monotone responses to those who pass our way, including those we love the most.

What we are going to see is that God is looking for sensitive saints. Not sensitive, meaning easily offended. Not sensitive meaning unnecessarily jumpy or over-reacting... but sensitive meaning alert, aware, and available to those with whom they come in contact.

I think you could almost take two words and fold them together and come up with the scriptural concept of sensitivity. Those two words would be COURTESY and COMPASSION. Compassion is the act of caring; courtesy being the gracious manner of behavior that demonstrates you care. We have been looking at the various aspects of compassion these last few weeks, but seldom do we stop as Christians to look at the subject of courtesy...good manners, considerate behavior, or sensitive responses. And Christians ought to be the epitome of courtesy.

II- THE CRY FOR COURTEOUS CHRISTIANS...

Like bright lights shining in a world that has lost its way, Christian children ought to still address their parents with respectful titles, Christian husbands ought to open doors and pull back chairs for their wives, and otherwise perform the very simple acts of courtesy that have through the years said to the world "this person is important to me." Christian clerks in a store or Christian receptionists on the telephone ought to be known for their smiles, their graciousness, their willingness to listen, and their gentle response to difficult situations. If we are not decidedly different, if we are not sensitive saints, if we are not compassionate, courteous Christians, we will be swept up in the tide of impersonal behavior that is sweeping our generation and miss the most exciting opportunity in a decade to demonstrate the power of God to take the attitudes of an era and use them for His Glory.

Don't crawl up into your list of excuses. You've heard them all: "I'm from the Midwest. Midwesterners are just cold." "I have the gift of administration; administrators are just impersonal."

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“I have a such and such temperament; all of us are insensitive.”
“My parents were that way; I can’t help it.”

It may not be natural for you to be sensitive. That only means that it must be supernatural. It only means that God, as He does what you can’t do, is bound to get all the glory. God is searching for sensitive saints, for courteous, compassionate Christians... and strangely enough one of the places He is looking is in the room you are in right now. So let’s embark on our journey through the pages of Proverbs for a quick look at what it is He’s looking for. Let’s see just how Proverbs speaks to sensitive saints. Be careful; do not let the sheer simplicity of what God is after cause you to overlook the depth of character that is revealed by that simplicity. In other words, please be sensitive, even as we study.

III- PROVERBS SPEAKS ABOUT SENSITIVE SAINTS...

Our pilgrimage through proverbs for the scent of sensitivity will begin as God asks us the question, “Christian, have you learned to be a listener—or are your vocal chords in a constant state of exhaustion?” One of Satan’s greatest hindrances to sensitivity is the tongue. When it’s in gear, the ears are in neutral. And when the ears are closed, the heart gets no messages. We’ve recently looked at the tongue in detail, so we will only address the issue of its overuse for this study. Proverbs says,

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. (Proverbs 18:21)

Of life and death, tongue holds the keys; use it lovingly, and it will requite thee. (Knox)

Those who love to talk will suffer the consequences. (TLB)

The heart of the righteous meditates for an answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out mischief. (Proverbs 15:28)

A good man ponders what to say. (Moffett)

A good man (or God’s man) thinks before he speaks. (TLB)

He that hath knowledge spareth his words; and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.

Even a fool when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding. (Proverbs 17:27,28)

The New English Bible translates that verse with a great deal of simplicity wrapped in authority. It says this:

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Experience uses few words: discernment keeps a cool head.
Even a fool, if he holds his peace, is thought wise; Keep
your mouth shut and show your good sense.

What those three passages say is this:

The tongue is either a giver of life or an instrument of death... so how you use it is the key to what happens in your life. For that reason, the godly man always thinks before he speaks. Whatever comes forth from his lips has been carefully, prayerfully thought through. The result is that most of us, once we've thought, will have far less to say. In fact, the wiser you are, the quieter you will probably be. If nothing else, by being quiet, others will at least think you to be wise, and you will have a greater opportunity to be respected.

James ties it all together by saying this:

Understand [this], my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear (a ready listener,) who is slow to speak, slow to take offense *and* to get angry.

(James 1:19 Amplified Bible)

In other words, God's man is a ready listener. He only speaks when he has listened first, and then knows he really has something to say worth saying.

But you know some of the world has Christians characterized as loud-mouthed, objectionable, sometimes obnoxious creatures who impose themselves on others to force others to accept their lifestyle. They so often see believers as men who speak much, but say little. They are always preaching, never listening; always judging, never reaching. I'm not saying that's a fair assessment. I'm simply saying it's fair to say many people have that caricature etched in their minds. I wonder if we've done anything to contribute to that error.

How good are YOU at listening? How willing are you to bite your tongue and button your lip, until the person you're with has had an opportunity to tell you what's really happening in their heart? Oh, what a listener Jesus was! He asked questions, and He listened. Jesus never lost sight of the individual because of the crowd. He moved at the touch of one, at the voice of one, at the tears of one, even though the throngs surrounded Him.

Sensitive saints listen. They don't interrupt others in mid-sentence to get in their two-cents worth (before it becomes worth

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even less). They don't talk without thinking. They don't suffer from hoof in mouth disease, wishing they could swallow that last sentence they never should have uttered.

Sensitive saints don't bore their brothers with endless tirades about the injustices of life that have fallen on them or about their pet subjects. They turn up their spiritual hearing aids and try to determine what's causing their brother to hurt. Sensitive saints know they don't always have the answer. Even if they think they do, they don't force it on those who are not interested. Sensitive saints listen much, talk little, and thus they have fewer words they have to eat.

So question number one is this: "Do you know how to be a listener?" Until God makes you a listener, you're not a sensitive saint.

Question number two is this, "Are you a reflector or an inflictor?" Do you receive and reflect the emotions of others, or do you selfishly and insensitively inflict your emotions on them. Does the whole household reflect your irritability? Does even the cat know when to leave the room because you're out of fellowship? Or are you so sensitive that when someone else in the family is hurting, you so yield your emotions to God that your concern is only to reflect and respond to their needs, forgetting your own? Proverbs has a lot to say about being sensitive to the feelings of others, even at your own expense. Listen!

The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy. (Proverbs 14:10)

The Living Bible paraphrases it:

Only the person involved can know his own bitterness or joy—no one else can really share it.

On the surface, that may seem to be slightly contradictory, but it's not. It isn't saying, you don't try to feel their hurts or their joys. It's saying, no matter how hard you try, you can never totally know either the depths of another's hurts or the height of another's joys. So don't condescendingly imply that you know where they're at, thus excusing yourself from listening. Listen, and let them tell you what it's really like from their perspective. You may think you know; but even if you've been where they are, no one can totally experience another's grief or joy.. nobody that is, but Jesus. Oh, how important that is in counseling. Verse 13

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adds this:

Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, And the end of
mirth may be grief. (Proverbs 14:13 NKJV)

Ken Taylor says it this way,

Laughter cannot mask a heavy heart. When the laughter
ends, the grief remains.

Many times those of us who are trying to minister read outer behavior and assume there are no deeper needs. Yet, beneath those wisecracks, beneath that sarcastic or jovial exterior, there may well beat a broken heart! The sensitive saint listens for the drum beat that echoes the melody...the melody of what that person is really trying to say. They may well be wearing a mask because they are convinced no one would accept them were the mask removed, or out of fear that they would be considered weak by their Christian brothers, they don't dare let the tears fall where they can be seen. Look beneath the mask and wait for the mask to fall. Sensitive Christians see beneath the surface, and they care. Proverbs 25:20 offers another scathing rebuke to the insensitive saint.

As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as
vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy
heart. (Proverbs 25:20)

The Living Bible says it best.

Being happy go lucky around a person whose heart is heavy
is as bad as stealing his jacket in cold weather, or rubbing
salt in his wounds. (Proverbs 25:20 TLB)

In other words, the Carlos Clown routine is devastating to a suffering saint. They don't want you to entertain them. They want you to enter with them into their hurts. If they want comedy, they'll turn on the TV; but if they want love and sympathy, they'll turn to a friend. You say, well I'll impose a happy mood, it'll do them good. You won't change the mood of their heart by being jovial. They'll just assume you're taking their trial lightly. You'll change the mood of their heart by being sympathetic, by listening and caring.

Proverbs 26 adds another dimension—the dimension of sincerity. It says:

Pretty words may hide a wicked heart, just as a pretty glaze
covers a common clay pot. A man with hate in his heart

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may sound pleasant enough, but don't believe him; for he is cursing you in his heart. Though he pretends to be so kind, his hatred will finally come to light for all to see.

(Proverbs 26:23 TLB)

In other words, going through the motions of giving sympathy or giving answers is not enough. If your spirit is someplace else, those who are hurting will know it. Kindness, shown out of a hypocritical heart, boomerangs until it is known for what it is. Don't just pretend to care. Stay before God until you DO care, then what you do will make a difference.

Proverbs 27 adds the final touch to this segment of our search for sensitivity. It says this:

He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.

(Proverbs 27:14)

If you shout a pleasant greeting to a friend too early in the morning, he will count it as a curse. (Proverbs 27:14 TLB)

I love that verse. I love to meet with people early in the morning. It's a wise use of time, but my mental gears just don't mesh until a little while into the conversation.

I'm especially grateful for those who are tolerant enough of my feelings to be subdued until I wake up. On the other hand, those hard chargers that act as though you ought to be ready to recite the Gettysburg address before your eyes are open, really give me heartburn. But the issue in the passage isn't just early risers and slow thinkers. *The issue is sensitivity.*

What it says is this. Scope out the person you're with. If he's obviously feeling poorly, the old slap on the back and cheer up Charley routine doesn't make him feel any better. If he's obviously emotionally drained from something you don't even need to know about, don't try to give him the Sammy Spiritual routine and make him feel like a reject from God's army because he's not making like Bob Hope on a Christmas trip to the troops. BE SENSITIVE. Listen to what his spirit is saying. Listen to what her spirit is saying. It may just be the time to listen. It may just be the time to encourage. But you'll never know if you're too busy performing the third act of the play, "Pharisees on Parade".

Do you see what these passages are all saying? Don't assume that you've been there and that their problems are no big deal.

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You can't truly know how much they hurt; listen and let them know you care. These Proverbial passages are saying don't just accept surface behavior as the real thing! Those people may just be acting jovial because they don't think you care about how much they hurt. Listen to their heartbeats. Proverbs is also saying don't be jovial around someone whose heart is breaking. Pay attention. Don't go around trying to change the atmosphere by giving it the Harriet Humor routine early in the morning or any other time.

Don't inflict your emotions on those about you. You send out feelers. You listen and wait, until you know how to best reflect their feelings back to God. Oh, how many of our wives would shout hallelujah to the rooftops if some of us guys would just apply these few principles and begin to pay attention to their real emotional needs... to what they are really saying. We'll begin to do that, if we begin to become sensitive saints.

The third area of insensitivity is much like the other two. Not only are we not to talk when we ought to be listening, not only are we not to impose our emotions on those who are crying for their emotions to be shared, but thirdly we are to be aware of the danger of intrusion. By that I mean, we are to be careful that we respect the rights of those around us....the right to their privacy, the right to their feelings, and the right to their convictions.

Proverbs 25 might be called the Harry Hambone passage. It's for the sake of those who shove their way into situations they don't belong in, or who don't have either the sense or the sensitivity to know when to wait for recognition. It says this:

Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men.

For better it is that it be said unto thee, "Come up hither"; than that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen." (Proverbs 25:6,7)

The Living Bible interprets that last verse.

It is better to wait for an invitation rather than to be sent back to the end of the line, publicly disgraced!" (Proverbs 25:7 TLB)

Do you get the real impact of that passage? It means God's man or God's woman doesn't barge in and struggle for first place in line. God's man or God's woman doesn't drop in uninvited.

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God's man or God's woman doesn't vie for position or politic for power. God's man or God's woman isn't a name-dropper, wanting to be known by the people they know. God's child is noted for his humility, the quiet way in which he or she takes their place without fanfare or attention. They don't join the church and expect to be promoted to a position of responsibility immediately because of who they are or what they've done in the Christian community. They quietly serve, not struggling to be noticed, almost anonymous in their ministering. Then it becomes God's job to lift them up, in due time, without their help!

When you walk into a room, do you expect all eyes to fall on you? Are you impressed by who you know? Do you tend to embarrass your hosts at a party by vying for attention at every turn? That's not God's way. Sensitive saints don't ever have to suffer the embarrassment of having to be asked to quiet down or take their place. Sensitive saints labor quietly in the shade, knowing God will exalt them if and when He chooses, not before.

The fourth set of principles follow a similar pattern. They have to do with insensitive saints who don't know when to leave. They arrive 30 minutes early, while you're still getting ready, never stopping to think of how that affects you. They stay after everyone else has gone, totally insensitive to the fact that you'd like to go to bed. They drop in unannounced, and like a pre-programmed miracle, they ALWAYS call you at the most inconvenient time. Proverbs speaks to this kind of insensitivity as well. Here is one good example:

Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee. (Proverbs 25:17)

Knox translates it:

Rare be thy visits to a neighbor; he will soon have enough, and weary of thee.

The picture is one of Connie Christian, the uninvited houseguest. She just "happens" to be in the neighborhood. And you'd just like to "happen to be in South America" when she rings the front door bell. Having worn out her welcome, she proceeds to wear down your patience. God's sensitive saints know better. Their divinely attuned antennas know precisely when they are welcome and when they have worn their welcome thin. What is the reason? They aren't thinking about what meets THEIR

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needs, but they are carefully observing how they can best meet yours.

The fifth precept is in Proverbs 25 as well, this time in verses 14 and 19. We call it the broken promise, broken heart syndrome. It's that kind of insensitivity that makes promises it can never keep and lightly esteems its own word. Listen to God's assessment of those kinds of believers....

Like clouds with wind that bring no rain, is the man who boasts of gifts not given.

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint. (Proverbs 25:14,19)

Ah, but when God's sensitive saint says he'll pray for you, he will. When he says he'll bring you something, he does. When he says he'll be somewhere at a certain time, he's there. His word is his bond, and broken promises represent to him a breach of his commitment to Jesus Christ who ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISES. God's man has sense enough not to promise things he cannot do and not to overlook the things he's promised to do, no matter how difficult they are. It's a sign of sensitivity. Many broken-hearted children grow up with scars of rejection or bitterness because of specific times mom or dad said, "We'll do this, or I'll do that," and someone or something came along to make it less than convenient to do so, leaving a broken heart out of a broken promise, all because a parent was not sensitive enough to think about how that neglect affected that child. Keep your promises. Sensitive saints always do.

Lastly, sensitive saints are always ready to reach out and write someone or call someone, no matter how much trouble it might be, if that letter or that call will bring joy to the one who receives it. Sensitive saints send thank you notes, "I love you" notes, "we miss you" notes, "welcome home" notes, and "just thinking of you" notes....because they know at the other end of that mailbox is a smile just waiting to happen, because someone cared enough to say so. Proverbs 25 says it like this:

As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. (Proverbs 25:25)

IV- THE MASTER'S PLAN: IN SEARCH OF SENSITIVE SAINTS....

An encouraging letter from someone who's gone satisfies the

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soul like water satisfies the thirst. Nothing encourages me like an unexpected letter bringing good news or a good report. The sad thing is I'm the last guy in town who gets around to sending one. Sensitive saints take the time to spread joy. They write notes, make quick phone calls, know just when a squeeze of the hand that says "I appreciate you" is really needed.

Everywhere they go people are excited to see them. Why? Because the antennas of their spirits are always turned to the other guy's heart. They know *when* to hush. They know *how* to listen. Their very quietness is counted as wisdom.

They don't make light of another's feelings, as though they could totally know how another feels. They know no one truly can know another's grief or joy.

They know that laughter often masks a heavy heart. Beneath that mask of mirth there often rests a bitter spirit. So they listen and wait till the humor dies and the hurts surface that need to be healed.

They know better than to make light of a heavy heart as well. They know the suffering saint isn't looking for a vaudeville act, but an act of love. They know phony encouragement is transparent hypocrisy, so they pray for sincerity before they speak. They know when a hearty greeting is in order. They know when a quiet smile is better. They know better, incidentally, than to give that hearty greeting too early in the a.m. before the eyes are opened, and the spirit is responsive to enthusiasm.

They respect the privacy of those about them. They know better than to invade another's world uninvited. They know when the welcome mat is out and when the "no visitors" sign means just that. They know how often to call and how often a call may be a nuisance. They know the trauma of broken promises. They know the triumph of a call or a note at just the right time to encourage another's heart. They know! They know! They know! How do they know?

They read the Bible... that's how they know, and they know that God's Word has a Master Plan for sensitive saints. It is a plan to develop a body of believers who are so concerned about the spirits and the feelings of those about them, that their own feelings fade into utter insignificance. It is a body typified by the lost art of listening, by saints who reflect rather than inflict

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their emotions on others, by Christians who know the danger of intrusion, the unnecessary weariness of a worn-out welcome mat, the devastation of broken promises, and the desperate need to reach out and write someone if it means that someone will be encouraged. That's the Master's Plan for the Master's man, and the Master's woman.

Now, ask yourself these questions, Are you a sensitive saint? Are you compassionate, considerate, and courteous? Or are you one of those who are always interrupting another in mid-sentence, always giving advice without being asked, always making promises you never quite keep, always calling at the wrong time, always having to be asked to go home, always busy telling everyone how YOU feel, never quite realizing what lurks behind the smiles or tears of those you just interrupted or offended.

That's not how to give your life away. You give your life away by listening, by asking, by caring, by being available, without being intolerable, by being at hand, without getting out of hand, by being visible in case you're needed, but becoming invisible when you're not, and by having the God-given grace to know the difference.

(See poem on next page)

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GOD IS LOOKING FOR SENSITIVE SAINTS

Because God is looking for sensitive saints
Men and women who know
That there is a time when you're welcome,
But there's also a time to go.

That there is a time (and it's most of the time)
When the very best thing you can do
Is lovingly place a lock on your tongue
If to thy LORD you'd be true.

That the very best thing most Christians can do
If they long for their lives so to glisten,
Is to button their lip just long enough
To learn what it means just to listen.

That if their mark on the world they're to leave
As they glorify their Lord,
That they must learn at whate'er the cost
Always to keep their word.

That there is a time when a neighbor's laugh
Is hiding a tear-laden heart,
That there is a time when an early shout
Is enough to tear someone apart.

That there is a time to be jovial
But there's also a time not to be,
And only the saint with the sense to know
Can really set others free.

God's looking for sensitive Christians
It's a problem we need to discuss,
Because strangely enough in his quest it seems
He is looking directly at us.

We may not exactly be sensitive yet
And no doubt our behavior doth show it,
But we ought to acknowledge he's looking
And be sensitive enough to know it.

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