

Negative Pressure
August 19, 2018

Each autumn a flock of blackbirds forms in the Gambrills area and flies around together for several weeks before heading south. They are fun to watch. I have seen them come land on the church lawn to look for food. Let me describe it for you.

The birds don't land all at one time. The birds in the front of the flock will swoop down onto the lawn. The others follow, flying over the heads of the first ones to land to land beyond them. The flock is so large that it takes a while for them all to come in and land. By the time the last of the flock is coming in the ones who first landed look up to see all these birds flying past and decide they better take off too. It is as if they are thinking, "Everyone is leaving. I better leave too." They take off, joining the end of the flock with the beginning. It looks like a giant black tire of birds rolling across the field. And none of them are on the ground long enough to actually find any food. I think this works as a picture of peer pressure.

A woman was celebrating her birthday of 102 years. Someone asked her the benefits of living to such an age. After a pause, she answered, "No peer pressure!"

But I don't know anyone in this room in that situation. Whatever decade you are living there are others in our church in that same age group. So we all have peers. And we all are affected by peer pressure.

Peer pressure can be bad or good. Your peers can pressure you to do sinful things or to do good things. An example of good peer pressure is in Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

But today's sermon is about negative peer pressure and how to resist it. Negative peer pressure is pressure to do sinful things. Our world is full of negative peer pressure.

You might encounter it from your family, from friends, from co-workers, from a group at your school. For example, if you are assigned to a group project at work or school, and all the others in the group want to take a short cut outside of the boss's or teacher's instructions, the group may pressure you to go along.

It is negative peer pressure we need to guard against as we live for God. We are being pressured to adopt the values of the culture around us, to adopt the morality of this leader or that group, even though that clearly goes against what the Bible teaches us to be God's will.

We're going to look at a passage from a book of wisdom this morning, the book of Proverbs. The king of Israel, Solomon, was given great wisdom by God. Solomon wrote down some of his observations about life as advice to his son. We are the beneficiaries of that writing.

Proverbs 23:17-18 (NIV) Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

In these verses are several points of wisdom to help us in resisting negative peer pressure.

1. Be careful of who you admire. (verse 17)

Proverbs 23:17 Do not let your heart envy sinners...

It is common in our culture to admire someone famous. Many people pick an actor, sports star, politician, business entrepreneur, scientist, or military hero and make that person a model for their own life. They follow that person's deeds, listen to their words, and let that person influence how they live.

But fame is not a sign of wisdom. Fame is not a sign of intelligence. Fame is not evidence of good morals. Fame is not evidence of good character. There is no one of such people who is perfect. Every person is flawed. Every person is sinful. Be careful of who you admire. Do not fall into the habit of admiring people of low character simply because they are rich or famous.

One of the magazines I used to read had an interview each month with a famous actor or actress. We might admire their acting skill, their hard work, and perseverance at their craft. But let us not admire the values and lifestyles we often see among them. One actress was only in her twenties and was already working on her third marriage. The other two lasted about one year each.

Do not admire those who pursue sinful ways. King David wrote...

Psalm 73:2-3 (NIV) "... my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

He came close to sinning when he started envying those who sinned to gain their money. In some neighborhoods the only people who appear to be financially successful are the drug dealers and pimps. But choosing to adopt such a lifestyle has great negative consequences.

However, we who have committed to serving God with our lives should admire Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. He is the best person to imitate.

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

Admire Jesus. Admire His perfect life. Admire His sacrificial death, his willingness to die for your sins. Admire His courage. Admire His faith. Admire His prayer life. Admire His ability to stand up to negative peer pressure. Admire His obedience to God.

Be careful of who you admire.

2. Be careful of what you desire. (verse 18)

Proverbs 23:18 (NIV) There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

We don't know exactly what future David was looking forward to. But we are looking forward to the return of Jesus and the glory we will receive with Him when He returns. Our bodies will be transformed into resurrection bodies, free from the temptation to sin. Our salvation will be completed. We will always be with Jesus. And our salvation will be forever. Anything you are tempted to have now is only temporary. Focus on what God has promised for your future and use that to resist the desires for worldly things.

This is what Jesus did as he faced the cross.

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...", who for the joy set before him endured the cross...

He was focused on the joy that awaited him after the cross. This helped him persevere through his crucifixion. Focusing on the future benefits to himself and us helped him resist the temptation to avoid the cross or to end it early.

Many spiritual blessings are waiting for those who trust in Jesus. As we keep the promises of God for our future in our thoughts each day, this will help us to resist negative peer pressure.

The world wants us to focus on worldly things like fame, power, and the things that wealth can buy. But all of these are temporary. As the saying goes, you can't take it with you. You will leave it all behind at death. So instead, Jesus says to focus on eternal blessings. Reminding yourself of these each day will help you resist negative peer pressure.

Some mornings you wake up and you don't feel like being a Christian. Your body is dragging. Your spirit is dragging. Your emotions are dragging. You'd like to just ignore all that is good for you and be bad. What should you do?

Open your Bible.

Read of your future blessings.

Picture yourself experiencing those blessings.

Praise and Thank God for what is coming.

Savor the joy of your salvation.

Head into your day ready to obey Him.

Proverbs 23:19-21 (NIV) Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

3. Be careful who you hang out with. verse 20

Choose people who will help you to keep your heart on the right things. Choose people who will encourage you to live for God. Choose people who will pray for you. Choose people who are, themselves, actively trying to resist negative peer pressure. Choose to be part of a positive peer pressure group. Encourage the group members to be that for each other. Make a covenant with each other.

Who you hang out with can make a big difference in who you become. This works both negatively and positively.

1 Corinthian 15:33 (NIV) Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

We need to be more intentional to make this work for us. It won't just happen on its own. Purposely approach other Christian friends and decide together to be a positive peer group to each other. Talk about it. Talk about the values you want to resist and the values you want to reinforce with each other.

Some years back there was a movement among Christian teens. "True Love Waits". True love for Jesus would save sex for marriage. It was an example of positive peer pressure. You can do that. You can organize such a group for yourself. You can be intentional as a teen or an adult to surround yourself with people who are wanting to faithfully live for Jesus.

We become like those we hang out with. We do. As a pastor I've seen this play out both ways over and over in the lives of Christians. Make sure your heart is on the right path by hanging out with the right kind of people.

There is a warning in verse 21 about hanging out with the wrong kind of people.

Proverbs 23:21 (NIV) "... for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags."

The ultimate price of sin is condemnation and hell. But there are other costs, more immediate costs to consider. The effects of sin will always be bad. It may seem, for a time, that the bad people have it made. But it will not always be that way. There will come a day when they will fall. There will come a day when their sins will catch up with them. There will come a day when you will be glad you have chosen God's way instead of the way of negative peers.

If God is stirring your heart this morning to believe and to act, then pray yourself into the hands of Jesus.