

Watch 5 minutes of news on any given day now and you'll be left shaking your head for the next hour. What a world we're living in! Most alarming of all are the segments covering those horrific and sad stories involving kids. It's scary. It's chills-down-the-back scary. Too many teens wrapped up in something or other and making wrong choices. I can tell you that we stand at our front door every morning to see both our teenagers off to school, and as they drive away, we let out a resigned sigh and mumble, "God be with them." I mean, what else can we do? Once we think we've covered all the bases, what else is there to do other than to leave them in God's hands?

We try to stay on top of things, you know. Particularly who and what surrounds them. It is hard sometimes though to keep track of my children's friends, for example. Who's who in their wide circle of peers, know what I mean? But it's so important that we do exactly that — keep track. Because peer pressure, both positive and negative, is ever so present in their lives. We ourselves dealt with it as teens, and even now as well adjusted grownups, we still sometimes feel the desire to measure up to our peers. Imagine what it's like for our kids these days. From experience, we know the lasting effects these influences can have. That's why I think it is crucial that we not only instill in them the basics of right and wrong, but that we help them build their self-confidence to better equip them to make wise choices in these situations of push-and-pull between the values we teach them and those from outside forces. Because once they leave the protective shield of our homes, it seems they are fair game. It is a mistake to see and understand what goes on in the world of teens nowadays and assume that our own children won't be touched. No family is immune.

So I talk to my kids all the time about the importance of surrounding themselves with good people. No matter the color, religion, gender, etc., just good people. Getting involved with a good peer group can play a principal role in the shaping of their personality, and lead them to make the right choices in life. We grownups already know that making the right choices is what it's all about. But helping our children understand that every choice they make today

will create circumstances, and that these will affect the choices that will be available to them in the future, is by no means an easy task. But at their age most of them are far from being able to read people, and are just finding out what a tangled web us humans weave. I have already seen both of mine struggle with friendships that have gone sour. I've explained to them that people are "like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get." That sometimes some of these events may leave them thinking that it ought to be illegal to practice friendship without a license. But that these experiences, while introducing them to jealousy, envy, and judgment, for instance, can also teach them about compassion, trust, and loyalty. And through these trial and error phases, they will undoubtedly, hopefully, connect with a lot of good souls.

Which reminds me of a scripture passage that talks about friendship. Jesus is preaching in a very crowded place. Four men bring their paralyzed friend to see Jesus, but they can't get to Him because of the crowd, so they open a hole in the roof and lower their friend to Jesus. Jesus is moved by their faith and forgives the man's sins and heals him. Okay, who wouldn't want to have friends like those? The type of friend who leads you to the Lord; the type of friend who recognizes your paralysis — your anxieties, regrets, fears, sorrows, mistakes — who, even when you're content to stay in your own little rut, wants to help you and see you healed. This is the kind of friend I try to persuade my kids to be, in the hopes that in leading by example, they can attract the positive I know this world does have to offer them. May God be with them, and all your kids.

P.S. I want to give thanks to those friends who have recognized my paralysis and have consistently led me to the Lord. I am forever grateful. And I pray that He grants me the opportunity to be that kind of friend for another.

Life is a theater…invite your audience carefully. Not everyone is holy enough and healthy enough to have a FRONT ROW seat in our lives. There are some people in your life that need to be loved from a distance. It's amazing what you can accomplish when you let go, or at least minimize your time with draining, negative, incompatible, "not going anywhere" relationships/friendships/fellowships! Observe the relationships around you. Pay attention to: which ones lift and which ones lean? Which ones encourage and which ones discourage? Which ones always have "drama" or

don’t really understand, know and appreciate you and the gift that lies within you? The more you seek God and the things of God, the more you seek quality; the more that you seek not just the hand of God but the face of God, the more you seek things honorable; the more you seek growth, peace of mind, love and truth around you, the easier it will become for you to decide who gets to sit in the FRONT ROW and who should be moved to the balcony of your life. You cannot change the people around you… but you can change the people you are around! Ask God for wisdom and discernment and choose wisely the people who sit in the FRONT ROW of your life!

~ Unknown

“A friend is one who strengthens you with prayers, blesses you with love and encourages you with hope.”

~ Unknown

“A mirror reflects a man’s face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses.”

~ Proverbs 27:19“Friends are friends forever, if the Lord is the Lord of them.”

~ Michael W Smith

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