

Relationships: The Long Distance Factor
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2 Corinthians 8 – An appropriate lesson as we send two of our own on a journey to minister in a far away land!

It can be hard to maintain a long-distance relationship. But technology is trying to bridge the gap. What are some ways technology helps you maintain a relationship with someone far away? Skype; Texting; Facebook/Twitter; Cameras in phones.

Here's an extreme example that's not "brand new" because it was nominated as one of Time Magazine's Best Inventions for 2006: The HUG SHIRT. They write:

Remember when PDA stood for something other than personal digital assistant? It can again with the Hug Shirt, a high-tech garment that simulates the experience of being embraced by a loved one. When a friend sends you a virtual hug, your cell phone notifies the shirt wirelessly, via Bluetooth. The shirt then re-creates that person's distinctive cuddle, replicating his or her warmth, pressure, duration and even heartbeat. And, yes, the Hug Shirt is fully washable.

Inventor: CuteCircuit Read more:

http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1939342_1939424_1939709,00.html#ixzz0xEkk30uc

I have a shoebox at home filled with letters my Dad sent home to his Mom in World War II. It's interesting to open that box and read through the thoughts of a North Georgia farm boy (age 18-21 during the war) who had never been anywhere, writing from Italy and North Africa. His Mama must have kept almost all of them.

Aside from e-mail, and depending on access and availability, 21st century military men and women have a host of technological options to help them stay in touch with friends and family back home: cell phones, Skype voice calls using the Internet- e-cards, instant messaging, message CDs, and even social media sites like Facebook.

Marcus Penn, a 25-year-old Marine from Beaufort, S.C says:

"My wife still has my e-mails," he says. "I sent 1,845 from the day I left to the day I got back. That's not counting the Google chats."

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35592389/ns/technology_and_science-love_in_the_digital_age/

David McCullough writes in the acknowledgement notes of his Pulitzer Prize winning biography John Adams:

. . . The letters of John and Abigail Adams number in the thousands, and because they wrote with such candor and in such vivid detail, it is possible to know them—to go beneath the surface of their lives—to an extent not possible with other protagonists of the time.

Read some of the letters here: <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/letter/>

- When you love someone, you'll do everything you can to show it...even when they are hundreds (or thousands) of miles away.
- Christian believers can ALSO minister to others in long-distance relationships.
- Paul modeled this in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9
 - Ministering through GENEROSITY
 - Showing LOVE to those far away
 - Being EAGER to minister to those far away
 - Being OPTIMISTIC that we CAN minister even across the miles

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Generosity Encouraged

1And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 6So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

- One way we can minister to those far away is by being GENEROUS.
- Verse 1: Paul writes to the Corinthians: “I want to show you a great example of ‘long-distance’ love...a group of churches in Macedonia.”
- Look at verse 2: These people have been going through TOUGH TIMES financially because of the persecution they were experiencing...YET, what QUALITIES did they display in SPITE of their problems?
 - Overflowing joy and rich generosity
- The first reason people might have for not GIVING to those in need is their own financial situation.
- Verse 3 says: “they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.”
- In fact, in verse 4 he says they “pleaded...for the PRIVILEGE of sharing in this service to the saints.”
- “Service to the saints”: Paul was promoting a RELIEF OFFERING to needy JEWISH CHRISTIANS in Jerusalem who were under PERSECUTION. He was asking GENTILES who had been saved in these churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Galatia, and here in Corinth to give to JEWISH BELIEVERS far away.
- It's a fact that families have been devastated by the financial meltdown of the past two years...and we're still not “out of the woods” People are hurting and it's hard to find even a small offering to help someone else.

- But, it's interesting to me that even in the midst of tough financial times people are willing to give SOMETHING if there is a real need...I've seen it time and time again.
- I've seen it in this class. In fact I could write to someone and use our Sunday School class as an example of this just as Paul wrote about the churches in Macedonia.
- This class gives regularly to help those who minister far away and many times I see things done QUIETLY that the whole class never hears about...GOD BLESS YOU FOR BEING SUCH A GENEROUS AND LOVING CLASS to those in NEED!!!!
- These Macedonian Christians said, 'we might not be able to give a BIG offering, but instead of going out to lunch at Macedonian McDonalds, we'll go home and eat a "PB and J" sandwich so we can give SOMETHING.'
- God will bless that SACRIFICIAL GIVING and MULTIPLY IT for His glory!
- What caused these people to be so GENEROUS when they were in such bad shape themselves?
- Look at verse 5...the last sentence. To whom had they GIVEN themselves?
 - To the Lord
 - And to OTHERS by THE WILL OF GOD
- They were not just giving to "a good cause", they were giving TO GOD because that was HIS WILL FOR THEM.
- Paul says, 'So, I sent Titus to you to take up an offering.' Because now that you and I are RECONCILED in our RELATIONSHIP, I want you to EXCEL in everything it means to be a Christian:
 - YOUR FAITH...in God
 - YOUR SPEECH...in sharing the Gospel
 - YOUR KNOWLEDGE...of God
 - YOUR DILIGENCE...in serving God
 - YOUR LOVE...for God and for others
 - And THE GRACE OF GIVING to those in need.
- We can MINISTER to those at a long distance by GENEROUS and SACRIFICIAL giving. But, in addition to material gifts, what other ways can we MINISTER to those who are at a long distance from us?
 - Calls; emails; Facebook; Birthday Cards; and if Mark and Susan Robnett were here they'd say PRAYER.
 - But we MUST be intentional!!
- Being INTENTIONAL to minister to those far away starts with LOVE
- Let's move on to verses 8 and 9

2 Corinthians 8:8

8I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

- Paul says, "I'm not twisting your arm or COMMANDING you to do this"

- Look at verse 8: He says this is a TEST. A test of what?
 - “The sincerity of your love”
- If Paul had to MANIPULATE and GUILT this church into doing something to help those in need they weren’t doing it OUT OF LOVE
- Think back to last week’s lesson for a minute.
- Last week I said we need to MAKE THE FIRST MOVE to RECONCILE a broken relationship because of how God the Father modeled it to us.
- Remember the hymn, “Oh How I Love Jesus...Because _____.
(He first loved me.)
- Look at verse 9:

9For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

- What does Paul mean by that verse?
- Turn to Philippians chapter 2...beginning in verse 3

3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

- Back to chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians...in verse 9. Paul says YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED the GRACE of Jesus.
- Question: What motivated Jesus to GIVE UP His place in Heaven to come to earth to be poor and then die a horrible death? LOVE
- Love for WHO...YOU, and ME, and every human being!
- He was MOTIVATED by LOVE...
- That’s what should motivate us to MINISTER those far away

The teacher’s guide puts it this way:

Our giving must be an expression of Christian love. If we serve or give merely out of a sense of obligation, then we have missed the true blessing of service. Christian kindness expressed through service is vastly different from grudging obedience.

- In other words: If you want a BLESSING...BE A BLESSING!
- If you want to make God SMILE...do something for others out of LOVE not out of GUILT or obligation!

- And I'm happy to report that I see examples of this kind of LOVE all over this class and I'M BLESSED BY YOU!
- You are EAGER to MINISTER to others!
- Paul had a church at Corinth like that.

Jump ahead to Chapter 9 verse 1:

2 Corinthians 9

1There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. 2For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.

- Paul is saying about the Corinthians the same thing I can say about so many in this class: "I've been bragging about your 'service to the saints'!"
- And guess what? You are ROLE MODELS to the Macedonians!
- Your enthusiasm has STIRRED MOST OF THEM TO ACTION
- Have you ever noticed that ATTITUDES are CONTAGIOUS?
- Doesn't matter if it's a POSITIVE ATTITUDE or a NEGATIVE ATTITUDE...it will "get on you" and STICK if you are around it much.

It has been said:

A healthy attitude is contagious but don't wait to catch it from others. Be a carrier.

- The LOVE OF CHRIST is contagious
- If we are surrounded by people who SERVE BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST, it will begin to INFECT US TOO!
- And sometimes even though a person has TRUSTED CHRIST and has His LOVE in their heart...they may not know how to EXPRESS IT to others
- Paul said these Corinthians were EAGER to EXPRESS the LOVE OF CHRIST and it was INFLUENCING other churches...and he was URGING THEM TO CONTINUE in their EAGERNESS
- Jump down to verse 7:

7Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- God loves and cheerful giver
- If my GIVING or SERVING doesn't result in a CHEERFUL HEART...I'd better examine my MOTIVE. Is it LOVE or GUILT? Is it because I WANTED TO or because I felt I HAD TO?
- On the other hand, if we're EAGER to SERVE and GIVE look at what God will do in verse 8:

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

The New Living Translation puts it this way:
2 Corinthians 9:8 (New Living Translation)

8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

- If you are EAGER to GIVE and EAGER to SERVE, God will be EAGER to PROVIDE so you can have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.
- There is a CYCLE of giving and receiving here.

John MacArthur writes:

“God gives back lavishly to generous, cheerful givers, not so they may satisfy selfish, nonessential desires, but so they may meet the variety of need others have.”

- Example: The pump in our pond. As the water flows down the falls more water shows up to replenish the waterfall. It’s a cycle. The more that flows the more that will show up to REPLENISH the flow.
- And it’s not just money.
- If we’re EAGER to do MINISTRY and if we are doing the MINISTRY GOD has called us to do.
- This is an important point: Not the ministry someone guilted us into doing or the ministry we called ourselves to but EAGER to do the ministry GOD called us to do. God will provide for us the TIME; the ENERGY; and the STAMINA as well as the material resources we need.
- If He isn’t providing...we might be EAGERLY doing the wrong ministry.

Let’s jump down to verses 12-14 and we’ll wrap up.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

- Verse 12: When ministry is done right NEEDS ARE SUPPLIED...but there’s more...
- Look at the end of verse 12: When ministry is done right WHO GETS THE THANKS? God
- Look at the end of verse 13: When ministry is done right WHO GETS THE PRAISE? God

- When ministry is done right, not only will needs be met, but **HEARTS WILL BE BLESSED** and more importantly **GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED!**
- And **BELIEVERS** will utter the words of verse 15: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” The gift of His Son Jesus Christ on the Cross make possible, the gift of His **LOVE** shown through **SERVICE** and **GIVING** by His people!

So what’s the **TAKEAWAY?**

- People who are far away from us **NEED** our **GIFTS** and **SERVICE!**
- God will bless that **SACRIFICIAL GIVING** and **MULTIPLY IT** for His glory!
- That **SACRIFICIAL** giving and serving should be motivated by **LOVE** not obligation.
- If you want a **BLESSING...BE A BLESSING!**
- If you want to make God **SMILE...do something for others out of LOVE** not out of **GUILT** or obligation!
- The love of Christ is **CONTAGIOUS**, and if we are **EAGER** to **GIVE** and **SERVE** it will motivate others when they hear about it.
- The result? When ministry is done right, not only will needs be met, but **HEARTS WILL BE BLESSED** and more importantly **GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED!**
- Who can you and I reach out to this week that needs a touch from a long distance?