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What are some of the ways you have wanted to behave but been held back by fear?

What are ways someone you admire have behaved that inspire you?

Who might you inspire by your boldness in generosity and kindness, and what might be the act that will captivate their heart?

**2 Corinthians 8:24** – Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

**I) Whether Public or Private...**

There is a way we are supposed to behave in various situations. Formal, casual, stiff, loose, quiet, or loud. Polite, rude, proper, inappropriate, controlled, uninhibited. One list requires us to respect the situation while remaining ourselves. The other suggests that who we are changes based on the people around us. We all assume the uninhibited us is our real self. Often, that version is one crossing boundaries to discover the feeling of wickedness. Once we know who we are and it is the person we want to be, we are free to be that person whether in public or private. The closer we become to Jesus, the greater the positive impact we make when being ourselves in every situation in front of those we can impact.

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♦**In character**: We will not please everyone. God desires that we seek approval from Him and not our peers. Once we embrace that mindset, it is tempting to shrink from expressing ourselves in front of others, not needing their approval but not wanting their ire. These two are at odds with each other. God approves of us when we are proud to represent Him to others. He wants us in character all the time. “Therefore openly (2 Corinthians 8:24),” be yourself. Take pride in who He has made you to be whether those around you like it or not.

♦**The people who matter**: Some will. Some are eager to know Jesus is real. We have said He is, that He has changed us, that we are now like Him. They want more. They want to see Him, hear Him, be touched by Him. Maybe they don’t know Him but want to. Maybe they know Him and need Him to show up as He promised. Either way, these are the people who matter. They are the ones waiting for us to be like Jesus in His behalf. Be yourself “before the churches (v24).” You will have God’s approval and fulfill Jesus’ promise to those who love Him.

## II) Express Yourself...

The people who matter need more than talk. They’ve heard all sorts of advice how to live. Most of it is nonsense. Fix one thing and break another. The advice is a classic shell game that preys on our desires for quick and easy solutions to hard problems. We know the truth. Living in the image of God is a way of trading our old problems for new ones along with the power to solve them. We no longer concern ourselves with our circumstances. Rather, take responsibility for how you express yourself in those circumstances.

♦**Walk the walk**: We talk about love, generosity, sharing each other’s burdens. We talk the talk; will we walk the walk? Pray with a person the moment you are asked. Listen to another’s story when they need to unburden. Give someone a ride. Buy someone groceries. Those who matter need us to “show them the proof (v24),” that we have been changed. The world is full of empty promises, words without action. Jesus is a man of action. We must be, too.

♦**Make a difference**: Words of love are easy. Well, maybe not easy, but easier than actions. True love nearly always requires sacrificing our preferences. Otherwise, it’s just life as usual. Worldly love is transactional, giving something to get another in return. It involves keeping score. Biblical love impacts the other in ways that bring out their best. When we “show them the proof of your love (v24),” we do something without expectations. Not even a thank you. We do it because we are generous. We can’t not give what we have to those who need it.

## III) As You Are...

Think about the people you admire. What is it about them that draws your admiration? Talent, personality, fame, fortune? Or is it integrity, honesty, generosity, kindness? To those who matter it will be the latter. Anyone chasing worldly values will not be attracted to Jesus. Being like Him will probably cost us any chance at fame, reduce our fortune, and diminish the glory of our talents. But it will free you to be as you are and give life to those slowly dying from the world’s toxicity.

♦**Weigh the heart**: Those who matter know the illusion of the world’s values, which cost more than their worth. These are not swayed by words and one-time deeds. They weigh the heart by measuring the consistency of behavior over time. When another measures up, “our reason (v24),” for approving of each other are the acts of love that prove our trust in Jesus’ faithfulness. We demonstrate we really do believe He will provide all we need when we give what we have to those who need it. Our obedience conveys the privilege of distributing God’s goodness.

♦**Brag about Christlikeness**: The more like Jesus we become, the more praiseworthy we are to those who know. The paradox is Jesus is a humble servant. We do not feel worthy, we do not praise ourselves. The Christians around us brag about Christlikeness and send people to us in faith we will obey. They are “boasting about you (v24),” because you radiate the glory of Jesus. Because we will meet every need we can with joy in faith that Jesus will reward us all the more. Because we have become people who can’t not share generously all that Jesus has given us.