

God's Not Dead: Taking A Stand

Good morning!

Do you have a favorite bumper sticker?

There are so many funny ones these days. Like this one: ***“Did you ever consider that maybe the Hokey Pokey is REALLY what it’s all about?”***

My favorite has to do with friendship, which is what we’re going to talk about today, and what that means, namely taking a stand for your friend. Maybe you’ve seen my favorite bumper sticker: ***“God, make me the man my dog thinks I am.”***

Isn’t that great? That’s real friendship...unconditional acceptance no matter what happens. No matter what happened yesterday, I’m still your friend now.

How many of you have ever heard of Joseph Medlicott Scriven? It’s a name you wouldn’t forget. Joseph...Medlicott...Scriven. Not many, I’m sure.

Let me tell you about this Irish immigrant, a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, who at 25 had fallen in love and was to be married, but on the day before his wedding everything changed in an instant.

While crossing a bridge to visit Joseph, his fiancée fell off of her horse, and drowned in the River Bann in Ireland...the very day before their wedding! What a horrendous accident.

As you can well imagine, he was crushed, so he sailed to Canada to forget his broken heart, and to try to start his life anew. And he pretty much did—eventually falling in love again, and even getting engaged for a second time. All seemed right with the world once more for Joseph Scriven.

But before they could wed, his fiancée got very sick, and four months later she died of pneumonia. What are the odds? How would one recover from that horrible shock...all over again?

If it were you, sitting there at your second funeral would you blame God, turn away from Him, despair of all His supposed goodness?

You’ve probably heard folks say or post on **Facebook**, *“I married my best friend.”*

For Joseph Scriven, he couldn’t say that. He had to bury his *potential* best friend...twice. And while recovering from these dual tragedies, if that were not enough, his mother in Ireland became extremely ill, and he could not be with her.

Heartbroken and helpless. It was beyond adding “insult to injury,” almost a cruel cosmic hoax to see how much he could bear.

So he did the only thing he could do in 1860; he wrote to her and sent a poem that he hoped might give her some comfort in his absence.

Why do I mention Joseph Scriven’s sad story? To depress you? No...to encourage you!

Because despite his circumstances, horrible circumstances, almost soap opera-like tragedies, he never lost faith in his best friend...and that simple poem to his mother became a famous hymn about that same friend, Jesus Christ.

Here’s a few lines from it, one of the greatest hymns of all time, What A Friend We Have In Jesus:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Joseph considered Jesus to be his best friend, and despite his loss, his trust in his friend never wavered, and he stood with Him in a life of ministry to the poor in Port Hope, Ontario until his death in 1886.

Today we’re completing our four-part series based on the new film ***God’s Not Dead*** where we see a similar friendship with Jesus despite some heavy losses by our protagonist.

In the film, Josh Wheaton, takes a stand for his Christian belief in God with his college philosophy class, trusting in his Friend to see him through as well, no matter what the cost. And as you’ll see a bit later on, it costs him plenty.

Let’s take a quick peek at the trailer for ***God’s Not Dead***, and see how Josh responds to his professor’s challenge to renounce his best Friend:

[God's Not Dead Trailer](#)

How would you respond to a public challenge like this that impugns your friend? It may be a co-worker, a neighbor, or someone in your church. It could even be a member of your family or the love of your life.

How far would you go to defend your friend and not disappoint them when they need you most?

Taking a stand can be a hard thing to do sometimes. I don’t want to give too much of the story away, but Josh sets the bar pretty high for all of us in this film, willing to sacrifice everything to stand with his best Friend.

First Peter 3:15 says, “*but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;*”

Let’s look at Josh’s motivation and his “***Taking A Stand***” for his Friend, Jesus Christ, and in the process discover what exactly makes a person a true friend?

What Makes A Friend?

First of all, let’s take a look at some of the things the Bible says about friendship.

- A real friend is consistent in their affection.

“*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity* (Proverbs 17:17).”

What does that mean practically? That means that no matter what happens, they are there for you, 24-7, especially when your world falls apart. When it is the worst, even at 4 A.M., you can call them because you know they’ll come and help.

- A true friend is brutally honest.

“*Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses* (Proverbs 27:5-6).”

If you have a problem, they care enough to not sugarcoat it. They tell you the truth. If there’s broccoli in your teeth, your breath stinks, or that color makes you look fat...they’ll tell you. They care too much to let you be a fool, get hurt, or be embarrassed.

- A genuine friend is closer than family, even to the point of death.

“*One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother* (Proverbs 18:24).”

Someone who is closer than a brother is someone who will sacrifice even their own life for you. They are more than family. They are your go-to-guy in any situation because you know that they have your back. When it’s life or death, they will step in for you no matter what.

Who can be with you 24-7, tells you the truth all the time, and would even die for you as a brother?

I think the answer becomes clear when we consider Scriven's best Friend, the man from Nazareth, Jesus Christ, because He didn't just say it, He "...*demonstrates His own love toward us...* (Romans 5:8)."

Jesus is that "*friend who sticks closer than a brother,*" isn't He? He is always there, always honest, and as a brother He even died for you. Josh knows this and acts accordingly in his philosophy class.

Think about it. Do you know anyone who cares so much for you that they would actually die for you? I don't know about you, but no one has ever died for me, personally.

Taking A Stand

This is the litmus test. A real true friend will stand with you when your reputation is in question, when you're at the very bottom, when you are completely broken, and have nothing.

The whole premise of *God's Not Dead* is summed up beautifully in this scene at the library where Josh reveals his motivation...pure friendship that does not want to let his Friend down.

Let's take a look at this poignant scene with Martin Yip, a Communist student from China who doesn't get it:

Film Clip 48:53 to 50:53 (Josh's Explanation)

"Everyone thinks I'm crazy," Josh says to Martin. *"Girlfriend, ex-girlfriend. My parents don't want me to risk it. I'll have to work like a dog to catch up in all my other classes."*

Josh lays out all his "difficulties," but ultimately has no real qualms about defending his friend to his atheist professor, despite all the risk and difficulty. It's a no brainer. Why?

Because he thinks Jesus is alive. That's a powerful statement! He thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is really and truly still alive...today, right now! Do you? Do you believe that too? Believe it enough to take a stand for him?

C.T. Studd, who also believed this and demonstrated it by giving his life as a missionary, said, *"If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."*

Is Jesus your friend? Would you stand up for him in public like Josh? Would you go anywhere for the gospel like C.T. Studd? It is a remarkable love that we can also see elsewhere in the Bible. Let's take a look at the Old Testament story of another true friendship.

Jonathan and David

*“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and **he loved him as himself**. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because **he loved him as himself**. 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 (1 Samuel 18:1-4).”*

Of all the stories of friendship in the Bible, this is perhaps the greatest. And what do we see modeled here between Jonathan and David?

We see the Golden Rule that Jesus established for us (Matthew 22:34-40)...treat others as you would like to be treated...which means love them as you love yourself. Exactly what Jonathan did, *“...he loved David as himself.”*

Jonathan even defended David and protected him from his father, King Saul.

“Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David 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. I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”

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. 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?”

Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death (1 Kings 19:6).”

Now that’s standing up for your friend, to the King and your own father, no less, when it’s literally life and death. And I’m sure Jonathan knew David was a “threat” to his right to Saul’s throne one day. Talk about risking it all!

And how did David respond to him? He loved him in return. Their hearts were knit together, and when David learned of his death he mourned him and said, *“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. **Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women** (2 Samuel 1:26).”*

He loved him more than the love itself!

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, *“The only way to have a friend is to be one.”*

Clever, but what does that mean practically? I knew a guy who once described his friend to me as “*he always makes me feel like a million bucks!*” What a great way to define a friendship!

That is what we see Jonathan initiated with David, and also what we see Josh reciprocating to Jesus’ love for him in coming to His defense in his philosophy class. Josh doesn’t want to let him down. “*I think of Jesus as my friend. I don’t want to disappoint Him.*”

Getting Practical – Dale Carnegie

One of the foremost experts on friendship was Dale Carnegie. For more than 100 years, and in almost as many countries, his methods and courses have been changing the way people view each other for the better.

Carnegie grew up a very poor farm boy in Missouri, but he soon discovered biblical truths about friendship that he put into secular terms in a book that sold over 5 million copies in his lifetime called ***How To Win Friends and Influence People***.

It’s a gem of a book, and if you struggle with relationships, I highly recommend it. His life motto should be very familiar to all believers:

“Forget yourself; do things for others.” –Dale Carnegie

Pretty simple.

Or as the Apostle Paul said to the church at Philippi, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others* (Philippians 2:3-4).”

So let’s get practical and have something to apply regarding friendship.

Here are the six basic truths that Carnegie lived by, tried and true, and if you want to have friends, just apply these proverbs to your own life and watch what happens.

1. Be genuinely interested in other people.
2. Smile.
3. Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the most important word in the world. Use it often.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves. Ask questions.

5. Talk in terms of the other person's interest. Avoid "I."
6. Make the other person feel sincerely important.

That's all you have to do. In short, love others as you would like to be loved. Sound familiar?

"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you." – Dale Carnegie

In closing, we've seen what a real friend is in the example of Jesus Christ, and Josh's Jonathan/David response to His love when he stood up for Him. Some of you here today may think you know Jesus as your friend too, but faith isn't an intellectual ascent to some historical facts.

True faith is action just like Josh standing up in his philosophy class, it requires works...not for salvation, but as evidence of it. If you really believe your brakes will work in your car when you leave here this morning, then you'll drive home, right?

But if you don't believe your brakes will work, you'll walk home.

Real faith means you take a step, an action, you stand up. That's what we call baptism. After you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you take an action, a step of faith, to show your belief.

And by the way, Joseph Scriven never married. His action was a life devoted to ministering to the poor for the sake of his best Friend. Listen to the rest of Scriven's poem. I'd like to think his mom found great comfort in it, and in her son's remarkable faith.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged — take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge — take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear; may we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer. Soon in glory bright, unclouded, there will be no need for prayer — rapture, praise, and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.

With that sort of a friend, why wouldn't you take a stand for Him and give your all no matter the risk...especially when you know He stands right there alongside you? What a friend we have in Jesus, a friend who stood up for us, and who "sticks closer than a brother!"

Let's pray.