



## **Devoted & Useful – Part 4**

### **Solidifying Our Relationships**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, no matter how nice our buildings might be, or no matter how nice your house may be, or your car may be, or your kitchen, those can all be great. But if your relationships are bad then life kind of stinks, am I right about that? You've got to have good relationships. That is fundamental to just having a life that you are going to say that things are going well. And the challenge in our cultural moment is that relationships in general, I think you could obviously look at it and say in our day there's a lot of shallow, a lot of flaky, a lot of unstable and a lot of transactional kinds of friendships out there that don't provide the kind of relationships that you know as a Christian or at least a Bible reader, you know that's not what God expects us to have. We're supposed to have a different kind of quality of relationship; there's no doubt about that. And we come to church and we can be physically present but not have the kinds of relationships we should have. I mean, it's like the old axiom that, you know, the wolf is going to go after the isolated sheep. And you might think, well, that's the guy who doesn't come to church as often as he should. Well that's true. You can be physically absent and we're going to be in trouble. But even if we are physically present we can pass each other in the lobby and text every now and then periodically and, you know, we can have a conversation here and there, connect online. But we're not really connected with the kind of durable, the kind of trusting relationships that you know that's the way God designed us to function. And if that's not there it colors everything about our lives.

So the real question is how do we have the kinds of relationships God wants us to have? And, you know, is it all labor and laborious and work? You know, how do we go about that? Or I guess to put it in the inverse, how do we keep from having the kinds of relationships that we know the world pretty much has as its norm? I mean, there are exceptions, of course, but we need to make sure that our relationships aren't torn apart at the first stress or strain that we may encounter. Thankfully our passage that we've reached in our study of Second Corinthians has given us a great bit of insight into how to do it right. And Paul is modeling this for us in a passage that really doesn't even seem to fit the flow of the text. We've covered a lot of different things about holiness in this. We've called the series, you know that we're supposed to be Devoted and Useful, but one of the things about being devoted and useful is you're going to have the right kind of relationships. And Paul pops in here in Second Corinthians Chapter 7 verses 2, 3 and 4, and he gives us in these three verses a great example. He's modeling the example of what it looks like to have the right perspective on relationships.

And if you know the context of the Corinthian church, you've studied First Corinthians and you've studied so far with us in Second Corinthians you know this is not a perfect church. The church has a lot of problems. And in this church they are doubting the Apostle Paul, and they're kind of withdrawing from the Apostle Paul. That's how he starts here in verse 2. And he's trying to call them back into this. But you'll see a really remarkable, optimistic, tenacious kind of pursuit of a kind of relationship with his friends at Corinth that I think we just need to learn from this morning. And if we have it, I think we're going to find out as this passage ends

in verse 4, we're going to say, hey, this is something that will bring us great joy. So it's well worth the effort. Let's take a look at this, Second Corinthians Chapter 7. Take your Bibles and follow along as I read it for us, verses 2 through 4. Here's how the English Standard Version reads. It says, "Make room in your hearts for us." Now the phrase "in your hearts" is not in the Greek text, and the reason it's provided by the translators is because where he goes in verse 3, the middle verse 3, he says I've said it before that you are in our hearts. So there's kind of a contrasted parallelism here that, yeah, you're not opening up your hearts. And now he does use the word "kardia" which means "heart" here in this passage in verse 3. But in verse 2 he's just saying something that almost bites and stings a little bit more in that he's saying can you just open up to us. Open up. Because they weren't, they were closing down.

Now, there were a lot of reasons as we've learned already in Second Corinthians, we started in Chapter 2 verse 1 reading about a painful visit and it made us think about that, though we don't have all the details on that, but however they last engaged it wasn't a good visit. Now, clearly you've had connections with friends that way where you had a hard lunch or a hard meeting or a hard night or whatever, you struggle. And so he's coming off of that with this letter and he's saying, okay, we have to fix this. And he's going to get into dealing with the critics that they're listening to but right now he's just appealing to them directly. Hey, would you just open up to us? And then he says a series of things that can be misunderstood, they seem defensive but he says, "we've wronged no one, we've corrupted no one, we've taken advantage of no one." That quick little triad of sub-points here, it's helpful for us to recognize as we read in the beginning of verse 3, he's not trying to push back. He's not being defensive in the sense that, hey, I've done everything right and what's wrong with you guys? You're all closed off to us. That's why he says in verse 3, "I don't say this to condemn you." I'm not trying to say, you know, hey, this is all on you even though really this is their problem. He's trying to appeal to them in a very positive, optimistic way. He's not trying to be hostile toward them.

And then he says I want to prove I'm not being hostile toward you. "For I've said before that you are in our hearts." Talk about us embracing you and by us, by the way, verse 1 of Chapter 1 this was Paul and Timothy. Timothy has been brought along in this missionary journey. He's writing this to the Corinthians with Timothy and he's saying, hey, we were there with you. We loved you. You're in our hearts. And look at this. You want to talk about how much in our hearts, "to die together and to live together. I'm acting with great boldness toward you." Now, here comes something that if you know the historical context it's almost surprising. You may be tempted to think he's flattering them here. "I have great pride in you; I'm filled with comfort. In all our afflictions," which you talked about at length in Chapter 1 of this book, "I'm overflowing with joy." You make me happy and I'm proud of you. Wow. Really? Did you read your own letter that you wrote in First Corinthians? It seems like you're ashamed of these people. This is not flattery. Paul is not lying. He's not trying to do anything to in any way embellish. He clearly has things in mind, which he does in just about every letter he writes. Even to Philemon whom he's trying to correct. I mean even to everybody that he's writing, he seems to have this sense in which he can find what's good and highlight it. And he is proud of them. And they have done some things right. Yeah, they've done things wrong. But we can learn from this magnanimous attitude. We can learn from this optimistic view and we can



learn from this. I don't care if you're leaning away, I want to lean in and I'd like you to come on back. This is helpful and needed. This kind of durable, loyal, faithful, kind of loving connection with other people is what we need, because our church really is only going to be as strong as the relationships within our church. Of course, it's all about connecting with the Lord Jesus Christ, but to the extent that we cannot together do what Jesus says, and that is that we love one another as he loved us, and so prove to everyone else that we are his disciples, we're in trouble as a church.

So we need this. We need this corporately. You need this individually. It's the kind of relationship you want and it's the kind of relationship you need. Now it starts with the negative. Here are all these three things. We'll get to the command here, make room in your hearts for us. That's not a bad translation. Make room in your hearts. But then he starts with all these negatives. We'll get to the first line of verse 2 when we talk about verse 3. But let's start with these three negatives. He's trying to say, hey, I didn't wrong, I didn't corrupt, I didn't take advantage of you. Right? That's trying to say my hands are clean and my relationship with you, I didn't do any of those things. And all of those things, if we start with the last one, take advantage of you, it's the easiest for us to understand and relate to and so let's just camp on that once we give it a heading. If you want to put this in kind of the vernacular for the modern 21st-century group of people, and I use the word "transactional" in the introduction, a lot of people are using people and their relationships. You give me this, I'll give you that, and I'll be in this as long as you do that. But we just need to make sure that we don't have any of that in the equation of our Christian relationships.

Number one, let's put it this way. "Don't Use Your Friends." If you call them your friends, they're not commodities. They're not there in your life to leverage for some benefit for you. You may benefit from them and Paul says, hey, my joy is overflowing, you bring me comfort. Now that's true. You're going to have lots of advantages by having good friendships. But we don't do friendships because I'm utilizing you to do something for me, because if that's our case, once we hit a bump then you're gone. It's like a lot of people view church, right? I go to this church as long as it does something for me. The minute it requires something of me, the minute I have a little struggle I'm off to find another one. That's how people are with friendships. And that cannot be the way we function. There's something about loyalty which we'll get to in a minute, but it starts with saying I'm committed to never using my friends. Let's think about the ultimate example of that. If you wanted the, you know, the Dudley Do-Right or whatever, you have, Dastardly. I can't even remember my cartoons from my childhood, but you want the ultimate criminal, the nemesis, I suppose it's Judas, right? Judas ends up using his relationship with Jesus to cash out for 30 pieces of silver. And if you know the story and the pivot point, when does he go and conspire with the Pharisees? What's the trigger for that? It's when Jesus gets really clear. We move from, hey, you're going to sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, all these great things that make people wonder whether or not they're going to be at his right hand or his left hand. And instead of all the accolades of the coming kingdom, Jesus starts talking about a postponement of that kingdom and he says I'm going to go to Jerusalem, be betrayed by the chief priests and scribes, I'm going to be handed over and be flogged, and I'm going to be killed. Right? As soon as that really sinks into the ears of Judas he goes out and conspires with the Pharisees and he says, I'll turn him



over. What are you going to pay me? 30 pieces of silver? I'll do it. He cashes in the relationship.

And I know sometimes if you read a little bit about the Upper Room Discourse in the gospel of John, you may feel bad for Judas because it talks about Satan comes and enters him and you think, wow, he's a victim. He's not a victim. In John Chapter 12 there's the story of Jesus having this woman, you know, wash Jesus' feet, anoints him with this very expensive perfume and Judas stands up and he says, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't. We can sell that for 300 denarii. We can go and take that very expensive perfume. You don't have to pour it out. Let's go sell it and then we can give it to the poor. Now, it's a lot like in our lives when you see something crash and burn, right? Let's just say the embezzler, you know, gets revealed. You look back and start putting pieces together. John put those pieces together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he says it's not because Judas cared about the poor, right? He loved to go into the treasury and take, he was a thief and took what he wanted. Of course, he wanted 300 more denarii in the treasury because he was pilfering. He was an embezzler. See, so we know that from the beginning Judas is looking at the promises of associating with the Messiah, and he's in it for himself.

Now, that's the extreme. But I do think we need to think about our friendships. Are there any Judas genes somewhere in our relationships? I'm in it for what I can get out of it, because once we have that as part of the motive and I get it, it's a composite motive, but if that's part of the composite motive we're in trouble. You think, well, I would never, I mean, we're not about that. James, you know, picks up on the same concept when he says to the church, this is the half-brother of Christ now writing, and he says you know what? You can do the same basic thing. Though he doesn't mention Judas' name, when you see someone coming into your church and he's wealthy and you treat him a different way than you treat someone who comes into your church for the same reason, wants to worship Christ, but they come into your church and you treat them differently. You say, go sit over there. In other words, you say I want this guy and let's go play golf, let's go to lunch. I want this guy because he's wealthy. And he says when you do that you do it with evil intentions, and it's such a natural thing. Why? Because just like the world, the world says I come first, you come second, what can you do for me, though they would never say it that way. You see because in their equation they are first and everything is a commodity in their life, including relationships and people. And what we're saying is God made it very clear to us when he was asked by the lawyer what's the greatest commandment? Well, it's to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, strength, and all your mind." He says, and by the way, if you want to prioritize this, people come next and then you come third.

Now, if we think that way then we know that just as it says when Jesus says you're supposed to love one another, not just as you love yourself, he says love one another as I have loved you, John Chapter 15. Then we know this, Jesus made it very clear how he loved us. He put our interests before his own. And he says, Paul does in Philippians Chapter 2, you ought to put other people's interests before your own. So if I'm putting other people's interests before my own it doesn't matter whether they're poor or rich, it doesn't matter what I can get out of it. And so you need to ask yourself the question, am I taking advantage of people? To start with



the last phrase there, Paul says I haven't taken advantage of anybody. He's not using relationships for his own advantage. And that's something that can happen even if you don't see yourself in league with Judas selling Jesus out for money. We sometimes will give our friendship as long as we see ourselves getting something back.

How about this one? We can befriend people for some kind of monetary advantage. Sadly, it's still happening. We can also befriend people for attention. For a kind of attention that Diotrephes wanted in Third John. Remember the little book of Third John verses 9 and 10? John talks about a guy named Diotrephes. Now Diotrephes just like Judas, there's that same pivot point in Judas' life when he realizes I'm not getting out of this what I want so I'm going to cash out. I can get 30 pieces of silver if I'm going to do that. Diotrephes in verse 10 of Third John says I'm kicking people out of the church. I'm putting them out. And he's not putting them out because of First Corinthians 6, they're in sin. He's putting them out because you're not giving him the accolades, the attention, that subservient, you know, adoration that he wants. Diotrephes wanted to be first, so what was he doing? He's befriending people because he wants their attention. He wants them in his little clique. And if you don't give me that attention, well then I'll look for someone else. Matter of fact, I'll push you out if you're not giving me the kind of attention that I want. I need to make sure you're not only not having a Judas gene in your friendships. I don't want any Diotrephes gene either, because we should take advantage of no one, and no one is a commodity to make you feel better or more important. Nor is it to enrich yourself. Don't take advantage of anyone. That's not how we use people. We don't use people. Don't use your friends.

Look at the first one on the list. "We've wronged no one." We've wronged no one. Now, why would anyone selfishly wrong someone? Well, it happens all the time. There are a lot of motives for it. When Cain killed Abel he was using Abel as the receptacle of his angst and his envy. He was bitter toward him. And because of that, though he would suppose to be his brother and be kind to him, he certainly wanted to express his selfish feelings, and he was going to use him as a target of those feelings. So, I don't like you because you, it says in First John Chapter 3 verses 11 and 12, he says in verse 11 "you should love one another." In verse 12 he says "we should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." So whatever was going on with those sacrifices there in Genesis Chapter 4, here's what was happening. He was saying I don't like that you get the favor that I'm not getting. And even though we ought to be friends, we're brothers, you're going to become the punching bag of my angst. And so he is wronging him because of his own frustration. And people aren't to be used that way. We don't use our friends just as some kind of punching bag, as some venting hole, as somebody who we're just dumping on all the time.

Or how about David and Bathsheba, right? Bathsheba was not befriended by David because he really wanted to edify Bathsheba, right? That was not the point. You know the story. You're being very quiet. But you know the story, right? He was going to be able to vent his lustful desires by befriending Bathsheba. Let's go get her. I mean, that was an interesting... I need to meet her. Why do you want to meet her? Not because she's rich, right? That's not it. Not because you're bitter toward her and she's going to be the receptacle of your angst. No, she

may be a receptacle of something, but it's your lustful passion. We don't use people. And in that case, you're wronging them because you're doing something that is going to make you feel better or look better or feel relieved, whatever it might be. Even in the churches in Galatians Chapter 5, the debates within the churches, he says you "bite and devour one another." He starts again in that text in verse 14 saying you have to love each other. If you loved each other things would be fine. But you don't. You don't love you're biting and devouring each other. Why? Because they had these conflicts. Now some were deep theological conflicts, but some were cultural issues like we read about in Romans Chapter 14. And he's saying you shouldn't be doing that, you're going to devour each other. Well, a lot of that was a selfish sin against other people because they wanted to make themselves look better. And if I can put you in the other camp and speak against you, well that certainly makes me look better.

"We've wronged no one." Look at the next phrase in the middle of verse 2. "We've corrupted no one." Now, this is a little more subtle and maybe the hardest to illustrate but it happens all the time. In Jeremiah, we were reading in our Daily Bible Reading not too long ago, we learned about the priests and the prophets in Jeremiah Chapter 6 verse 13. And it says, "From the least to the greatest," he's talking about the "prophets to priests," he says, "everyone deals falsely. They've healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." Do you remember that line? It's repeated twice in the book. Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Why do they keep saying that? Well, because they don't even "know how to blush," right? They commit all kinds of abominations. See? So they're committing abominations, the congregants, and the prophets and the priests were committing abominations. So what they did was saying I know what you're doing, really, according to the Bible, it needs condemnation. But I'm not going to condemn you because I don't want to condemn myself. So all of a sudden now I am corrupting you by trying to lower the standards. And sometimes we will befriend and influence people simply to mitigate our guilt. Because you know the old adage that misery loves company? Well, compromise really loves company. If you're in a compromised position before the Lord, you want to get people around you who also have that compromise. And if they don't, you'd like to corrupt them so they do. You want to talk them out of their high standards of godliness so you can get them down to your level and you can say to them, oh, don't worry about that. And if you can get them not to worry about that, that mitigates your own shame and your own guilt. Don't corrupt anyone. Why would Paul ever corrupt anyone? Well, the false teachers corrupted people all the time because they didn't want to live by the standards that they were preaching, and therefore they changed the standards and they mitigated their own guilt.

In First Corinthians Chapter 1 we learn about people saying, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephus, I'm of Christ. Well, why were they doing that? Well, they were corrupting each other in this sense. They were befriending and influencing people, think about this, because there were people in the church they didn't like, and if they could get people to somehow identify with them with some common denominator, some common interest against their common interests, whatever they were, then I can now rightly say, hey, you and I should be against those people. We can influence and befriend people. In part, we can corrupt them in some way. We can create factions within the church, not over doctrinal issues, right? But just over



the fact that I want to take you into my group so that you can shut the people I don't like out of my group. It couldn't be said more clearly than in Galatians Chapter 4 verse 17. It says, "They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you will make much of them." Now again, talk about transactional. I want to be able to flatter you. I want to be able to say nice things to you. I want to bring you into my group, not to be the target of my angst or the target of my sin. No, I just want to corrupt you. How am I corrupting you? Well, I'm corrupting you because I'd like to have you not like those guys because I don't like those guys and I want you to make much of me. And if they hear it that would be great.

There's this sense of these factions and that should never be the case. We're always going to have our close friends. Jesus had Peter, James and John, but he never leveraged that Peter, James, and John group against the rest of the disciples. Do you follow that? Never. That's not how it worked. But sometimes that's what we can do. Now that's really negative, I understand that. But notice the theme here. Selfish, selfishly getting something from people, selfishly sinning against people and selfishly encouraging people to engage in my own sin, whatever that might be. I'm corrupting them. I'm getting them to see things the way I see them when I know it's not right. And even if we don't know it's not right, sometimes we just intuitively say why don't you share my view in this? For whatever the reason is, my own licentious life, my own low standards, my own hatred towards someone else, or antipathy towards someone. Don't use people. Now, we could spend all morning, I suppose, talking about that.

Well, let's get back to our text, verse 3. He says, I'm not trying to shame you in this. I'm not trying to put distance between us. I'm trying to fix the problem. "I don't say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts." I'd like you to open up to us. But I'm telling you, we're fully open to you. You're fully embraced by us, Paul and Timothy. "To die together and to live together." Do you want a strong statement? There's a strong statement. Have you ever heard one like that in the gospels? What does Peter say when Jesus says, you know, they're going to strike down the shepherd and the sheep are going to scatter. Peter says oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I'm willing to go and die with you. Right? What is he trying to say? What is Peter trying to communicate with that line? I mean, Paul's using the line here. What is the point? I'm loyal to you, right? As they say out there, come hell or high water I'm with you. I'm to the end. No matter what comes. Come what may. I'm with you. Loyalty. It's a statement of loyalty. Now, Peter's didn't prove true, although I think he had great intentions. It took Jesus going in John 21 to kind of bring him back in his great shame for failing after he said that. But this is what Paul is saying and it certainly is how we should feel. I am going to say I have friends in my heart and I'm ready to die with them and live with them.

Let's just put it this way, it's something the world doesn't know a lot about. But let's just put it this way, if you want to have the kind of relationships we should have, we need to be "Extremely Loyal." That's what we're talking about. Extreme loyalty. Now you're going to say to yourself when I have friends I'm never going to use them, and I'm going to commit myself to extreme loyalty. And you want to talk about where that is not common in our culture, just look at the relationships even by the common grace of God that were marked in previous generations by loyalty and when the divorce rate wasn't what it is now. I mean, so we understand that the world is low on loyalty and fidelity. We get that. But as Christians even in



our friendships there should be that. People don't even get married because they don't want to say I'm committed till death do us part. And yet in friendships David is willing to say that to Jonathan, his friend, even when that's really not an advantageous situation when you know your friend's dad is out to kill you. He's not doing it to leverage. He's certainly not using Jonathan but he's willing to commit himself even in a ceremonial way to exchange armor and all the rest. This is an amazing thing to see that the standard in Scripture is the standard of loyalty in our friendships, and we ought to be loyal. And I can talk about a lot of other things. We could go into careers and jobs and ministries and ministry posts and all the rest. We need a lot more loyalty than we have. But today's topic is your friendships, your relationships. And I want you to think about how loyal a person you are on the loyalty meter where are you?

Turn with me to the book of Proverbs. There are three proverbs I'd like you to look at real quick, and I think you can identify with the great need that the Bible holds up for us. Proverbs Chapter 20 will be the first one. Paul says you're in our hearts. Well, I'd like that to be true that you have a team of people, a cadre of people, some cohort of people who are in your hearts. You and your friends have a connection. Not flaky, not fickle, not flighty, relationships that are characterized by this Hebrew word in Proverbs Chapter 20 verse 6, drop down to verse 6, "Many a man proclaims his own," now these two words in the English Standard Version usually translate and of course, in this text they do translate to the Hebrew word "Hesed," right? If you've been around the block a few times in the Christian life, you know that word hesed. A very important word usually connected to God talking about love toward his covenant people. And we use the word in the English Standard Version or they use it, I wasn't on the committee, but they use the word "steadfast." Now it's not a word I'm using every week. I don't know about you, but I do use the word "loyal" and that's a good synonym for it. What kind of love is it? It's loyal love. "Many a man proclaims his steadfast love," his loyal love, "but," here's the rhetorical question, "a faithful man who can find?" It's hard to find one. So we know this isn't a new problem. Right? Well, this is not a new problem. But I do think it's getting worse in the 21st century in the West, it certainly is getting worse.

So we need to say we're going to be countercultural in our standards. We are people who are extremely loyal. And you can add the word "extremely," the little adverb extremely. Why? Because in our day any loyalty is going to look extreme. And you should have an extreme loyalty to your church, for the things God calls you to, and certainly to your friendships. And Paul is showing this even though they're leaning away. He's stating you're in my heart to die, to live. That's a major thing. Matter of fact, it is the fundamental definition of friendship. Turn to Chapter 17 if you're in Proverbs still. Three Proverbs. Let's look at verse 17 of Chapter 17. Proverbs 17:17. Here's just a good way to talk about loyalty without using the word. Here it comes, verse 17, "A friend loves at all times." All times? Yes, all times. Right? Even when there are people criticizing your friend. Even when you're going through bad times. Even when there's misunderstanding. A friend loves at all times. That's the definition of friendship in the Bible. And because this is Hebrew parallelism he inserts the word "brother," which we're not talking about a biological brother here, a brother, a friend, a friend who sticks closer than "a brother is born for adversity," even when things are bad, even when they get nothing out of it because they're not transactional friends, they're loyal friends. They don't use people, right?

They love people. What kind of love? Loyal love. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

One more. How about Proverbs Chapter 19 verse 22? This will help us tie the first point to the second point. And we talked about the fact that we don't use people. Well, if you don't use people you may find yourself in some friendships you thought you'd never have. Look at verse 22. Proverbs 19:22. "What is desired in a man is," here's our word again, *hesed*, *hesed*, loyal or "steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar." Now, why would I have this little Sesame Street comparison in the middle of this verse? Because we're not just talking about comparing a poor man to a liar. I'd rather have a poor man than a liar. No, we're talking about steadfast, loyal love. Loyal is about saying I will be with you. I'm going to be your friend. We're going to go the distance. We are committed to one another. You're in my heart to die or to live. That's what we're talking about. Now, here's the thing. You may find that in a poor person. I'd rather have a poor friend who is a loyal person than someone who claims his faithfulness but he's a liar. Proverbs 20:6b, "Faithful men who can find?" Do you follow me here? Of course, I'm not going to care about the transactional nature of friendships because that's not how it works. Will there be kickback? Will there be benefit? Will there be blessing? Can I say with the Apostle Paul in verse 4 of Second Corinthians 7, there will be an overflowing with joy. There will be, but it starts with you committing regardless of saying I am in this, I care about you. What is desired in a man is *hesed*, it is loyal love. Now "a poor man is better than a liar." What we want is a friendship and it's not based on what we get out of it.

It's going to be hard. That's the whole context of Second Corinthians. It's been hard. They've had a painful visit and it's hard between them. But jot this down at least, John Chapter 15 verses 10 through 13, Jesus is talking about how he "kept his Father's commandments, he abided in his love." "If you keep my commandments, you'll abide in my love." "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Here's the interesting thing about joy. It's a byproduct of doing a godly thing. Now, if people chase joy all the time and they don't get it, it's very elusive. But if you do the right thing it's a byproduct. It's the fruit of doing what's right. And here he says, "These things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as," a great Greek word "*Kathōs*," just as "I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends." So here is the interesting thing about the derivative of joy. Joy is coming from the kind of love that you're willing to engage in that is going to cost you, costly love. In other words, love is going to be measured by its sacrifice, and the sacrifice that is given in a relationship like Paul is showing and modeling right here in Second Corinthians Chapter 7 is the extent to which joy becomes the product. Why is Paul overflowing with joy when the Corinthians are leaning away and he's having to reach out and grab them and say come on back, open up to us. Well, because it really is about the joy of him reflecting the virtuous kind of love that the Bible says should be at the core of all of our relationships. You're going to feel dirty, you're going to feel ashamed if you really are a transactional friend and you're in it for what you're going to get. But you're going to feel blessed if you start to reflect the kind of love that God had, whether it's a poor man or a rich man, whether it's someone who gives you the attention you want or whether they don't.



"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends," whether it's Thomas or Peter, whoever it is. That's the essence of it all.

Go to Philemon real quick if you can find it. Do you remember Philemon? We preached through it really quickly because it's a short book, one chapter book, 25 verses. We preached through it really quickly just before we got into Second Corinthians, as I recall. And in this equation that's laid out in the book, Philemon, of course, this man in Colossae, this church of Colossae, this prominent figure, Paul writes to him because he encounters his runaway slave Onesimus when he's in Rome and he leads him to Christ, disciples him, and now he's going to send him back, the right thing to do, send him back. But then he tells Philemon you better accept him back as a friend, not as a slave, as a fellow brother, not as a servant. Right? He's more valuable to you as a friend, right? Let's have some *hesed* kind of love here, to use an Old Testament term, and that's going to be way more fulfilling for you than having a great employee. Can you just receive him back?

Now here's his appeal, verse 17. "If you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me." As Paul plays the intermediary, the third party in this, this is how you need to see all your friendships. There is a third party involved in Christian friendships. It's Christ, and Christ is the one who constantly says to us, hey, bear with one another, just as I bore with you, welcome one another, or accept one another just as I accepted you, to quote Romans. Forgive each other, to quote Colossians, forgive each other just as I have forgiven you. He doesn't want me to say in my own mind; I'll forgive as much as they forgive. I'll be welcoming as much as they welcome. I'll be as generous as they're generous. No, no. I need to have that third party in view. "If you consider me your partner," and of course we consider Christ to be our partner. Of course, this is Paul stepping in but it's a great paradigm for us. And "if he's wronged you," I just quoted the forgiveness part, verse 18, "or owes you anything, charge that to my account." I know you want to get back what he stole from you when he left your house in Colossae. But hey, charge it to me. Paul had all kinds of access because of who he was. I mean, if you really want to cash it in, you need so many denarii back, fine, just I'll get it to you. Just accept him back. See, Paul is reaching out to the Corinthians to be their friend. Not because they're worthy of any of that. Because he's thinking with the third party in view. Verse 19, "I, Paul, write with my own hand: I will repay it -- to say nothing of your owing me even your own self." If anyone could say that to you, it's Christ.

If you're a Christian you owe him everything. And if he's the one saying, man, I want my children to get along. I want them to be friends. I want them to be close. I want them to reflect the virtues of real loyal love. Well, then we'll do it for him. And what will it do, verse 20? Paul says, "Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ." There's the Christ element, right? Paul's going to say, I'm going to be refreshed, just like Christ would be refreshed. This is going to be a good thing. Christ is going to be pleased; I'm going to be pleased. And when I think about what I need to do in my friendships Christ is going to be pleased. Do you want to talk about optimism? I don't know what I would have said had I written this, because I don't know what kind of guy Philemon was, but Paul says, I'm "confident of your obedience. I write to you, knowing that you'll do even more than I say." That's what we're seeing even in our passage. Go back to our text, Second Corinthians 7.

He's so positive. He's positive, you would say, to a fault because he doesn't seem very realistic about all this praise. But he's expecting an ongoing relationship, which is made possible by thinking through the third party in the relationship. And you ought to be thinking through that all the time.

Verse 4. Look at verse 4. "I'm acting with great boldness toward you," and we should have great boldness. "I have great pride in you; I'm filled with comfort. In all of our affliction," which he talked about in Chapter 1, "I'm overflowing with joy." So he's boldly saying some things about, hey, open up, open up! And he's also boldly saying, hey, I'm proud of you. Hey, you make me happy. I mean, think about that. That's amazing. And I've already mentioned it when I read through the passage at the beginning. There's a lot to complain about. I can read First Corinthians to find all kinds of things. I can even read Second Corinthians. I can read the last chapter of Second Corinthians and say you have some concerns here, but you also have some things that I'm proud of you. It's not flattery. Flattery is always someone who puts himself above their friend. They're going to use words to leverage them to do what they want their friends to do. That's manipulation. Flattery is never a part of the Christian vocabulary. But this kind of praise is. And that's a struggle for Christians, right? You guys think that your job, you've been deputized by God to keep everybody humble. I know you think that's your job. You have the Keeping People Humble certificate that you got somehow. (audience laughing) That is not your job. It's not your job at all.

Here's what the Bible says, "Let another praise you and not your own mouth." When you read the word "pride" here, you think, wow, that's pretty encouraging, but it seems wrong. By the way, let's get the wording up here. Number three, boldly encourage, you "Need To Boldly Encourage." He's going to be bold with them about what he said and what he's saying. What he's saying now are things that are definitely under the heading of this word, encouragement. He's giving them words and bringing them to a place of saying, okay, I'm ready. I'm ready to lean back into this relationship. Okay. Pride. Do you know why pride is wrong? When you see the word sitting by itself you think it's wrong because you always assume it's about being proud of yourself. Pride is wrong because if the object is you, well then you're acting just like Satan in Ezekiel Chapter 38. Yes, you should not be proud of yourself. And there's the problem. Let the mouth of another praise you and not yourself. It's not that God is against praise. He just doesn't want you to praise yourself. He would like you to be engaged in praising others. Well I only praise God. Well then you're a sinner and you're in sin, and you're compounding your sin because the Bible says all over the place you ought to be praising people. Really?

Proverbs Chapter 31, I know you know this verse. Surely your wife has quoted it to you. Proverbs Chapter 31. Right? Let the woman who fears the Lord. The "woman who fears the Lord is to be praised," right? We should praise people who do the right thing. Paul is doing it everywhere. He's constantly praising people, even people who you think, well, I can see 80% of your church looks like a mess. Well, with the 20% he's going to praise them. And he's going to say I'm proud of that. When was the last time you said that to someone? I'm proud of you. Now there has to be some praise coming out of your mouth. A couple of passages just really quickly. Second Thessalonians Chapter 1. Do you want examples of this? It's



everywhere. It's also in the passage that we're in but we'll get to it later in Chapter 7 verse 14, he talks about boasting of the Corinthians. Well here he's boasting of the Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians Chapter 1 verse 3, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you." Even that, it starts with that. If your prayer life is starting with that kind of optimistic, positive sense of I'm thankful for my friends and here's why. Because he says, I'm thankful for you. Why? "Because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing." Okay, well that's good. He has a list of things he's looking at, the optimistic, positive things, and he's thanking God for it. And then it gets into this, verse 4. "Therefore we ourselves boast about you." Now, is boasting wrong? If Paul went around boasting of himself you'd say that's wrong. That is wrong. Let the mouth of "another praise you, and not your own mouth." But here he's boasting about the Thessalonians and he should. "Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God." What? "For your steadfast love," the very thing we're preaching about, your "faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you're enduring." You're doing a great job. I'm proud of you.

Go back to First Thessalonians Chapter 2, First Thessalonians Chapter 2. How far does this go? This is insane. Verse 19, First Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope or our joy or crown of boasting before the Lord?" Well, you better not boast before the Lord. Right? Well, you're going to. Why? Paul, what are you going to boast about? "Is it not you." We're going to boast about you. Verse 20, yes, "For you are our glory and joy." How do you think that made the Thessalonians feel? It's an amazing statement. Surely there's been someone in your life who is giving you those kinds of words. Hopefully someone. It reminds me of that... Did you have the Hot Wheels track with the orange track? And one day you got the little house with those spinning foam wheels in it. Anybody? No? This is a young crowd. It would take the sides of that little, you know, diecast metal little Hot Wheels car, and it would take it through that house and would spit it out the other side to make it go faster. And if you had just the right length of track it would go around and around and around all day. Those foam wheels spinning inside that house are the definition of "Parakaló". That is the word "encouragement." Encouragement is when something comes alongside of you. It just doesn't come alongside of you. And I often illustrate it with a knee brace. It is that, it holds you up, but then it spurs you on. That's what's happening. These words are spurring the Corinthians on and they're so encouraging. Right? He's boldly encouraging them. And this is great.

And surely you've had a coach, right? Athletes. You've had a, you know, a music director, you've had some mentor, you've had some boss, you've had some whoever in your life who has given you just the right words of encouragement at the right time, and yet we hold them back so much. Boldly encourage. This is the selfless, godly pride that is hailed everywhere as a good thing in Scripture. Expressing words of affirmation. Even when you say, well, I'm going to hold this back because 20% of their life is a mess. I understand that, but Paul continues on with boldness. It's a great text. "I'm acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I'm filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I'm overflowing with joy."

I'm old enough to remember my craft projects as a student in the Long Beach Unified School District when in those days we used Elmer's white glue. Does anybody remember that? And then you learned that after you were done, you always had a little left on your fingers and then



you recognized that you got so into peeling it off after it was all done sometimes at the end of the craft project you just take a bunch of that, put it all of your hands. (audience laughing) Anybody? You put it all on your hands. And then you had something to do instead of listening to the teacher for the next half hour because you could sit there and you were trying to peel off the biggest parts of it. That glue was great! Elmer's white glue. Then they came out with this thing called Krazy Glue. There ain't no one in here pouring that out on their palms. I remember the first time I used that I was as careless as I was with the Elmer's glue. And I thought for sure I could never wear gloves again. I couldn't use scissors. My thumb was attached to my forefinger and I'm literally, I'm an adult here with my heart beating out on my chest thinking I'm done. I'm deformed. (audience laughing) A whole different kind of glue.

What Paul's modeling for us is something very distinct from the world's friendships and relationships, right? God doesn't want Elmer's friendships, right? He needs crazy friendships, Krazy Glue friendships. The kinds that are going to stick through the hard times, no matter how difficult it is even when your friend isn't doing everything the way you want them to, because it's not about them. You're not using them as some transactional chip to make sure if they do this, then I'll be friends with you. Now, I'm talking here about the normal ebb and flow of life in the Christian community. We need to have loyal friendships that are filled with bold encouragement. So let's lean into the kind of reinforcement of our bonds together that we should have. Our church is only going to really be as healthy as our relationships in them, because we do this together as a family, as a team, as a flock, as a building. Even the bricks in the building have to have mortar that sticks them together. And we need to be daring, bold. Their words of encouragement are always predicated and underwritten by loyalty. The kind of *hesed* love that reflects that divine commitment. It's a divinely patterned loyalty and love. Let's get to that this week.

God, please help us this week that's filled with, I hope, thanksgiving. Let us be thankful for our friends, even as Paul was thankful and led immediately into boasting about them. I pray that we could boast not only about them, but even as Paul said to the Thessalonians and to the Corinthians that he was boasting about them and he was proud of them. That's a good thing, an encouraging thing and it spurs us on, it moves us forward. These kinds of friendships bring life to us. It brings us joy even in the giving regardless of the receiving. So God help us, please, as this is done the kind of mutual edification that will take place in the body of Christ. I pray you'd encourage us in a way that would just send us into this week with real, profound thanksgiving. And if our relationships are sparse, God, I pray you'd help us to make these, to invest in these, to see you make our lives filled at every turn, every corner. But new relationships we're willing to invest in. Let us not just come physically to church. Let us really be an organic part of our church family.

In Jesus' name. Amen.