

The power of some

2 Cor 7

In Bryce Courtenay's book *The Power of One*. There's a story about a colony of antsand a dung beetle. The power of one's about apartheid in South Africa. And it follows one boy and his strength in the face of it all. The power of one. And this story about the ants and the dung beetle is told by one of the Zulu witchdoctors. It's a sort of a prophecy.

And there's this power struggle between the two. The ants one day push a ball of dung up the hill for the dung beetle in return for some information about where to find the dung. Which was food for them. But instead the clever dung beetle says. Oh it's too far for you to go back to find the food in a day. So how about you just take some of this food. Enough to keep you alive until tomorrow. And meet me in the same spot tomorrow. And the dung beetle each day. Instead of showing them where to find the food. Just gets them to push another ball of dung up the hill. In return for just enough food to keep them alive 'till the next day. And pretty soon that's the pattern. And the ants become the dung beetles slaves. And they forget how to find food for themselves. And the dung beetle becomes a tyrant and punishes any ants who step out of line.

Until one day. When one young ant starts asking questions. He says.

Why do we have to serve the beetle?

He says – doesn't the food of the forest belong to everyone?

He says. Why don't we stand up to the dung beetle? And the older ants say no no we mustn't. HE's too powerful. He'll punish us. But the young ant stirs up the other young ants. And he tells them not to show up for work.

So the next day when the dung beetle shows up. There's no ants. And he screams and he yells threats. But still no ants. So he starts pushing the ball himself. Which is hard work because he's not used to it anymore. But he pushes and he pushes. And he has a break. And he keeps going. And when he gets almost to the top. This young ant and his followers come out from hiding and they all start pushing on the other side of the dung ball.

And the dung beetle's tired, but he's strong. And the young ant yells. Give up now and we'll share it. But the beetle's too used to having it all his way. And he says NEVER. And finally the ants overpower the beetle, and he tumbles all the way back down the hill with his dung ball until it smashes into a rock and the beetle's buried deep in the dung.

And you get the picture. It's an illustration about the power of one. The difference one person can make.

But it's not just one person on their own. When you break it down. The victory is not just the victory of the one. It's the one. Plus another one. Plus one. Plus one. Plus a few more. Plus a lot more.

If no-one stands with the one. If no-one turns up alongside them. The one ends up crushed and defeated.

And it's really the victory of some. It's the victory of MORE THAN ONE.

And there's a great reminder here from Paul that as followers of Jesus, WE'RE MORE THAN ONE. We're more than a whole lot of little ONE's. Doing their own thing.

And though at times we might like to be, we're not independent of one another.

Though we might like to think we are.

Paul says we're not independent. He says we're DEPENDENT.

And as he writes from Macedonia where he's getting hammered from left and right. He's writing to the church in Corinth to remind them of THEIR ROLE in HIS MINISTRY. Or, even more broadly than that. Their very real, and very important role in what God's doing in the world.

Which might sound a bit surprising. Paul being dependent. I mean, if anyone you would think could be a one man band. If anyone could run a solo race you'd think it would be Paul. He seems so strong. And God's given him those amazing powers you see in the book of Acts. ...amazing miracles.

But Paul's call in this section. His imperative. Is not about moral behavior. It's about their attitude to him. It's about their relationship with him. And coming out of that relationship their work alongside of him....as fellow kingdom builders.

There in verse 2. He's asking them to do something. He says. Make room for us in your hearts. It's the same sort of thing we were talking about two weeks ago. About the heart. Make room he says.

And for me that brings up the thought of the relatives coming to visit. And they're staying with you. And you have to MAKE ROOM. You've set up your house comfortably for you. Everything just where you want it. But it can't stay that way when there's people coming.

Ash and Heidi have had parent visitors with them for a few months. So they've had to MAKE ROOM.

When my parents come to stay, we have to make room. The kids have to shift bedrooms. You have to make room in your routines. We have to make adjustments.

And Paul says here. MAKE ROOM in your hearts. For us.

Which is a bigger ask I THINK than making room in your house. Your house is where your stuff is.but your heart is where you keep the really important stuff. Your heart is the place where you hold the things that are most important isn't it.

I remember going to dreamworld about ten years ago and they were feeding the lions. And these great big powerful man eaters....they seem so tame. The handlers wrestle with them and play games.

But they said. Even though that's true. The handlers have been with them since they were cubs and they can just about do anything. They said. They never ever get between a lion and it's food. They wait 'till they're in their cages at night. And they shut the door. And they slide the meat in. And they stand well back. It's very clear what's important to a lion.

What's important to you?

You can actually figure it out. It's not that different from the lions. What really makes you angry? Figure that out you'll figure out what's important to you.

Paul says. MAKE ROOM FOR US...in your hearts. It's a pretty big claim when you think about it.

Now in chapter 8 Pauls going to take that a bit further. HE's going to say make room in your WALLETS. As he talks about the offering for the churches in Jerusalem. And if you were cynical you'd say he's just warming them up for that.

But Paul makes a bold claim on them.....and he says. Shift some furniture around. And make room.

Now I want you to notice the plurals here. In these verses.

Actually go back to verse one.

Since WE have these promises, dear friends, let US purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Make room for US in your hearts(plural). We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have deceived no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you(plural) have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you(plural). I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged;

Now, in our individualistic culture that might be a bit hard for us to grasp that anything matters except individuals.

But christianity always about being a part of something bigger. God's people Israel were called to be a nation belonging to God. To be one of God's children was to be one of his people. And it's the same now. When you put your trust in Jesus. When you come into his kingdom. You come into his family. Like when you get married. It's part of the deal. You're part of a new family. And that's it ...like it or not.

And people want to say they can be Christian without going to church, without being in a church family.

It's like saying I can be married and live by myself. There's a word for that. It's called estrangement.

And I can understand why people find it difficult. Sometimes being in families is hard. But in God's economy. HE's given us each other.

For better for worse you say when you get married...And for better for worse. You and I are a family. For better, for worse. In God's economy – WE'RE the ones with

the job of living as his people before the world. And we're the ones who take his words and live them out. And we're the ones together who bring his words to the world. And we're DEPENDENT ON ONE ANOTHER.

Paul says that family is important. And the rest of the chapter is Paul putting flesh on the bones of that.

He says make room for us in your hearts. Why?

Reason number one is because of our commitment to you.

If you follow from verse 2 he says. Think about it. Have we wronged anyone? No. Have we corrupted anyone? Because if we have you'd be right to shut the door on us. But you tell me he says. Have we exploited anyone? In other words. Can you point to any time we've used someone for our own personal gain? He says search back in your minds and see. And you'll find there's none of that. And here's why. It's because we're committed to you.

Because verse 3 he says I don't say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.

It's the language of commitment isn't it. Boots and all Paul says. We'll suffer what you suffer. We're in the trenches with you and if we live we live and if we die we die. Whatever it is. We're with you on it.

That's our commitment to you Paul says. There's room in our hearts for you.

The other day Zoe shouted out to me from the toilet. She said dad I need your

help. She's old enough to go by herself. But she can't quite clean up after herself yet. So she calls out and I go in.....and as I go in she turns around..... and faces the toilet. She folds her arms..... And she says.

Daddy. She says...YOU....are a BOTTOM WIPER.

A BOTTOM WIPER..... I've got a

degree!!! I've got letters after my name....I've got letters

BEFORE my name I'm a REV!!..... But she doesn't see that....all she sees is daddy.

Nose blower, food getter, mess cleaner, car driver, and bottom wiper.

What do you say to that?

There I am. Standing there. With the toilet paper in my hand. And the job in front of me. I can't say anything. She's right.

She's properly understood my relationship to her. And she's properly understood my commitment to her.

That's what parents DO. That's their level of commitment.

And Paul says to the church we'd live or die with you. That's our commitment to you. That's YOUR PLACE in OUR HEARTS. So make room for us in yours.

He goes on verse 4. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged;

in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.

And he's moving on to reason number two. Reason number one. Our commitment to you. But reason number two. You need to make room for us...Your very real, and meaningful help to us.

In all our troubles our joy knows no bounds.

It's interesting the place of honour Paul gives to the Corinthians here.

If you remember from chapter one. Paul talks about the God of all comfort. The God who comforts us in our troubles. And now he says.

Our joy. Our comfort in our troubles. Comes from you.

What he 's saying is. God's the God of comfort. HE brings comfort in troubles. But it's not necessarily some sort of unnatural or supernatural peace that just comes from nowhere. Again in God's economy. To a large degree it comes through people. You're God's instrument he's saying to this church. His instrument of comfort to me. Did you know that?

And if you're a Corinthian you might screw up your nose and say what do you mean? So here goes on to give an example from verse 5...

Paul talks about how difficult it'd had been in Macedonia.

For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within.

To Paul as was so often the case. It seemed like the walls were closing in. And he's getting abuse from all sides. And on top of that. Titus didn't show up at the

pre-arranged meeting point. Titus had taken a letter from Paul to Corinth. Paul's going to mention it in a minute. Paul couldn't send email. Everything had to go sea-mail. And this letter's a painful letter.

And he's supposed to meet up with Titus at Troas. But Titus doesn't show. And he has to move on to Macedonia.

Conflicts on the outside he says. Verse 5 ..conflicts on the outside, Fears within. What's happened to Titus? How did the Corinthians respond to my letter? The silence is killing me...But God, who comforts the downhearted comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. HE told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

"Do you get it?" Paul says. I was at the breaking point. And God used you. And I want you to see that. God comforted us by Titus and his news of you.

In pressie churches we sometimes have this attitude that the minister who is paid..is the one who does the ministry. That's what he's paid for. But as far as Paul's concerned. There's no such thing as solo Christianity. And there's no such thing as solo ministry. It's one. Plus one. Plus one. Plus a whole lot more. We're co-dependent.

Which I guess is why divisions are so terrible in the church.

We ought to be productive. And it's great when things are working well. Paul says when I heard about you guys that produced GREAT JOY. Just when I felt like driving my chariot off a cliff.

Now as I said Paul's just had to write a tough letter to this church. A rebuking letter. And now he's able to explain the letter in this context of relationship. In this context of commitment.

And he's able to say yea it was tough. But it was TOUGH LOVE.

This is sort of like your dad when he used to say this is going to hurt me more than it'll hurt you. Verse 8

Paul says even if I caused you sorrow in my letter I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while-

He says but I'm happy. Because of what it PRODUCED.

Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

It's only your best friends that will tell you hard things. And sometimes they won't even do that for you.

Paul's commitment. Means he's willing to say the hard things.

For their good.

And we're called to do more than smile at each other once a week and pretend everything's fine.

I know in our bible study groups this year some people have been able to share some deep struggles with each other. You can't do that with shallow relationships. And in the context of having the bible open we've been able to challenge each other in our actions and our attitudes.

And Paul says open wide your hearts. And let each other in. And sharpen each other up.

^{NIV} **Proverbs 27:17** As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

And Paul says as we open up. As we sharpen each other up. As we exercise our CO-DEPENDENCE...it's a great thing.

As we turn each other away from sin it brings salvation. Instead of worldly kind of sorrow that doesn't produce anything. Worse than that produces death.

Verse 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you earnestness and eagerness and indignation and alarm longing, concern.

And Paul says I wrote so you could see how devoted you really are to us.

And we're encouraged by that response.

Not only us, but so was Titus. His spirit was refreshed Paul says. You were exactly as we said you'd be. You received him. You listened and obeyed. I'm glad Paul says.

It's a bit like a coke ad. We're all in this together. We're all in this together Paul says. You. Me. Titus. All of us. So make room.

It's a call to committed relationships in the church isn't it.

It's a call to understand that God works through people. To comfort and encourage us. To challenge us. To bring the message of Jesus to people.

It's a call to a tough gritty kind of commitment isn't it.

It's an uncomfortable kind of ask in lots of ways.

But it's how it works. Or doesn't work as the case may be.

Is there room in your heart. The place where your treasures are. Is there room for God's people? Because if there is that's going to work itself out in lots of ways isn't it. Serving each other. Genuine care. A commitment to godliness. Maybe even Financial support. If there is. God's able to use that in all sorts of ways. To produce good things. So make room.

