

STUDY GUIDE



Introduction

HAVING GOOD FRIENDS

1. Circle any of the following descriptions that match your experience of best friends, or add your own description at the end. Then, next to each applicable statement, write the name(s) or initials of the friend(s) you immediately thought of when you first read those words.
 - Safe places where I can be myself.
 - The few people I can be comfortable with.
 - The ones I go to when I need support.
 - Know and accept all of me.
 - Have walked with me through the seasons of life (marriage, childrearing, loss, etc.).

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- I have found God in a deeper way through them.
 - Helped me through tough times.
 - Made my life more meaningful.
 -
 -
2. Why is it significant that when Jesus was in Gethsemane, just hours away from the cross, he looked not only to his heavenly Father but also to his closest earthly friends—Peter, James, and John? (See Matthew 26:36–38.)
3. Think for a moment about a few of those special people on your BF list and ask yourself these questions:
- a. *In what specific areas of life could my best friend and I do better for each other?* For example, is your connection focused too much on one specific

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topic—say, parenting, marriage, or dating? What important areas—like physical health, family of origin, spiritual values, or finances—don’t get discussed? How will you begin to dig into those additional facets of life to enrich your friendship?

- b. *What risk might we need to take to make our relationship even better?*

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4. Prayerfully read the following “one anothers” selected from the more than fifty that are mentioned in the New Testament. Which two or three of these do you most need to work on? (If you’re not sure, a true friend will undoubtedly be able to tell you!)

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Choose one of these traits and the friendship in which you will cultivate it this week. Then make a plan, and make sure it happens!

- *Mark 9:50* “Be at peace with each other.”
- *Romans 12:10* “Be devoted to one another. . . . Honor one another above yourselves.”
- *Romans 14:13* “Stop passing judgment on one another.”
- *Galatians 5:13* “Serve one another in love.”
- *Galatians 6:2* “Carry each other’s burdens.”
- *Ephesians 4:32* “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
- *Ephesians 5:21* “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- *Colossians 3:9* “Do not lie to each other.”
- *1 Thessalonians 5:11* “Encourage one another and build each other up.”
- *Hebrews 10:24–25* “Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

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- *James 5:16* “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other.”
5. In Mark 2:1–12, the good friends of the瘫痪者 brought him before Jesus so the Lord could bless and heal the man. Which of your BFs especially need(s) Jesus’ touch of healing, hope, or encouragement today? Bring those friends before Jesus in prayer.

1



Fs, BFs, and BFFs

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1. At the DNA level, a friendship must have three elements: knowing, liking, and presence. Why is each of these essential to a healthy, life-giving relationship?

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2. To whom, if anyone, have you handed over the key to the vault of your life? What did you learn from that experience?
 3. Look at the list below. Which kinds of information about yourself do you find most difficult to share? Which kinds are most difficult for you to listen to when someone else is sharing? Why are those topics tough for you?

Dreams

Hurts

Vision for Life

Secrets

Feelings

Sins

Core Values

Mistakes

Strengths

The Past

Heartaches

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4. Some good friends are friends for a season. Comment on the positives and negatives of that reality. What factors contribute to making someone a forever friend?

 5. Can you have or should you have more than one best friend? Why or why not? And what do you think about having best friends of the opposite sex?

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6. For each of your best friends, consider what percentage of that relationship is based on knowing? on liking? on presence? What practical steps can you take to strengthen each element of those friendships?

 7. If you have a best friend of the opposite sex, what precautions are you taking to keep it appropriate—or what safeguards might be good to implement?

2



The Accidental Necessity

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1. Who in your life would you categorize as a companion? as a best friend? Why did the people on the “Best Friend” list make the cut? Why do you think each person sensed you were open to healthy, new relationships?

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- When, if ever, has a best friend helped a struggle of yours come to light and then kept it from becoming a bigger issue? Why are BFs able to have that kind of significant impact on us?
 - If you are married, when has your time with a best friend—or your spouse’s time with a best friend—improved your marriage? If you’re single, has a dating relationship ever benefited from your best friend’s involvement? How does spending time with a best friend not only fuel you but fuel your relationship with “significant others” as well?

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4. We all need to be transparent with someone about our inner selves, needs, mistakes, and emotions. What keeps people—or has kept you—from being vulnerable like that? What good things come with the choice to be transparent in a friendship?

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5. What fears of being vulnerable do you have, if any? What would facing those fears in the arena of friendship look like? Be specific about actions you could take in an effort to overcome those fears.

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6. What will you do with one or two of your BFs this week to intentionally care for and maintain those relationships? Note how the friendship benefits when you take those purposeful actions.

3



Life Is Better When We Are Hanging Out Together

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1. Friendship has two parts: liking and connecting.
What happens if you have one without the other?
 2. When, if ever, have you grown to like someone because you learned his or her story? For what current relationship does that experience encourage you?

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3. To deepen our connection with a friend, we need to act in ways that foster trust and openness. Brainstorm some specific ways to do that—some of which will probably require you to take the initial risk of going deeper in that friendship.
 4. When have you seen someone being drawn to another person for less-than-healthy reasons—or when have you experienced that yourself? Why does such attraction happen? What steps can we take to prevent such attachments?

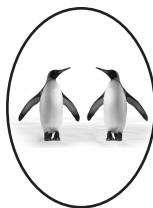
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BEING A GOOD FRIEND

5. One way we come to have good friends is by being a good friend. So do unto others at some point this week and try at least one of the following:
 - Make a no-purpose phone call.
 - Take the lead in bringing up your own needs for grace, validation, acceptance, understanding, or safety with a friend.
 - Go deeper in a conversation by sharing how you feel, not just how you think. Mention what concerns you, frustrates you, or saddens you.

Now consider: What difference did that action make?

4



The Time Investment

HAVING GOOD FRIENDS

1. Why are both quality time and quantity time essential to best friendships?
 2. Children develop a sense of being loved and secure when they have “internalized” parents who were consistently warm and loving. This emotional pic-

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ture of Mom and Dad cheers the kids on and comforts them in times of stress. Who in your life has made that life-giving contribution to your soul even if your parents didn't? Give an example of when an internalized BF helped you take a difficult step.

3. “*Best friend* should be an earned title rather than an honorary one.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

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4. Why is proximity as important as time when it comes to preserving and strengthening a best friendship? In what ways can BFs compensate for a lack of proximity?

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5. Look at some of your most important relationships and think about how you're doing in the areas of being caught up on life events, connected emotionally, and close enough to be able to speak and hear truth. Which friend(s) do you need to see more often? What change in your schedule over the next seven days are you going to make in order to see someone you haven't seen for a while?

5



BFs in a Facebook World

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1. What percentage of your contact with your BFs is through digital connections such as texting, email, and social media like Facebook and Twitter? Are those connections making your best friendships stronger? Why or why not?

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2. Why has good, old-fashioned face-to-face communication not yet been matched by technology? Specifically, what aspects of communication are lost when we communicate via technology? Give an example of how, without those nonverbal cues, our words can have a completely opposite meaning.
 3. Think about the downside of digital connections. When has something negative or confrontational seemed much worse when you (or your recipient) read it, simply because it wasn't communicated in person? In what ways have you—and/or someone you've connected with via text, email, or social media—been able to hide parts of yourself you didn't want known or create parts of yourself that didn't exist?

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4. Why is it important to first clarify for ourselves what we're thinking and feeling before going to BFs? Describe a time when a BF helped you clarify your reality *after* you had already done some reflecting on your own. You may also be able to tell of a time when you went prematurely to a BF, adopted her reality, and later regretted it.

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5. What can we do to stand strong against the temptation to hide behind technology or not be real?

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6. While digital communication can definitely help you stay in contact with your BFs, it is also important to make sure you're connecting with people in person. How balanced is your life right now? Are you connecting face-to-face with new friends? with long-time friends? Be honest with yourself about where, if at all, you are hiding behind a Facebook image or text messages. What step will you take this week to be more balanced in your face-to-face vs. technological connections?

6



Speed Dial

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1. When have you experienced the reality that the high points are more joyful when shared with a BF? And when has a low point in life seemed less low, less hopeless, because you had a BF by your side? Why do you think such timely connecting with a BF has these effects?

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2. Validation has to do with knowing that your own experience matters to someone else. When has a BF's validation been exactly what you needed when you needed it? Explain how such validation makes us "more of ourselves."
 3. When have you needed a BF to simply be present with you? When have you needed a BF to help you move on from being in shock, make wise choices, and develop a plan of action? Comment on what your BF provided for you when you were in crisis.

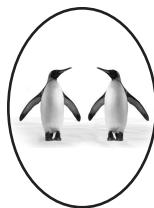
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4. Who do you have on your speed dial, either literally or figuratively, when you need to vent? Why that person? What does that BF offer even when you're in a seemingly impossible situation?

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5. In what best friendship(s), if any, are you purposely keeping quiet about a current challenge, disappointment, or hurt? Explain in your own words why such attempts actually make us high maintenance—and then plan to get together with that BF so you can let him or her know what's going on and allow that person to support you.

7



What Matters Most

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1. When, if ever, have you realized that you and a BF had diametrically opposed values and chosen to distance yourself from him or her? Explain your decision.

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2. *Core values* are those general truths—like love, responsibility, freedom, and forgiveness—that you allow to guide all areas of your life. What are your three or four most important core values? How do you determine if your BFs share those core values?
 3. *Context values* are your beliefs about how to conduct specific areas of your life—such as your finances, family, career, health, and political views. In what context values do you and your BFs differ? Why can differences in context values be beneficial? What personal growth, for instance, have you experienced because of such differences?

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4. If you are a Christian, do you believe that all your BFs should be Christians as well? Why or why not? Does this limit the degree of intimacy you can experience? In what ways might this difference enrich a friendship?

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5. With which of your BFs are you intentionally or unnecessarily staying separate in your context values? Explain. Which core values are keeping you deeply connected to which BFs? If you find large differences in the core values you and a BF have, talk about those values and determine how to preserve and even strengthen your friendship.

8



Permission to Speak the Truth

HAVING GOOD FRIENDS

1. Why is other people's truthfulness critical to our growth? Give an example from your own life: when did someone's words of truth spark some kind of growth in you?

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2. Best friends are truthful about themselves and truthful about each other. How can a BF's honesty about you be valuable?
 3. When have you been “truthed without grace”—and when have you perhaps spoken truth without grace? What lessons did you learn from those experiences?

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4. Best friends are completely honest with each other and push each other to grow. Are you and your BF(s) too careful with each other? Why isn't this a problem—or why might this be the case?
 5. What can you say to help a BF—or yourself—see that truth does not mean condemnation but can instead be a gift of great love?

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6. Model honesty about yourself with one of your BFs.

One day this week, ask a BF to help you see areas in yourself where you're not growing, things you're doing that aren't healthy, blind spots you aren't aware of, and even areas of potential that you may not see. To encourage yourself to have this conversation, list three or four benefits to this kind of honesty within your best friendships.

9



No Explanation Needed

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1. In our best friendships, we are okay with each other being *not* okay. Which BFs have accepted your dark side? Which BFs have helped you both recognize and learn to ignore your internal judge? Which specific flaws, sins, and mistakes of yours is a BF well aware of but accepts and loves you anyway?

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2. Why is it necessary to deal with our weaknesses as *problems* rather than a cause for *condemnation*?
 3. How is a BF's acceptance helpful in identifying the cause of our sin and resolving that deeper issue rather than merely dealing with the symptom?
 4. What integral part of God's redemptive process can BFs play? Ideally, talk about when a BF has been significant to God's work in your life.

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5. The first step in developing greater acceptance in a friendship is to do your own personal inventory. Take that step this week, identifying a dark-side issue, a poor choice, or an unhealthy behavior that your BF doesn't know about or is only generally aware of. Then share it with the person and admit: "I'm beating myself up. I need to know I'm okay with you." You might even conduct an acceptance inventory together by discussing: *How do you think we're doing in accepting each other's flaws and mistakes? How can we better show each other acceptance?*

10



Family, Friends, and Family Friends

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1. Your family is the laboratory where you learn about friendships. What did relationships with your parents and/or siblings teach you about having friends? about being a friend?

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2. As important as family relationships are, we all need the cross-pollination of other types of people if we are to be as healthy and developed as we can be. What have you learned about yourself and about this big world—with all its variety—that you wouldn't have experienced if you had stayed in the laboratory of the family?
 3. Why might a person's lack of desire for nonfamily BFs indicate some unfinished development and/or untapped potential? Why is this a problem?

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4. Are you blessed to have close friends who are family? If so, what contributed to these rich relationships? If not, consider honestly—and learn from your conclusions—whether the reason is more you or more the family system.
 5. Maybe your family members are not close friends because of a lack of forgiveness. If that's the case, what is keeping you from entering the process of forgiving, healing, grieving, and attempting to reconcile?

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6. The ideal scenario for family friends is both-and: it's having BFs both within your family and outside of it. What can you do to better befriend someone in your family? Choose a family member, select one of the steps you just brainstormed, and make an intentional effort in the next week or so to more deeply connect with him or her.



Conclusion: The Power of BFs

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1. Why is it important to be aware of the power—both positive and negative—of your best friendships?
 2. What four or five examples come to mind right away when you think about how your BFs have changed

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your life? Have all of those changes been for the better? Why or why not?

3. Comment on the wisdom of this statement: “We all need the lifelines of best friends. Be a person who cares about many people, but has invested deeply in a few.” How easy or difficult is it for you to follow this advice—and why?

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4. What have you most appreciated about this book's discussion of BFFs?

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Go back and look at each of the “Being a Good Friend” exercises that you have been challenged with in the course of this study. Which two or three helped you the most? Now brainstorm how you can continue to build on those action steps over the long-term.



Notes

Introduction

1. Tom Rath, *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford to Live Without* (New York: Gallup Press, 2006), Kindle edition, chapter 3: "Better than Prozac;" and Farouk Mookadam and Heather M. Arthur, "Social Support and Its Relationship to Morbidity and Mortality After Acute Myocardial Infarction," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 164 (2004): 1514–18.
2. Alina Tugend, "Peeking at the Negative Side of High School Popularity," *New York Times*, June 19, 2010, B6.

Chapter 3

1. I have written more extensively on connection in my book *Loving People: How to Love and Be Loved* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

Chapter 4

1. Robert Lee Holtz, "The Really Smart Phone," *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 2011.

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Chapter 8

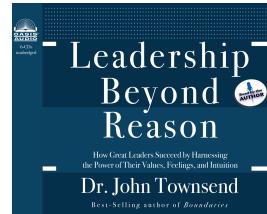
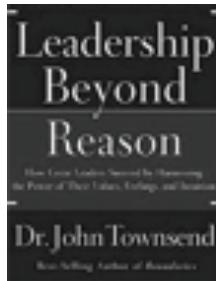
1. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).
2. Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business Books, 2001).

John Townsend is a business consultant, psychologist, and relational expert. He has written or cowritten twenty-six books, including the two million-unit bestseller *Boundaries*, *Leadership Beyond Reason*, and *Handling Difficult People*. For more than twenty years Dr. Townsend has engaged with leaders, organizations, and individuals around the globe, offering them life-changing solutions to their problems. He is cohost of the nationally syndicated radio talk show *NewLifeLive*—heard in 180 markets with three million listeners—and has been interviewed on venues such as Fox News television and published in magazines such as *Personal Excellence* and *Leadership Journal*. He is also a regular columnist for *Christian Coaching Today* magazine.

The cofounder and director of a health-care company for ten years, with operations in thirty-five cities in the western U.S., it was here that Townsend learned the strategies for change and success that he now employs in his coaching and writing. Dr. Townsend works with leaders and organizations by providing team and executive coaching and corporate consulting, and by giving conference presentations. He also conducts his own Leadership Coaching Program, as well as the Ultimate Leadership Workshop.

He is both a visiting professor at Dallas Seminary and clinical director of the American Association of Christian Counselors, and conducts the One Week Intensive training experience for counselors. In addition, Townsend is on the board of directors of the New Canaan Society—an organization dedicated to the spiritual and personal growth of Christian businessmen—and is active on the board of Mustard Seed Ranch, a residential program for abused children.

A resident of Newport Beach, California, Townsend and his wife, Barbi, have two sons.



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