

## Resist Negative Peer Pressure

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A reporter was interviewing a woman on her birthday. She had just turned 102 years old. The reporter asked the woman 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. We all face peer pressure in our lives. We usually think of peer pressure as something children and teens struggle with. But the truth is that adults struggle with peer pressure too. You may face peer pressure from family, from friends, from co-workers, from neighbors, or others. The temptation to conform... in order to be accepted... is one of the strongest temptations we face.

Peer pressure IS a pressure because you and I have an incredibly strong need to be accepted by others. We want people to like us. We want people to include us. We want people to accept us as friends. This desire to be accepted by others is so strong that people can end up doing things they later regret.

Maybe you have such regrets. Maybe you went along with the group and ended up doing something you regret. Maybe you hurt someone. Maybe you stole something. You did something that you NEVER would have done if not pressured to do so by someone else. And your action had lasting consequences despite your every effort to make things right.

We often speak of peer pressure as a negative thing. But it can be positive as well. Negative peer pressure is when you are pressured to do something wrong. Positive peer pressure is when you are pressured to do the right thing. There are examples of both in the Bible.

**Church is to be a place of positive peer pressure.** We encourage each other to live that will. We expect each other to do so. We hold each other accountable for doing so.

But today we are more concerned with resisting negative peer pressure. We need some practical wisdom for this. So we turn to the Bible book of practical wisdom, the book of Proverbs. Look with me at just one passage from this book, though there are more that speak to our subject.

**Proverbs 23:17-21** (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. 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.

Let's draw several actions from this practical wisdom.

**1. Be careful of who you admire.** Be careful who you want to be like. Verse 17, "Do not let your heart envy sinners..."

Why would anyone envy sinners? People envy sinners because of what they have.

We are tempted to admire sinners if they have something we do not have. Maybe they have lots of attention. Maybe they are popular. Maybe they have lots of friends. Maybe they have lots of influence over others. Maybe they have lots of material things that you don't have.

They may have these things because of their sin. Sinners may prosper by their sin. In some poor communities the only people with much money are the drug dealers. So people are tempted to admire them and become like them. King David wrote about this problem of admiring the wrong people and almost getting into sin.

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

David says that he started wanting what the wicked had and almost started doing what they did. But something helped him resist their influence. He goes on to write that he remembered that such people are getting away with nothing. God knows all they are doing. Their punishment is just delayed by God.

Do not admire sinners. Do not envy them. Do not wish to be like them. Instead of admiring sinners, admire people of good character. Look for good character in people, like Jesus. Admire Jesus. Admire His sacrificial life and death. Admire His willingness to die for your sins on the cross. Admire His courage. Admire His faith. Admire His ability to stand up to negative peer pressure. Admire His obedience to God.

You might also admire faithful followers of Jesus. These are the people you want to be like. Just as they trust fully in God, you want to learn to trust fully in God.

**2. Desire God's plan for your life.** Verse 19 warns us to keep our hearts on the right path. That path is God's path. God loves us and wants what is best for us. You have to discover what the right path of life is and desire that path for yourself.

We learn the right path to live in the Bible. God teaches us in the Bible what is best for us. **There is no substitute for reading your Bible and asking God to help you understand it.**

You need time with God in the Bible daily. You might be tempted to get by on reading the Bible one day a week. But spending only one day a week in God's word is like dieting only one day a week. Everyone knows dieting once a week doesn't accomplish anything towards weight loss. It is better than nothing, but not very effective. You must diet almost everyday in order to really lose weight. You can't just eat the right foods or enough vitamins only on one day a week and get lighter and healthier.

To be healthy, you must take in the right foods and the right amount of foods each day. In order to live the right path, you need to be in the Bible with God each day.

Jesus knew the Word of God well. God's Word showed Jesus how to live right and not give in to the negative peer pressure around Him. Jesus battled the temptations of peer pressure a lot during His teaching ministry. Everybody had expectations of Jesus. His disciples had a plan for Him. The crowds had a plan for Him. His critics had a plan for Him. He did not listen to any of them, but sought God's plan in all things.

That is the model for us too. Keep yourself focused, not on a way to live, but on the right way to live, God's way to live.

### **3. Choose the right friends.** verse 20.

Just as you don't want to admire the wrong people, you don't want to hang out with the wrong people.

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

It is true that you can become like those you hang out with. You become like those you want to be friends with. In order to be friends with them, you will be tempted to act like they do, talk like they do, hold the same values that they do. You will be tempted to do these things so they will accept you. Instead, you need to seek Jesus' acceptance.

You don't want the wrong people as friends. Instead, you want to be with people who are trying to live God's plan themselves.

Choose people who will help you to know God.

Choose people who will encourage you to live for God.

Choose people who will pray with you and for you.

Choose people who are, themselves, resisting negative peer pressure.

Not everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian is living the right path. You have to be careful who you hang out with. You have to know what they say, but you also have to see what they do. You have to look at their character. Do they act like Jesus or more like the negative peers around you?

To resist negative peer pressure hang out with others who are trying to resist negative peer pressure. We can help each other to do so. We can be a positive peer to each other.

Find people who are better Christians than you are, and hang out with them. Learn from them. Let them be a positive peer pressure upon you. Learn from their prayers, their understanding of God's word, and their behavior how to live the right path.

### **4. Remember that there is always a consequence for sin.** verse 21

There is a consequence for everything you do. There is result for everything you do. It may be a big consequence or a little consequence. It may be a permanent consequence or a temporary consequence. And it may be a good consequence or a bad one. But there is a consequence for everything you do.

Sin always brings negative consequences. You may not see the consequences today, but it will become known at some point in time. At some point in time your sin will cost you something. Then you will regret your sin .

There is always a consequence for sin. Nothing is hidden from God. He knows everything you have ever done, thought about doing, or wanted to do. God knows every

sin of yours. And while He did not punish you directly at the time of those sins does not mean that there is not a price to pay. There is a consequence.

The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Death awaits the sinner, and then judgment for sins. Without a Savior, a rescuer, you will be found guilty and will be condemned.

But there is an answer.

**Romans 8:1 (NIV)** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

This is one of my favorite verses. Without a Savior I will be condemned. But with Jesus as my Savior, I will never be condemned. That is because He was condemned on my behalf. He was condemned and died in my place.

You too can become "in" Christ Jesus. If you will put your faith into His death for your sins, receiving Him as your Savior, and turn your life over to Him as your Lord, you too can become "in" Christ Jesus and be forgiven of your sins.