

VALENTINES AND ENVELOPES

We've reached the season of love and romance, Valentine's Day, and while everyone has their own idea of what the perfect gift be—flowers/jewelry/a night out/new outfit, nothing beats the old standby—a mushy romantic Valentine's Card—

Now, those cards might come in a wide variety of envelopes—lots of those to choose from.

1. PLAIN BUSINESS ENVELOPE—speaks of simplicity, practicality, getting the job done
2. MANILA ENVELOPE—Big, important, lots of content
3. PRETTY DECORATED ENVELOPE—Frilly and pretty and romantic
4. EXPRESS MAIL ENVELOPE—urgent and needs to get there right away

ONE THING IS CERTAIN—while each envelope is quite different, the importance of the envelope at Valentine's Day goes only as far as the content—THE REALLY IMPORTANT PART OF A VALENTINE ISN'T THE ENVELOPE—IT'S THE MESSAGE INSIDE THAT COUNTS!

In many ways, it's the same for us as human beings—

SOME OF US MIGHT FEEL A BIT LIKE PLAIN BUSINESS ENVELOPES—we live with simplicity and practicality, moving from task to task with efficiency and with the goal of getting things accomplished in an efficient ways.

OTHERS OF US MIGHT BE MORE LIKE THE MANILA ENVELOPES—our lives are filled, maybe even a bit overstuffed, with events and activities—we have important things to do and lots of places to go. STILL OTHERS OF US MIGHT MATCH MORE WITH THE PRETTY FRILLY ENVELOPES—we live life with emotion and gusto—we appreciate the finer, more beautiful things in life—we search for romance and enjoy art and music and fine dining and flowers and all that makes life special.

AND FOR SOME OF US, the EXPRESS MAIL ENVELOPE suits us best—it seems we are always hurrying from urgent task to urgent task, never having quite enough time to sit down before we have to be at the next location.

EACH OF US HAS A LIFE THAT OTHERS SEE, and our lives are each unique and different, much like these envelopes. BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT, JUST AS THE IMPORTANT PART OF THE VALENTINE IS THE MESSAGE, NOT THE ENVELOPE, SO EACH OF US HAS A PART OF US INSIDE THAT NEEDS TO BE FILLED WITH A MESSAGE OF LOVE—Without that message, our lives are like envelopes with no real meaning and purpose inside.

SO TODAY, I COME TO YOU AS AN ENVELOPE—a person who carries inside of me the most important VALENTINE'S MESSAGE OF ALL—THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR EACH OF US. SO LET ME UNWRAP THIS VALENTINE MESSAGE THAT GOD HAS SENT FOR YOU TODAY—

1. **God's Plan (John 10:10)** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

GOD'S DESIRE FOR EACH OF US IS THAT WE WOULD HAVE A FULL, MEANINGFUL, JOYFUL LIFE—that's how He designed us—BUT WE HAVE A PROBLEM

2. **The Problem (Romans 3:23)** For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. WE HAVE CHOSEN TO GO OUR OWN WAY INSTEAD OF GOD'S WAY, AND AS A RESULT WE HAVE BECOME EMPTY ENVELOPES—our relationship of love with God has been broken, and we have been emptied of the joy and purpose we were intended to carry inside. AND WORSE YET, IF WE LIVE AS EMPTY ENVELOPES THROUGH OUR WHOLE LIFE, then when our lives come to an end, there is a PRICE TO PAY

3. **The Penalty (Romans 6:23)** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we die without being filled with the love of God as God intended, we will be separated from his love forever.

NOW, MOST OF US DON'T WANT THAT FATE, so we work hard to try to fill up the empty envelopes of our lives by earning God's love—WE GO TO CHURCH, GIVE OUR TIME AND OUR MONEY, WORK HARD TO BE KIND AND GOOD, AND HOPE THAT OUR EFFORTS WILL FILL OUR ENVELOPES WITH ENOUGH LOVE TO BE ACCEPTED BY GOD—BUT THAT DOESN'T WORK.

4. Works Won't Work (Ephesians 2:8-9) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and it is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. No matter how hard we try, we can't earn our own way back to a full envelope of God's love—
BUT THERE IS GOOD NEWS—GOD SO MUCH WANTED US TO BE FILLED WITH HIS LOVE AND PURPOSE AND JOY THAT HE TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE

5. The Solution (Romans 5:8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. GOD KNEW WE COULDN'T SOLVE OUR SEPARATION AND BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, SO HE SENT THE ULTIMATE VALENTINE—HE LOVED US SO MUCH THAT HE DIED IN OUR PLACE TO MAKE A WAY FOR OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM TO BE RESTORED.
THE CATCH IS THIS—MUCH LIKE A WOMAN MUST RESPOND TO A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE WITH A YES OR NO, SO WE MUST RESPOND TO GOD'S OFFER OF LOVE WITH A DECISION--

6. Your Response (Romans 10:9-10) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. GOD COMES BEFORE YOU TODAY AND SAYS—IF YOU ARE WILLING, I WILL FORGIVE YOUR SINS AND FILL UP YOUR LIFE WITH MY LOVE AND PURPOSE AND JOY. BUT YOU MUST DECIDE TO ACCEPT HIS OFFER—IF YOU DO, A MOST WONDERFUL THING HAPPENS--

7. The Result (John 5:24) "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." GOD RESTORES THE RELATIONSHIP THAT OUR OWN SINFUL CHOICES HAD BROKEN, AND HE FILLS THE ENVELOPE OF OUR LIVES WITH HIS LOVE AND POWER AND PURPOSE AND PROMISE THAT WHEN DEATH COMES, IT WILL BE OVERCOME BY HIS LIFE AND WE WILL BE WITH HIM FOREVER.

Each of you has an envelope—a lifestyle you live that is unique to your personality and your situation— BUT EACH OF US ALSO IS IN NEED OF GOD'S VALENTINE INSIDE OF THAT ENVELOPE— LET ME ASK YOU THIS VALENTINES DAY—IF THE ENVELOPE OF YOUR LIFE WAS OPENED, WOULD GOD'S VALENTINE OF LOVE AND JOY BE INSIDE, BECAUSE YOU'VE ASKED JESUS TO FORGIVE YOU AND SET YOU FREE? IF YOU AREN'T SURE THAT JESUS IS INSIDE YOUR LIFE, YOU CAN DECIDE TO ACCEPT HIS VALENTINE OFFER TODAY. PRAY WITH ME.