

Chapter 1

What is a Hug?

“Encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” I Thessalonians 5:11, NASB

What is a hug?

One dictionary defines a hug this way: “To put the arms around and hold closely and fondly; to embrace tightly and affectionately; to cling to or cherish; to keep close to.”

People hug each other in many different ways.

Candace’s hugs are tight. She makes sure she hugs me each week at church - seeking me out if she’s not greeting at the door when I come in. Julie’s hugs leave a lingering fragrance of her perfume that remind you of her and her love. Joshua is ten. His hugs are awkward and shy and rarely given in front of his friends. One-year-old Tyler gives a running start to his hugs. His grandmom braces herself when she sees him coming. A mother’s hug is warm and reassuring. My husband’s hugs are loving and caring; they provide me with a safe place.

Manny works with youth. Many of them are uncomfortable with hugging, so he gives them high fives and slaps them on the back. That is his way of telling the young people that they’re important to him and showing that he cares.

Some hugs are tight and say, “I love you.” Other hugs are light - a greeting between friends.

When I first started attending church with my husband, I was surprised by all the hugging. My family didn’t hug or touch much. The people at the church I had been attending didn’t hug - at least not in the youth and collegiate departments, where I had attended. Hugging felt awkward to me at first. Sometimes I would try to slip in and out of meetings unnoticed. But no one can get by Candace. Or Julie. Or Mrs. Johnson.

Soon the hugs felt more comfortable, and I began to accept them more easily. I liked the feeling that the hugs expressed: Warmth. Caring. Love. Even though I wanted to be able to give these same feelings to others, I just couldn’t seem to initiate hugs.

That’s when I began looking for alternate ways to make others feel cared about. Sending a little note during the week. Popping in for a quick visit with a loaf of homemade bread. Sharing flowers from the

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garden. Leaving a little gift that I thought they'd enjoy someplace where I knew they'd find it. Telling people that I appreciated them. Encouraging them through words and notes.

These little acts of kindness and encouragement were my way of "hugging" people. Of hugging their hearts. Sharing warm, caring feelings - like a hug.

I began noticing the "hugs" others were giving to my heart: A cute card in the mail. A dinner when things were hectic at home. A listening ear. Scripture verses written on 3 x 5 cards and hidden around my house. These "hugs" gave me ideas as I continued to reach out to others.

Most of these hugs didn't take a lot of time or effort, but they left a lasting impression. A nice reminder of a friend's love.

When you give hugs, it means stepping toward people. Putting your arms around them. Allowing yourself to be open and vulnerable to them. In a hug, both people are hugged. Both feel the and love that a hug conveys.

In hugging a heart, you also need to make the effort to step toward people and be open to them. Listening, understanding how they feel. And then taking the time to do something - whether it's ten minutes to write a note or time to prepare a meal or help with a chore.

But I've found that you also experience a special feeling in hugging a heart. Several years ago, I spent occasional evenings at a home for pregnant unwed teens so that the house-parents could have a night out. While there, I talked to the girls, ate dinner with them - which they cooked - watched TV together, whatever. In between my visits, I wrote notes to the girls that I had gotten to know a little. I was never sure what to write, so I just wrote about whatever was happening in my life at the time. My oldest son was just over a year old then, so I included stories about him. Just that simple gesture made a difference for them. And it was a blessing to me. One night when I arrived, one girl I had been writing to came bursting into the room with a big hug and smile. After nine years, I still hear from her occasionally and get pictures of her little boy. All because of little gestures of kindness. A few minutes of my time. A little bit of my caring.

That's what this book is all about. Simple ways of touching other people's lives. Hugging their hearts. Letting them know that you care.