



## **One Critical Part of All Healthy Relationships Who's Your Best Friend?**

It is not easy giving up on a dream and launching into a new purpose in life. For me, it took being cut from my high school basketball team. And then my trigonometry teacher had to ask for me to be removed from her class due to my lack of effort. My first year of college I was forced to take a remedial math class because I hadn't studied hard enough in high school. Many never realize the value of being told "no", of rejection and roadblocks. It's so much easier to be told all the time that you are great, that you are wonderful, that you are perfect for the job. Sometimes what we need most is someone we respect or love criticizing our work, confronting our lack of effort, or pointing out our bad actions. When I was younger, there was a world famous pastor who shaped the way I preach and my approach to ministry. He was brilliant in many ways and fabulously successful. It turned out, that he often cheated on his wife and used his position as pastor to seduce several women in his church. When after more than two decades of this abhorrent behavior going unchecked it became public what he had been doing. This pastor lost his ministry and his influence in the Christian world. It seems absurd that no one in his huge church noticed the growing rift between his public persona and private morals. What if one of the many who had a hint of what was happening with this powerful pastor confronted him on his questionable behavior? Might it have made a huge difference not only in his life but the lives of the many women he corrupted and their families that were damaged or destroyed? Would his local church as well as the Church worldwide and the many seekers who discovered his life of faith was a fraud been spiritually and psychologically protected? Sometimes all it takes is one courageous and faithful person to change the course of human history by letting someone know a change needs to be made in his or her life.

In his closing comments, James made this profound statement in his letter. **My brothers. If a certain one in you might go astray from the truth and a certain one might turn him around, He must always know that the one who brings back a sinner from out of his way of delusion shall rescue his soul out of death and shall conceal a great number of sins.** (James 5: 19-20) We don't often see life this way. No one likes being corrected, let alone confronted. And who is interested in stirring up controversy or creating conflict? I recently saw where a woman taking public transit asked some teens to turn down their music and got nearly killed by them. It's not easy being the one who corrects or confronts. No one wants to be a "Karen" or worse the killjoy. There is an expression in corporate circles and even in church work that every organization needs a parent and that is true in relationships. If you didn't know you smelled badly, that you dominated conversations or that your clothes didn't match, wouldn't it be better for you to be told by someone who loves you and wants what is best for you? Your most important friends are the ones who are not afraid of hurting your feelings every once in a while to protect you from harming yourself or others.

The account of Jonah the prophet of God is one of the best known tales in the Bible. He was famously swallowed by a great fish and after three days spit out on shore. If that is all you know about the story, you have missed the most important parts. Jonah was in that predicament because he refused to do as God ordered and warn the people of Nineveh of God's impending judgement upon them. He wasn't afraid to go there. He just hated the Assyrians so much that he didn't want them to repent and be spared by God. Is it possible, that when we don't warn others, when we ignore what they are doing when we know it is harmful,

there is a hint of hatred in what we are doing? When you don't tell a co-worker that his drinking seems excessive, is it because you love him and want what is best for him that you keep your concern to yourself? That couple on the verge of divorce. Should you say anything or keep your thoughts about their marriage to yourself? Is a doctor right or wrong to tell her patient he has Aids? Should a lawyer tell his client she needs to admit she is guilty if she wants to avoid a long prison sentence? Many don't tell the truth because of what it might cost them, or they are afraid of how the other person will take it. Jesus insisted, **Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.** (John 8: 32 NIV) When the truth is really the truth and not just my opinion or something I read online, then it is always good and valuable.

Perhaps you remember the time when Joseph, the ancient son of Jacob, the founder of the nation of Israel was in prison and two prisoners each had a dream the same night. Both had worked for the king of Egypt. One, who was the former cupbearer for the king, had a dream where he held three clusters of grapes and squeezed the juice into Pharaoh's cup. The other, the former baker for the king had a dream where he had three baskets of bread stacked on his head and birds kept coming and snatching away the bread. Joseph knew that both dreams were from God. The cupbearer's dream indicated that Pharaoh would set him free and restore him to his former job. The baker's dream informed him that in three days the king would have him executed. Imagine the dread in Joseph, having to give the baker the bad news. It had to be ghastly. Yet, Joseph knew intuitively what Jesus declared. **Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.** The baker had three days to repent of his sins, to make things right with God and trust in God's mercy. We all die, and the baker was not immune to that fate. God gave him some time to square things away with Him and that was freeing. Joseph could have kept the news from the baker, threw up his hands and pretended he did not know what to make of the dream but that would have been a lie and it would have brought the baker more harm than good.

King David committed a terrible sin, a horrific crime in fact. Not only did he have sexual relations with another man's wife but he also when he found out she was pregnant, ordered his general to place the husband at the front lines where he certainly would be killed, and he was. It seemed no one but his general and the woman he got pregnant would ever know what evil he had done, but God did. The Lord told one of King David's closest friends and spiritual advisors, Nathan, what David had done. The account tells us nothing of the internal struggle Nathan must have had coping with the prospect of confronting his friend about such a terrible crime and sin. It simply says Nathan went. To prepare David for what he was about to face, Nathan told a story of a poor man who had a lamb he cared for like a member of his family. A rich man who lived in the area, had a traveler show up at his house and the rich man wanted to provide a meal for him. Rather than use one of his own sheep for the feast, he took the poor man's ewe lamb and slaughtered her for the meal. David's reaction to what he thought actually happened was probably exactly as Nathan expected. **David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."** (2 Samuel 12 :5-6 NIV) Imagine David's own shock when Nathan softly pointed out to David that he in fact was the cruel murderer for what he had done to Bathsheba's husband, Uriah.

You have a moral obligation, a responsibility given to you by God if you are born-again, to look after the spiritual condition of others. Not to be holier than thou, not to build yourself up by tearing others down, but rather to rescue people from the terrible result of sin. Like a lifeguard who is watching for swimmers in distress, like a fire fighter who jumps into the flames to rescue the perishing, like a nurse who warns her patients of the health risks they are taking, you share the words of God with those who risk ruining their lives. The Bible tells you your calling. **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.** (Hebrews 10: 24 NIV) Each day, before you get going very far, take the Shepherd's Pause. Ask the Lord how you can help someone live closer to Christ, how you can say something or do something this very day to encourage faith and hope and devotion to Jesus as Savior and Lord.