

## The Pitfalls of Peer Pressure

### Proverbs 1:10-19

*the pun but we often go with the flow.*

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Proverbs 1:10-19**. Please stand to honor the reading of God's Word.

In 1997 Nathan Zohner, a 14-year-old student from Idaho won first prize in the Science Fair where he had entered his project. The premise of his project was an attempt to show how conditioned we have become to alarmists practicing junk science and spreading fear about everything in our environment. In his project he urged people to sign a petition demanding strict control or total elimination of the chemical "dihydrogen monoxide."

In his presentation he cited a number of reasons for concern.

It can cause excessive sweating and vomiting.

It is a major component in acid rain.

It can cause severe burns in its gaseous state.

Accidental inhalation can kill you.

It has been found in tumors of terminal cancer patients.

It decreases effectiveness of automobile brakes.

I looked up the chemical and found some additional concerns.

It is a component in Styrofoam.

It is an industrial solvent and coolant.

It is used as a fire retardant.

It is used in nuclear power plants.

To substantiate his theory Nathan surveyed 50 people asking whether or not this chemical should be banned. **How would you respond?** (raise hands) Based on his observations of the chemical, forty-three agreed that it should be banned; six were undecided and one person voted no. (There's always one in every crowd.)

The title of his prize winning project was "How Gullible Are We." His conclusions are obvious, we are gullible, because the chemical he introduced to be banned was nothing more than water. *Pardon*

The message title is simply "**The Pitfalls of Peer Pressure.**" To some degree we all face them.

Unfortunately peer pressure is all too often easy to succumb to. Whether in advertisements we see on television or from telemarketers who interrupt our quiet evening or the neighbor who just got the latest gadget, there is pressure to not be the only one without. I'm told that if I try the hair club for men my life will dramatically become better.

We go to the mall and mannequins lure us into a store to buy the latest fashion.

Television ads are aimed at making us think we can't live without the item they're selling.

Our friends won't accept us if we don't go along.

Some peer pressure around us though is innocuous.

It won't harm us if we feel we need what they are selling or offering or doing.

But there is a whole other type of pressure that comes from others who want us to do things that are wrong. There is pressure at work to cut corners a little on a project to meet budget or time lines. There is pressure at school to achieve or excel at all costs to get that scholarship. *Two teens were walking down the hall after a particularly difficult test. One turned to the other and asked how he did on the test. The other stated that he was two seats away from passing.*

We can be made to feel that the only way to get ahead is to do what everyone else is doing and cheat a little here or there. People justify that it's only a little thing, and no one will get hurt if I do it. Or we believe that it won't hurt if I do it just this once. Or you are told that "everyone" is doing it. Or we are told that no one will know, no one will see. Or we are told that we deserve it, it should be ours anyway. Or we justify that it will only be this one time.

All too often peer pressure comes from those who are intent on something that is wrong, things that the Bible calls evil or wicked.

From our passage we will consider three points.

The warning against evil doers – v. 10-14

The walk of evil doers – v. 15-19

The wisdom to avoid evil doers

## I. THE WARNING AGAINST EVIL DOERS – v. 10-14

A man by the name of Dennis Wolfberg was once asked if there was any advantage to being 102. He stated that “the one advantage of being that old is there’s no peer pressure.”

With a tone of cynicism Bill Treasurer had this to say about peer pressure: “Peer pressure has many redeeming qualities. It is the pressure of our peers, after all, that gives us the support to try things we otherwise wouldn’t have tried.”

An unknown person made this thought provoking statement: Don’t think you’re on the right road just because it’s a well beaten path.”

Peer pressure has simply been defined as pressure from one’s peers to behave in a manner similar or acceptable to them.

With peer pressure comes lofty promises of a life of ease or a better grade or academic record or a promotion.

In our passage as we consider the warning against evil doers note in **verse 10** the prey they pursue.

### A. The Prey They Pursue – v. 10

We aren’t given any indication about the age of this son, but we do see Solomon warning him about those who would seek to lead him astray. If his instructions are to his son Rehoboam we know from reading the accounts of his reign that he chose to listen to his peers who took him down a path of destruction as the kingdom was severed from his rule, rather than listen to the advice of his father or from his father’s aides. We can make an

assumption that this son is young and vulnerable or susceptible to being swayed to do things that are wrong. He is impressionable. The target of these evil doers is the naïve and the young, those who still have difficulty discerning between right and wrong.

Some of you may remember the cartoon *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*. I was recently watching a rerun episode where Fat Albert’s younger cousin had been persuaded to steal candy from stores for an older teen. His reward was getting a portion of the candy he stole. Later in the show the older kid told him he was ready for the big times and wanted him to start stealing things of greater value. Fat Albert and the gang were able to keep his cousin from getting into serious trouble with the law.

From the opening verses of Proverbs we have learned a couple of important truths. The first is how important it is to reverence God. Verse 7 tells us that fearing God is the beginning of knowledge. The second is that we need to respect our parents and listen to their advice. The word for listen means more than just hearing what is said; it carries the idea of obedience. From the home we move to our interaction in the world. Our passage today will help us in choosing friends, the people we tend to be around the most. Solomon reveals the motivation behind what these so called friends do and then exposes the consequences of what will happen if that path is taken. Solomon is writing to warn his son not to give in to peer pressure.

Friends can be a source of good counsel. You may have a friend or two that you call for advice.

**Proverbs 27:9 says “the heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.”**

We can then assume that counsel that leads to doing something wrong is like the nauseating odor of something rotting.

This is a stern warning against choosing the wrong friends. They can lead us into some deep pits. As much as we would like to as parents we can’t pick the friends our kids hang out with, but we can have a big influence in their selection. We can give them sound principles that will help them choose their

friends wisely. That's what Solomon is attempting to do here. Look out for "friends" who want to lead you down the wrong path. Even as adults we need to listen to the advice of a spouse or friend who are concerned about new people we're spending time with.

He chooses the term sinners to identify the ones to avoid. In the Hebrew the word is written in the intensive form and signifies people to whom sin has become a habit. It is a practice they consciously and willfully choose. It is intentional disobedience. The word implies that they are vicious and wicked, and they know they are doing wrong. We'll note their activity in a moment. From verse 10 we see that they entice the young and naïve. They're sly and they know just how to get those who are innocent, youthfully immature and naïve to follow them. They entice others to follow them with all kinds of promises that are tempting, all in an effort to lure down a path they know leads to destruction. Only you don't know its end is destruction. You only see the grandiose promises of a path that is lined with bright lights and glamor and the satisfaction of instant gratification. They prey on the young and naïve and these are the ones we need to warn. Indeed we should all be wary of such people, those who want to lead astray. This is a warning for all of us to watch out for deceivers.

Paul sums up this warning with advice of his own to watch out for such evil doers as he writes to the Corinthians, **"Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."** (I Corinthians 15:33) *If I were to take this cup of water and put in a tablespoon of swamp water from the marsh up the road, it doesn't matter how much good water I pour into the cup, it will still be tainted.*

We must teach our children to be wary of those who would lead them down a wrong path. Now consider the path they pursue in **verses 11-12.**

## B. The Path They Pursue – v. 11-12

Notice that their intention is to murder and destroy. **"let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit..."** The intent is very clear, they want to kill and rob from the unsuspecting. He warns his son not to follow after those who want you to do the same thing no matter how big the spoil will be. There promises are pie in the sky. The paraphrase in The Message says **"Let's beat up some old man and rob some old woman."** *It reminds me of the time my Great-grandmother was walking to the market as she always did when one day some teen came up from behind her, knocked her down and stole her purse.*

The way of sin is like water. It only travels downhill. Willful sin always leads to another willful sin greater than the first. The thrill from doing it no longer carries the same excitement, so they have to do something bigger and worse to get the same pleasure. We can be dazzled by the allurements of quick riches or think that the world is ours as we grab for that illusive carrot they dangle in front of us, but it's always just out of reach and so we do more, never realizing that our end is the same as theirs if we continue to follow them. **"There's a way that seems right but the end is death."** (Proverbs 14:12)

The temptation is there for all of us. It's not just a warning for the young. There's the allurements of getting better grades on a test by cheating so we can get that scholarship. There's the pressure to disrespect and defy parents. There's the pressure to become part of a gang. There's the pressure to use drugs. There's the pressure for immorality. There's the pressure for theft. For adults it can be any of those plus things like cheating to get ahead at work to get that promotion. Cheating on income taxes.

Taking office supplies from the office – after all, the overtime you put in that you don't get paid for, you deserve to take some of this stuff.

The path these sinners take is a slippery slope down to destruction, but the pressure is there, and the pressure is relentless.

Matthew Henry wrote that “the way of sin is downhill; men not only cannot stop themselves, but, the longer they continue in it, the faster they run, and they make haste in it, as if they were afraid they should not do mischief enough and were resolved to lose no time.” They run swiftly after evil.

That is the path of the sinner - to do evil and to use you in the process.

Now we see in **verses 13-14** the plunder they pursue.

### C. The Plunder They Pursue – v. 13-14

They paint a dazzling and impressive picture of what will be gained for their activity. They want something for nothing. They make others suffer while they prosper and it doesn't bother their conscience one bit. The lure is all the treasure they will get from their illegal enterprise. They are motivated by greed. Ignoring the command not to covet they pursue after their plunder with lust filled endeavor. His is a bold invitation to the innocent to join in this pursuit of doing wrong, of sinning. It is the wrong path to take for the person who would be wise to follow the advice of **vs. 7** and fear the Lord. But the pressure is intense and relentless.

Gary Larson who was the creator of the Far Side cartoon, had a knack for drawing the obvious. He illustrated the idea of peer pressure with a cartoon depicting a group of scientists all gathered around one scientist who was holding a test tube that was spewing steam. The scientist in the middle of the group was normal looking, while the rest of them were quite grotesque in appearance – huge eyes, hideous noses, monstrous lips, and elongated faces.

They were pressuring the normal guy to drink from the test tube. The caption read “Laboratory peer pressure.”

The young and naïve will follow these sinners because they aren't told the consequences of what will happen if they go down that path. The wicked paints such a beautiful picture of what will be gained that it's hard to refuse. They leave out the risk that is involved. If we could see how ugly sin is and how much it distorts our true beauty, we would stay away from what they are asking us to do. The truth is we don't really know how ugly it is. The truth is we don't really know the full power of God's wrath that was poured out on His Son, our sacrifice because of our sin. If we knew how much it must hurt God when we choose to follow after sin because it looks good, when we justify it by saying that no one will get hurt or no one will know, we forget how it affects God, and how it affects us and how much Christ endured on the cross for us. If we really knew it would compel us to stay away from the wicked and the path they have chosen and we would flee from it as fast as we could.

That's the advice Paul gave Timothy. **“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (II Timothy 2:22)**

You may be here and are facing the enticement of others to do stuff that is wrong, even though it sounds good. It doesn't matter what profit or enjoyment they say will be yours if you throw your lot in with them. Don't consent to follow them. Paul says “RUN FROM THEM.” Today if you are facing pressure from others to give in and do things you know are wrong, today is a day you can heed the advice of Solomon and choose not to go down that path any more. Choose to tell them no. Today is a day you can be free from the trap that awaits those who go down this path. Have a plan to say no before they come and lure you away.

Stolen goods are never sweet.

This is an urgent warning not to follow the path of those who would entice you to do wrong. Solomon identifies their prey, he identifies their path, and he identifies their plunder. Now in **verses 15-19** we will consider the walk of evil doers.

## II. THE WALK OF EVIL DOERS – v. 15-19

In **verses 15-16** we see their purpose is revealed.

### A. Their Purpose Is Revealed – v. 15-16

Solomon is attempting to warn his son not to go down the path of this evil doer. He warns of the dangers because they rush to do sin, their intent is to shed blood. It's an effort to keep his son from the same path, from doing the same thing. That they go quickly to commit this sin implies boldness, no restraint, or no shame in their actions.

The same advice is offered by the Psalmist in **Psalms 1**. There is a progression in their association with those who are bent on evil. To choose a path that pleases God is a path of righteousness that results in being happy and joyful because you harbor no guilt or shame. It is a path that is aided by consideration and meditation of God's Word. Because of your desire in God's Word, you are then like a tree planted whose roots run deep and that provide stability and strength in storms. Not so with the sinner. You are happy if you do not walk in the ways of the ungodly. **"To walk in"** refers to how we order our life. We are happy if we do not order our lives by the counsel or advice of the wicked. We will be happy if we do not stand in their presence to seek advice from those for whom sin is a habitual way of life. We are happy if we don't settle ourselves in their presence by sitting and making plans with them. They ridicule God and His commands. That they are called sinners again refers to someone who has missed the mark of God's holy standard.

To illustrate this we see the example of Lot who settled into a town that was known for its immorality. We find him sitting in the gate as a prominent citizen. John gives this advice.

**I John 2:15-16** **"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him, for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world."**

**Who do you love today? Are others tempting you, pressuring you to love the things of the world or are others urging you to love the Lord?** We can't serve two masters. It is in this passage that we see as one author wrote **"the world that is entirely hostile to God and is always a seductive influence which Christians should continually resist."** It is a world that competes for the affections of the Christian. The reason the world is incompatible with love for God is that all the things the world offers do not come from God but comes from the world. It excludes God from its values. It wants nothing to do with God. Its cravings and lustful desires are always sinful. The lust of the eyes speaks to man's covetous nature, wanting what does not belong to us. The boasting of what man has and does refers to the pride that wells up in a man.

Perhaps the best example in Scripture of someone who chose to avoid following a path of sin, who did not give in to the enticement of someone bent on doing evil is Joseph.

### **Genesis 39:1ff**

**Verse 7** states that she took notice of him, that he was a good looking young man. She enticed him to sin by committing adultery. In her position she could have virtually anything she wanted, including an act of immorality. Joseph refused her continuous efforts until he was left with only one rational action. When confronted with her enticements he ran in the opposite direction. **As one author noted**

“he may have lost his coat, but he kept his character.”

Those whom Solomon warns against have only one purpose – to continually commit evil and they rush to do it, they’re eager to do it. **But what then is the plight of someone who attempts to lure the young and naïve away? What picture does Solomon paint for his son in an effort to keep him from following the path and ways of the wicked?**

Notice from **verses 17-19** that their plight is revealed.

### **B. Their Plight Is Revealed – v. 17-19**

While the sinner paints a picture of glamour, Solomon paints an entirely different picture. In **verse 16** he describes their activities as sin. They have committed actions that are egregious to the Lord. Their actions miss the mark of God’s holiness. He uses the imagery of someone spreading out a net to catch birds, only instead of trapping birds they end up caught in their own trap. Solomon is showing them that they are really less intelligent than birds who know enough to fly away when they see someone spreading out a net. **Isaiah 17:13-14** clearly depict the outcome of those who pursue ill-gotten gain. **“Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when He rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.”**

Solomon is telling his son not to be so foolish to run with a crowd who gets caught in the trap they set for someone else. The end result is death and destruction. Anyone who follows them will bear the same consequences. In our vernacular we would say: **“Crime doesn’t pay.”** They can promise all they want and for a time it might seem like nothing is ever going to happen to them, that this

kind of life is the way to go. Solomon says don’t be fooled, because it will catch up with you sooner or later, the end is destruction. Broad and easy is that highway that leads to destruction. Narrow and difficult is the path that leads to right living. Our prayer should be that of the Lord when He taught His disciples to pray in **Matthew 6:13** when He said **“but deliver us from evil.”**

Paul reminds the **Romans** not to be conformed to the mold of the world, but instead by transformed by the renewing of the mind (**12:2**). The invitation of the sinner is come, but the end is death. There is another invitation given in **Revelation 22:17**. It also is an invitation to come, but it is an invitation to come to a place of eternal life.

We have noted the warning against evil doers and we have considered the walk of evil doers. In closing consider the wisdom to avoid evil doers.

### **III. THE WISDOM TO AVOID EVIL DOERS**

We have already considered briefly the exhortation from **Romans 12:2** not to be molded after the pattern of the world. We have considered from **I John 2:15-16** that we shouldn’t love the world or the things that are the world. We also pondered for a moment **II Timothy 2:22** and **Psalms 1** that encourages us to run away from those who would tempt us. For a few more moments let’s consider some pointers that will help us choose wisely so that we will avoid the allurements of those who would seek to take us down the road of destruction. These aren’t in any particular order of importance. Identify the areas where you struggle and purpose in your heart through the help of God’s Spirit to resist them and stay strong.

It takes courage to stand alone in what you believe. When you are asked to compromise your convictions and values and beliefs, count it an honor to stand alone.

Decide ahead of time what your answer will be.

## A. Scripture Memorization

**Joshua 1:8**

**Psalms 119:9, 11**

It's important to hide God's Word in your heart. They become the tools by which you can defeat the enemy and gain victory over temptation. If there's an area you struggle in, memorize verses that can be in your quiver to use against the temptation. Along with meditation should be application, obedience to what it is asking us to do or not do.

## B. Seek Support

By that I mean have someone you can go to when faced with temptation, someone with whom you can be accountable, someone who can encourage you in your walk of faith to stand strong, who will pray for you and with you.

**Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."**

**Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12 "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."**

Have someone to be accountable to, someone who can help us say no when tempters come .

## C. Be Strong in the Lord

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

**How do we do that?** We do it by daily putting on the armor of God so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil. Put it all on to vanquish the foe. And when you have put it on, pray, **"pray in the Spirit on all occasions"** so that He will help you stand firm.

## D. Have a Strong Faith

**Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God, must believe that He is and that He is rewards those who diligently seek Him."**

Always trust God to lead you He will never lead you to do wrong. **(Proverbs 3:5-6)**

## E. Stand Firm

**I Corinthians 16:13 "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."**

**Philippians 4:1 "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."**

Roman soldiers would put spikes through the sole of their shoes to help them stand their ground during a battle. Have a faith that is strong otherwise if you don't believe strongly in anything you'll fall for everything.

There is a direct correlation between standing strong and Scripture memorization.

## F. Surge Forward

**Philippians 3:12-14 "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."**

Great reward awaits those who choose to follow Christ rather than following evil doers filling their lust for instant gratification.

Scripture is filled with sound advice to help us avoid the pitfalls of peer pressure and the temptation to do wrong. We would do well to heed the advice given by Solomon and choose wisely those who would seek to influence us. **What path are you on today?** A person who fears God will listen to and follow the advice Solomon offers to his son. A fool will reject it and follows the path of sinners, a path that leads to destruction. They are the ones who openly reject God's commands. **Will you succumb to the pitfalls of peer pressure or will you stay away?** One way leads to death, one way leads to life.