



## Long Distance Friendship

Have you ever had a long distance friendship? Not necessarily a relationship, but maybe a friend who moved to a different country or a cousin who lived on the other side of the world?

A little while ago, I lived in Dublin for a year with a group of people from all over the globe. I was sharing a room with guys from Canada, Texas and Holland, and working alongside people from Finland, South Africa, Australia and Germany. We all had different backgrounds and different lives, but our year living and praying together brought us closer in our relationships with each other.

At the end of our time in Ireland, we said farewell, and each of us moved on to something new. Our experiences began to differ, with everybody choosing to live out their lives in a way that was unique to them. Sometimes this felt difficult, especially when you recalled a joke or shared situation that nobody else in your new place would understand. And sometimes it was really exciting, when we met back up together again, or found out that somebody was getting married or whatever.

Either way, the root of friendship continued despite the fact that



we all now live very different lives from one another, and don't necessarily communicate all that frequently any more!

Paul had an experience of long distance friendship as he travelled around the new church communities. Sometimes Paul would stay with a group for a year or more at a time, but he would always then move on to another place to share his teaching and leadership. The letters from Paul that we have in the New Testament show how he communicated with his friends, even though his life had taken a new and unexpected turn.

I was recently struck by a passage from one of Paul's letters to his friends in Thessalonica. He talks about hearing back from a mutual friend (Timothy) about how they're getting on, and how their

news is a real encouragement to him stuck on the other side of Greece! But the key lines that Paul writes are:

*'May God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ bring us to you very soon. And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows.'*  
(1 Thessalonians 3:11-12)

Paul clearly wants to be back with his friends, but knows that for now, he's where God wants him to be. More than that though - he encourages his friends to learn from the love and friendship that Paul has for them, and to put it into practice with all those around them.

Put simply, they're not meant to sit waiting for Paul to come and visit them, but to build new relationships built on the foundations that Paul started.

And it's the same for us wherever we are, and wherever our friends are around the world. God has given us experiences, and put us where we are for a reason. Keep up relationships, and remember the things that connect you with your long distance friends. Bring happiness to them by growing in every possible way, building on your shared experience.