

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** I am in Jr. High. My parents don't like one of my friends. They say she is a bad influence on me. I like her. Doesn't the Bible say that we should be friends with everyone?

**ANSWER:** Actually, the Bible commands us to **love everyone**; God calls us to treat everyone the way he treats us. The Bible says that we should love even our enemies and pray for them (MT 5:44). It says that we should do good and bless our enemies (LK 6: 28,29). It says we should feed our enemies if they are hungry and give them something to drink if they are thirsty (RM 12:20). We are to surprise our enemies by handling them with love and forgiveness and not return evil for evil (LK 6:29). Finally, we are to overcome evil with good (RM 12:21).

The question becomes: **“What is the best way to love each individual person God brings into our life?”** You need to understand that the Bible usually talks about love in terms of ACTIONS, not so much feelings. (Although, when we do acts of love in obedience to God, the feelings of love often grow out of those actions. )

Some people require different loving actions than others. Sometimes, our love for a person must be soft (gentle, empathic, nurturing and compassionate); sometimes our love for a person must be firm (responsible, accountable, and strong).

HOW we specifically love a person depends on many things: motive, attitude, situation, maturity, and what kind of relationship with God he/she might have. Look at the following examples and ask yourself (1) how Jesus loved each individual, and (2) why he chose to love him/her in that specific way:

When Jesus encounters the woman caught in adultery (JN 8:4-11) and the self-righteous Pharisees who condemn her, he sees a repentant and humble attitude on the part of the woman. He knows she is spiritually immature. He can see that she is not close to God, and he knows she is being used by the Pharisees to trap him. Considering all this, Jesus chooses to surprise her with the wonder of forgiveness and grace. He does not condemn her; he accepts her and challenges her to begin a new life. In this situation, the best way for Jesus to love her is to offer her the “surprise” of forgiveness and compassion. Here, Jesus chooses the “soft” side of love.

When Jesus is invited to dinner with the Pharisees (LK 11:37-54), he sees men who claim to know God. He sees men who should be spiritual leaders, but who are actually keeping people from entering the kingdom of God. He knows they are hypocritical and out to destroy him. He understands that they are not repentant. Considering all this, Jesus chooses to expose their sin, warn them of punishment, and challenge them to repent and turn from their hypocritical and malicious ways. In this situation, the best way for Jesus to love them is to hold them accountable. Here, Jesus chooses the “firm” side of love.

**How do you love a person who is a “bad influence” on you?** Ask yourself: “Is this person drawing me to Christ, or is she slowly pulling me away? Am I more apt to do what is right when I am with her, or what is wrong? Am I able to overcome any evil in this relationship with good, or is the temptation to do evil too strong for me to resist?”

Get the idea? You are not loving a person by letting her pull you away from Christ and what is right. You are not loving her by letting her make you more like she is. Don't flirt with spiritual disaster.

Give your parents some credit. They love you and want the best for you. Their experience in life has taught them to be wary, careful and wise about evil. **IF you are spiritually strong enough to be a consistent, godly influence on her, then, with your parents' blessing and guidance, involve yourself deeply in her life in order to draw her to Christ.**

Any relationship that draws you away from God in any way possesses an element of evil (This is spiritual war!). **IF you are not strong enough to overcome evil with good, then you must love that person from a distance by establishing clear boundaries that protect your spiritual well being.** You do this by (1) consistently praying for her (2) only interacting with her in specific, short-term situations when you can do something that is clearly good (3) modeling godly behavior without compromise (4) acting polite and friendly whenever you see her (5) clearly knowing and stating your boundaries and convictions when you have the opportunity, and (6) seeking the guidance and support of your parents in establishing boundaries and formulating godly convictions.

**You do not love someone who is a “bad influence” on you in the same ways that you love a friend who shares your values and faith.** You might not see the situation clearly because you are in the middle of it. If your parents see that this friend is having a bad influence on you, I bet they are right. Listen to them; God will reward your obedience. The goal of our love (in friendships, marriages, parenting, and all relationships) is always to draw others to Christ.

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