

# How To Be a Great Friend

(2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4)

Would you like to be a great friend? If so, there is no better example than the apostle Paul. Since he is a great friend to the Corinthian believers, Paul planned to visit them twice (1:15-16). However, after the first visit was so painful (2:1), he postpones his travel plans and writes this letter instead. He wants them to repent, especially of their accusations against him, and change their ways (7:9). He does not want to repeat the heartbreak from his first visit, so he decides to return when he can stay longer to teach them and build them up in the faith. The Corinthians never had a better friend than Paul. This passage reveals four requirements for being a great friend, beginning with ...

## **Allow people time to change (1:23)**

His change of travel plans gave some of Paul's opponents in the church at Corinth ammunition to accuse him of being untrustworthy. Therefore, he writes, *But I call God to witness against me* (1:23a). Paul often calls God as his witness in his epistles (Rom. 1:9; Philip. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10).

Paul knows everything he thinks, says, and does is witnessed by God. That's something none of us should ever forget. What reminder of this truth do we find in **Psalm 139:2**?

Next, Paul gives his reason for postponing his travel plans to spare the Corinthians his rebuke and discipline (1:23b). He wants to give them time to change and correct the problems he wrote about in *1 Corinthians*. He doesn't want the same problems he experienced during his last visit to re-surface when he returns to Corinth.

Paul is doing what we often fail to do in our relationships - lovingly giving people time to change. Paul isn't just waiting; he is also praying for the Corinthians to change. Several times in this epistle he informs the Corinthians he is praying for them (13:7, 9). As he prays, he is trusting in what promise in **Psalm 38:15**?

To be a great friend, **allow people time to change** and ...

## **Appraise your motives (1:24)**

To remind the believers he never abused his apostolic authority, Paul writes he isn't trying to act like their master by dominating their Christian lives (1:24). He is not being condescending or acting holier-than-thou. Paul knows God calls apostles - like He does pastors - to be examples, not dictators. What does Paul write to young pastor Timothy (**1 Timothy 4:12b**)?

Paul continues by writing he and his associates work with the Corinthians for their *joy*, and know they can only stand firm in Christ by *faith* (1:24b). Paul knows faith and holiness cannot be forced. Those things are determined by a person's relationship with God. When someone you love is unsaved or backslidden, you can't force them to change. Being forceful will probably be counterproductive.

Paul's motive for his ministry to the Corinthian believers is for them to experience the joy of a holy, purposeful life. Paul doesn't want to be a dictator; he wants to be a mentor who works together with them to *stand firm* in their faith. He wants to be a facilitator who brings them joy, not pain. He wants to build them up, not tear them down. That is always the motive of a great friend.

To be a great friend, **allow people time to change, appraise your motives, and ...**

## **Anticipate pain (2:1-2, 4)**

Paul continues to explain the reason he changed his mind about returning to Corinth. What is it, according to **2:1**?

Hearing about the problems of immorality (1 Cor. 5:1), disgraceful behavior at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-22), and false teachers (2 Cor. 11:13) to name a few - Paul hurriedly leaves Ephesus to go deal with the situation. However, his visit is not at all what he hopes, and is even *painful*.

Next, Paul asks this rhetorical question: If he has caused them pain, who will make him glad, except the one he has grieved? (2:2). Apparently, some in the church are making false accusations against Paul, and the rest of the church will not defend him. Therefore, there is no one to make him *glad*.

Paul is emphasizing that one goal of his ministry is bringing mutual joy. This is true of all the apostles. For example, what does John write in **3 John 4**?

As a pastor, I had *no greater* joy than to look out over a worship service and see believers whom I had a part in leading them to the Lord and nurturing them in their faith through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. On the other hand, one of the most painful things I experienced is seeing believers who started with great potential but wrecked their lives through sin or following false teachers.

At some point, being a great friend usually involves disappointment and even pain. Paul continues, *For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears* (2:4a). The word translated affliction (THILIPSIS, thlip'-sis) is the word often translated "tribulation." It refers to deep distress. The word translated anguish (SYNOCHE, soo-no-kay') refers to a compressing or a constraint. It is used to refer to a narrow way. We would call it "dire straits." In other words, Paul has no good options. He can ignore the sin in the Corinthian church and let it abound. Or he can confront the sin and make the Corinthian believers angry with him.

Nothing is more painful than confronting a beloved believer about sin in his or her life. In his previous letter, Paul gave reprimands aimed at causing the Corinthian church to repent. It was a letter he wrote with many tears because he took no pleasure in rebuking the Corinthians. To the contrary, it broke his heart.

Correcting sin is never painless, neither to the one doing the correcting, nor the one who receives it. Paul makes it clear his rebukes are not intended to cause them grief but to show them the *abundant love* he has for them (2:4b). He has their best spiritual interest at heart. Paul knows what truth found in Proverbs 27:6a?

A friend who loves you will risk your wrath to tell you when you are wrong. A true friend will never give you the impression your sin is OK. A true friend will always want you to do what is right and holy, so you will not cause irreparable damage to your witness, reputation, or family.

To be a great friend, **allow people time to change, appraise your motives, anticipate pain,** and . . .

### **Adhere to righteousness (2:3)**

As he did with his first letter, Paul is writing to the Corinthians, so when he comes, he won't suffer *pain*, or "sorrow," from those who should make him *rejoice* (2:3a-b). Paul hoped the sinful problems he confronted in his previous letter would be resolved before his first visit. However, they were not, and he did not have a pleasant visit because he addressed their sin.

Many churches today will not confront sin for fear of being politically incorrect or offending someone. Paul is not like that. He wants the church to be a place of *truth* and *purity*. He is willing to oppose sin and false doctrine, even if people he loves become angry with him.

Ancient people found costly amenities, like oil and perfume, make a person's heart glad (Prov. 27:9a). What does the rest of that verse declare (**Proverbs 27:9b**)?

A friend who cares for you and loves you enough to give you biblical counsel is truly a blessing.

Paul hopes and prays the problems in the church will be settled before he visits Corinth again. He wants his *joy* to be in all of them (2:3c). Paul wants them to repent of their sin because they cannot have mutual joy if they continue to condone sin in the church.

There must always be a desire to avoid conflict in any relationship but not at the expense of purity and holiness. Jesus died on the cross so He could present His church to God in splendor (Eph. 5:27a). According to the rest of that verse, what will the church look like if it is in splendor (Ephesians 5:27b-c)?

This means a pastor, or a local church, cannot condone sin or "water down" what the Bible teaches. Neither can a great friend.

To be a great friend, **allow people time to change, appraise your motives, anticipate pain, and adhere to righteousness.**