



A NEW TWIST ON AN OLD RULE

By Susan Vogt

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Have you ever gotten a gift that just wasn't you? Once I sent my husband flowers as a sign of my love. I was proud of myself because I realized what a nice surprise it is for me when he has done that and I wanted to please him. I also thought, "Why should flowers be reserved just for females? Certainly men would enjoy them too." Wrong! He was gracious, of course, but the quizzical look on his face told me that he didn't quite get it, and I learned a lesson. I was trying to give him a gift that *I* wanted to receive, not what he wanted to receive.

This got me to thinking about the Golden Rule, "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." Certainly this is a generous maxim and helps us treat others fairly – as we would like to be treated. But are there times when the Christian might go beyond the Golden Rule to an even deeper selflessness and translate it as, "Do to others whatever *they* would have you do"? Getting into another person's head and searching for what would bring them pleasure or what would work for them, even though it might not be what *I* would want, takes quite a love.

For example, my son had a bad day at school – forgot his homework, got laughed at for a mistake, etc. My inclination was to talk it through with him. "How do you feel? Is there anything I can do to help you?" His silence was off putting at first. After all, I was trying to give him what I would want. It took me awhile to understand that in this kind of situation he usually just wants to be alone, to escape into his head or a game. What I could do to help, was *leave!*

On a marital level this sometimes plays out at times when I am feeling a lot of stress – usually from having too much to do in too short a time. Jim, being the sensitive husband that he is, rushes in to console me. He hugs me, holds me, kisses me. Unfortunately, I'm afraid I'm not always too grateful. What I really want is for someone to do some of the work! Over time he has learned that he'll get a lot further if he offers to take some of my chores off my hands. The hugging can come later. He, on the other hand, feels unloved if there isn't a certain amount of physical affection. Offering to mow the lawn just doesn't cut it.

It's hard to get into the habit of thinking this way because it doesn't feel natural – to me. I have to put myself in the other person's shoes and figure out what he or she would want. I find myself needing to curb that urge to drop in spontaneously on friends just because I enjoy that kind of thing. Come to think of it, isn't that what Christ did when he became human – put himself in our shoes, in our flesh.