



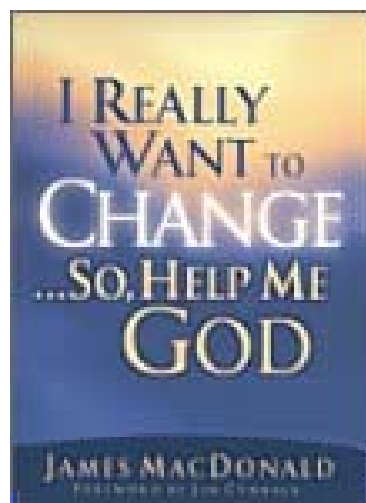
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"CHEERS" AND "FRIENDS" ...
["BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS"]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

FEBRUARY 25, 2007

FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



"CHEERS" AND "FRIENDS" ... ["BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS"]

Who was your best friend when you were growing up? What made that friend so special? Today we're talking about friends—not just ordinary friends, but biblical friends. That's not the same as a man I heard about recently who never seemed to be able to make or keep friends, so he went to see a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist was interviewing him, but failed to hear something the man said and asked: "Would you mind repeating that please?" "I said," replied the man, "for some reason nobody ever seems to like me. Why don't you pay attention to what I am saying to you, fathead?"

You don't need to be a psychiatrist to understand why this man never made friends. You don't call people names or even think of calling them a derogatory name if you want to have friends or keep friends. **Proverbs 17:17** says it this way: "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*" A true friend loves at all times, not just when the person is doing well in life. A true friend loves even when the chips are down or the person fails in some form or another. A popular saying that Beverly and I actually got to experience the hard way a few years ago says, "If you really want to know who your friends are, just make a mistake!"

A few years ago I saw a sign at the front desk of a country inn that read: "Please introduce yourself to your fellow guests since we are one big, happy family." But just under that statement was another one in smaller letters that read: "Management is not responsible for valuables left in your room!"

Today, we conclude our 9-week bible study from James MacDonald's book, *I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE...SO, HELP ME GOD*, and look at the toughest part of change. I think most of us, as Christians, are not living at the peak of our spiritual experience. Although we know how to fire it up, we just don't know how to keep it going. That's the key—just like my diet. I start out great

but after a few weeks, *w-e-l-l*, I just can't keep it going. So today, we wrap up this study and are going to learn that the Christian life is not a solo thing. It requires teamwork—it requires good friendships—Biblical friendships. And the key word here is biblical, because not all friendships are biblical. In fact many are very unbiblical and not only do not help us, but actually impede our progress in changing into the man or woman that God wants us to be.

I want you to listen to the theme songs from two of the most popular TV shows over the last 20 years or so. To make sure you catch the words, I'm handing out the words to both theme songs so you can follow along. See if you can pick up on the common thread running through these songs. **(HANDOUT LYRICS TO "CHEERS" AND "FRIENDS" THEME SONGS. PLAY SONGS)**

What did you pick up as the common thread running through them? [SENSE OF BELONGING. SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS. FRIENDSHIP. THEY WERE A GROUP, A COMMUNITY.] Can you identify? Yet we live in a society today that is greatly isolationistic. We have lost our connection to one another. We drive to work alone in our car, work all day in our office or cubby, get cash at the ATM, get lunch at the drive through, and spend the night watching TV. No wonder so many feel alone. No wonder we don't have a very high level of trust for one another. Maybe that's why we can identify with the words from the "Cheers" theme song. Look at the words of the chorus again: "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came; You want to be where you can see, Our troubles are all the same; You want to be where everybody knows your name!"

As we look at the HOW TO KEEP IT GOING part, I want us to recall our foundational memory verse in this study from **Romans 12:2**. Remember what it says? ***2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*** As pointed out in this final week's study, people who change—who develop a life

pattern of change, becoming more and more mature followers of Christ—are surrounded by Biblical friendships.

Dr. MacDonald sums up our study this week in his “*Say It In A Sentence*” on page 157: “If you want to experience lasting change, you must understand and access the power of biblical friendships.” That’s how we keep the fire going when we are working on changes in our lives. If you don’t get anything else out of this week’s study, you need to know that there are two keys to biblical friendships that help us in our daily journey called life: ⁽¹⁾ **A biblical friend holds you up when you stumble;** and ⁽²⁾ **A biblical friend holds you down when you stray.** In this week’s weekly newsletter I mentioned the famous quote from John Donne’s *Meditation XVII* that we need to keep beating into our heads: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind...”

Let’s look at the first key: a biblical friend holds you up when you stumble. Turn with me to **1 SAMUEL 18:1-12**. Probably the most beautiful picture of a biblical friendship is that of David and Jonathan. You remember the story about David, a shepherd boy, coming to find his brothers and ending up killing the 9’9” Philistine giant named Goliath because God was with him. Our scripture begins right after King Saul has inquired about David’s identity and Saul learns who he is. Listen as I read, starting in verse 1: ¹*After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.* ²*From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house.* ³*And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.* ⁴*Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.* ⁵*Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.*

⁶When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. ⁷ As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." ⁸Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" ⁹And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

¹⁰The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. ¹²Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul.

As far as Saul was concerned, David was his enemy. It was a one-sided, irrational hatred, as is often the case. It's always disorienting to be attacked when we're doing something good—doing our best and then suddenly we're violently opposed. We expect to get called on the carpet for doing wrong; we don't expect it for doing right. David was caught in circumstances beyond his control. Interwoven throughout Saul's murderous plotting is the extraordinary friendship between David and Jonathan. Saul's son, Jonathan, was David's closest friend. In chapter **20:17** we're told that David loved Jonathan as he loved himself. Jonathan attempted to bring about reconciliation between his father and his friend. He appointed himself as mediator, representing David before Saul. He nearly lost his own life in the process. Saul was so angry at Jonathan for defending David that he hurled his spear at his son. In the middle of the king's madness, these two friends sought to understand Saul through conversation and prayer. But it wasn't easy.

So, what how do we see Jonathan holding up his friend David? Look back at 1 Samuel 18.

Friends are one in spirit - 18:1 - *Jonathan became one in spirit with David. Don't seek to make a friend who you don't like. That may seem too simple; but some people think, I'll find someone successful or important and I'll try to be their friend. God has made us all differently. We ought to all get along, but there are some people we would rather not get along with for very long! Choose your friends based on how you "connect." Don't get me wrong - we should be friendly to all, but let God build the "connection" in our spirit. In seeking friendships, ask who are you drawn to as a person?

Friends love one another as themselves - 18:1 - *and he loved him as himself. See how good a friend you are by what you think of your friend. If you are going out to eat with your friend, do you take them to a steakhouse or McDonalds? If you are buying some cologne for your friend, is it Ralph Lauren/Polo or Old Spice? Do you think of them above yourself?

Friends spend time together - 18:2 - *From that day Saul kept David with him. Jonathan spent much time with David. In coming chapters we see them meeting together, hunting together, and spending much time together. If you have a friend, you will want to spend time with them.

Friends are committed to each other - 18:3 - *And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Friends will stick by you. They are there when the going gets tough. They are not "fair weather" friends. Some of you here can tell of friends who stood by you at difficult times in your life.

***Friends take steps to honor the friendship - 18:4 -**What have you given to honor a friend? When I went to work for one of my good friends 3-4 years ago, he had an extra SUV and thought I should have it. He gave me the truck I'm driving to work

everyday. He was a good friend, and he wanted to do something to honor his friendship.

***Friends look out for one another - 19:1-2** ¹*Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David* ²*and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there.* How much do you look out for the interests of your friend? Do you care the problems they are facing? Are you willing to speak up when you see a problem?

Prov. 27:6 - *Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.*

***Friends rejoice when their friends succeed - 19:4-5** ⁴*Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.* ⁵*He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"*

Jonathan wasn't afraid to speak up for his friend. He rejoiced in the victory God had given David. Even though he knew David would one day be king, the role due Jonathan by birth, he befriended David. If your friend gets the promotion or new car, but you don't, do you still rejoice?

***Friends help friends resolve their problems - 19:7** *So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.* Jonathan brought resolution to the conflict of his father and David.

***Friends encourage one another - 20:1-2** - If you are a good friend, you will seek to bring encouragement when your friends are down

***Friends are not afraid to express their friendship - 20:41 -**
We saw several friends at the grocery store yesterday. We talked for a few minutes and before we left, we gave them both a hug. We live in a society where we are afraid to show friendship. The Christians were told to greet one another with a holy kiss.

***Friends encourage one another in the Lord - 23: 16-18**
The true test of a friend is how they affect your walk with Christ.
¹⁶And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. ¹⁷"Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." ¹⁸The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

Now, the second key part of biblical friendships is he or she will also hold you down when you stray. How many of you have this kind of friend that will hold you accountable and make sure your walk is proper and where it needs to be. I have a great friend like this that will tell me when I'm messing up. He just doesn't go through the normal pattern of confirming and agreeing with everything I say or do.

I hope you got a chance to read the verse from **1 Samuel 11 and 12** this week in your Bible study about David darkest, his lust for Bathsheba, his adultery, his premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah, and his cover up—for more than one year. When you read the story you can't help but wonder where were David's friends? How tragic he didn't have any biblical friends at that point to see his decline and stop him before he crashed and burned. Instead, the Lord sent a good friend to confront David, remember Nathan? Turn to **1 Samuel 12:1-15** and refresh just how it was done.

¹The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,

³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." ⁷**Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"** This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.' " ¹³Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." ¹⁵After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.

WOW! Nathan had something to say and he did. Think about what Nathan risked by confronting David, the king. Why is it important to have a friend who will tell you the truth? Why is truth and accountability often neglected in friendships?

Why does it often take one friend to be a Jonathan to hold you up, and another friend to be a Nathan to hold you down? What friend is more valuable?

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*

Proverbs 18:24 (NIV) *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Proverbs 27:9 (NIV) *Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.*

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (NIV) *If one falls down, friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*

One of the ancient kings of Persia loved to mingle with his people in disguise. Once, dressed as a poor man, he descended the long flight of stairs, dark and damp to the tiny cellar where the fireman, seated on ashes, was tending the furnace.. The king sat down beside him and began to talk. At meal time the fireman produced some coarse black bread and a jug of water and they ate and drank. The king went away but returned again and again for his heart was filled with sympathy for the lonely man. They became very good friends as time passed. At last the king thought, "I'll tell him who I am, and see what gift he will ask." So he did, but the fireman didn't ask for a thing. The king was astonished and said, "Don't you realize that I can give you anything—a city, a throne?" The man gently replied, "I understand your Majesty. You have already given the greatest gift a man could receive. You left your palace to sit with me here in this dark and lonely place. You could give nothing more precious. You have given yourself and that is far more than I could ever deserve."

If you follow the process of change and access the power to change that we've talked about over the last 9 weeks, you will receive the abundant life that Jesus promised in **JOHN 10:10** when He said: *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*

Pray and think about someone you want to have as a biblical friend, someone who can hold you up and also may hold you down. Remember, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

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