

DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY

STUDY TWENTY

Friends in Need

2 Samuel 15; 17:27–29; 19:1–8

We have been taught the wrong thing regarding independence in the family of God. I was taught that if you are mature, you don't need anybody else. Just barrel on through life. Maybe you've been taught that it's a sign of weakness and immaturity to have a friend or to need a friend. That is not true.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE needs a friend. Friends provide companionship in times of loneliness, comfort in times of pain, celebration in times of rejoicing, protection in times of need. The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge perfectly depicted the image of a friend: “Friendship is a sheltering tree.”¹

Few understood the value of the shelter offered by dear friends better than David. Samuel walked with him as he gained national prominence. Jonathan ran with him when the bloodthirsty King Saul wanted nothing more than to kill him. Nathan wept with him as he repented for his sin in the darkest season of his life.

David's need for close companions persisted until the very end of his life. In one particularly stormy season, his own son Absalom staged a coup against him and attempted to steal the crown of Israel. During this time, friends surrounded David like a dense grove of trees, providing him shelter from his son's assault.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will introduce those friends who stood strong as sheltering trees for David during this difficult time. These friendships teach what to look for in godly companions and how to act as a good friend for those in need.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sadly, Absalom's insatiable desire for the throne created discord between himself and his father. Yet David desired harmony in his relationship with his son. Pray David's words from *Psalm 133* as you prepare to search the Scriptures today.

*How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!
For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron's head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.
Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon
that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The longer David held the king's scepter over Israel, the more his life spiraled out of his control. Personally, he wrestled with the guilt of his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. Domestically, he felt the whirlwind of consequences created by his own sinful choices ravage his own family. Politically, his kingdom started to crumble before his very eyes.

These struggles all seemed to converge in *2 Samuel 15:1–12* when David's son Absalom decided to try to supplant his father as king. He slowly won the people of Israel to his side until he had formed a full-fledged rebellion against David. So, in *15:13–15*, David fled from his own home, away from his hostile son.

Though this may have seemed like the loneliest season of David's life yet, God surrounded the estranged king with many friends who sheltered him from Absalom's rebellion.



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Observation: David's Needs

While David fled from the rebellion staged by his own son, close friends came to his aid several times. Read the following five passages, and as you read, focus on what each passage says, paying special attention to what each friend did to shelter David.²

Ittai—2 Samuel 15:16–23

David's closest friends and confidantes joined him in his escape because they, too, feared Absalom. Also, some unexpected hangers-on joined the caravan: six-hundred Philistines, Israel's archenemies! When David saw this, what did he tell their leader Ittai in [2 Samuel 15:19–20](#)? How did Ittai respond in [15:21](#)?

Zadok and Abiathar—2 Samuel 15:24–31

The priests Zadok and Abiathar also joined David on his exodus from Jerusalem, and they brought with them the ark of the covenant ([2 Samuel 15:24](#)). The ark represented God's presence and favor. According to [15:25–26](#), what did David ask these priests to do with the ark? Why might they have been surprised by this request? According to [15:29](#), did they do it?



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Hushai—2 Samuel 15:32–37

According to *2 Samuel 15:34–36*, what request did David make of Hushai? What was he to tell Absalom he intended to do in Jerusalem (*15:34*)? What would be his *actual* purpose (*15:35–36*)? According to *15:37*, did he honor David's request?

Shobi, Makir, Barzillai—2 Samuel 17:27–29

How did the three men David met at Mahanaim in *2 Samuel 17:28–29* help him after he escaped from Absalom through the wilderness? Notice how their help was entirely unprompted!

Joab—2 Samuel 19:1–8

After a long season of running, David's conflict with Absalom finally concluded. While the two armies clashed, Absalom attempted to escape, but he accidentally got caught in a tree (*2 Samuel 18:9–10*). When David's trusted commander, Joab, heard the news of Absalom's predicament, he killed Absalom despite David's request to treat Absalom gently (*18:5, 14–15*).



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Even though David the king had won the victory over Absalom's rebellion, David the father had lost a son, and the loss eclipsed the victory. According to 2 Samuel 19:5–7, what did Joab say to reassure David despite his grief?

When everything else fails and everybody else has turned away, there will be precious few who will say, "I'm with you. I'm there. Count on me. I won't kick you when you're down. I understand." David had such friends. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Friends Who Stand Near

Interpretation is the process of determining what a text *means* based on what it *says*. Now that you've closely observed David's interactions with his friends during Absalom's pursuit, you can now consider what timeless truths these passages teach about friendship.

What unique dangers did David's friends face by helping him amid Absalom's rebellion? Why might they have chosen to help him anyway? What does their loyalty teach about their faith in God?



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In the space below, write two or three timeless truths you learned about godly friendship from David's interactions with his friends. Use the following phrase to develop your principles: *Christians can demonstrate godly friendship by . . .*

I love passages like these because they put the glory in the Lord's hands—where it belongs—as He works through no-names. Those are the heroes who helped David pull it off. Is that your ministry? I praise God that you're in the trenches encouraging and ministering and supporting and giving. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Wisdom for Healthy Friendships

David's wise son Solomon wrote many proverbs about the importance of friendship. He likely learned many of these lessons by watching his father! Read the following proverbs, and summarize what each says about friendship. Then, note how David's friends reflected the qualities celebrated in these wise sayings.

Proverbs 12:26



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Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 18:24

Without his dear friends displaying godly qualities like loving self-sacrifice, David never would have survived Absalom's rebellion. Thankfully, David had spent his life nourishing friendships that would shelter him until his dying day. What does it look like for a follower of Jesus Christ to cultivate his or her own grove of friends today?



Application: Timeless Truths about Friends

In Pastor Chuck Swindoll's study of this account of David and his friends, he made four observations about friends. These timeless truths can guide anyone in her or her friendships.

- *Friends are essential.* There is no substitute for a good friend.
- *Friendship must be cultivated.* Closeness doesn't happen automatically.
- *Friends impact our lives—either positively or negatively.* Their impact isn't neutral.
- *Friends can range from casual to close to intimate.*



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Friends impact us. If you run with good friends, you become a better person. You run with bad friends, you become worse. Choose them carefully. Choose them wisely.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Do you agree that friends are essential? Has a friend ever met a physical, emotional, or spiritual need that no one else could meet?

As you consider the friendships you've cultivated, how have these people impacted you? Has any friend's personality, actions, or attitude rubbed off on you in a particularly positive or negative way? What has this taught you about which friendships you will choose to nourish going forward?

Whom do you consider your most intimate friends? Your list is probably pretty short. And that's normal! Although you might have few intimate friends, you can enjoy the highest levels of honesty and vulnerability with them. Practically speaking, how can you openly encourage these dearest friends in their walk with Jesus Christ?



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Friends are essential. They meet relational needs no one else can—not a parent, not a sibling, not a spouse. Yet everyone is faced with a difficult decision because each person gets to choose his or her friends. What kinds of friends will you choose? Friends who abandon you in your hour of greatest need? Or sheltering trees who will shield you from life's harsh storms?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for all the friends you've brought to me throughout my life, and thank You for giving me the greatest friend in Your Son Jesus Christ. Help me learn from David's friends so I may be a sheltering tree to those closest to me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Youth and Age," in *Poems That Live Forever*, comp. Hazel Felleman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 256.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

