"Preserving Relationships" | July 14, 2012 | Order Info

**Text:** Acts 17:5-9, 10-15, 16-34; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10.

It was a simple letter that didn’t ask for much. But it connected a grieving parent to 75,000 new friends. And it fostered relationships built on love, sympathy, support, and encouragement.

When Diane Roberts gave birth to her baby boy last September, she and her husband soon received the devastating news that Ryan had Down syndrome and a congenital heart defect. After surgery in June, doctors told them there was nothing else they could do for their son’s heart. He had only weeks to live. Their grief was unimaginable. One way they coped was to create a “bucket list” for baby Ryan. A list of things any healthy boy might grow up enjoying, and as a family experience them with Ryan.

As the days went by, events were crossed off the list. When friends asked Diane and Erik what they could do to help, Diane answered: “Just go create a memory with your kids. Just go put a banana split down in front of your kids for dinner and watch their faces light up. No chicken, rice and broccoli tonight, just ice cream. They’re going to remember that forever. Watch them smile.”

So Diane’s good friend, Melissa, kicked off the “Ryan’s Banana Split Party.” Via the social media, Facebook, she sent a letter to 200 friends stating Diane’s request, and ended with: So some night for dinner, have just a banana split but take a picture and post it to Facebook event page so they can see all the people that are fulfilling their wish!!!

The letter went viral, and 75,000 Facebook users committed to having a banana split party! Families from around the world have connected with Ryan’s family through posting photos of their parties, and leaving encouraging notes for his parents. Sadly, Ryan died on Sunday. But a simple letter that expressed love and touched the hearts of the readers, built relationships around the world.

As we studied in this week’s lesson, Paul was inspired to write two personal letters that we now know as the Thessalonians. They were meant to encourage and strengthen a young church in a very personal way. In these letters, Paul reveals his heart. When we read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10, we see a very personal side of Paul. We can hear his love in these words: “For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain” (3:5).

By revealing his heart, Paul teaches us two important lessons. First, when we’re evangelizing people, our goal shouldn’t be numbers or personal recognition. We should evangelize out of love. Then like Paul, their salvation will be our joy. The second is that Paul didn’t evangelize and then move on. He stayed in close contact through his letters. Conversion isn’t enough. We must continue to nurture new believers. Such demonstrated love is what will preserve our relationship with them.

~ nc

Additional resource: You Tube

1. Huffington Post
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