

A Different Perspective
Don't Lose Heart
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When Others Pull Us Down

You know, one of the toughest things in life to deal with, I think, is when other people try and pull us down. I remember when I was an officer in the army we used to joke about the comments that officers would write on our annual reports. One of those jokes was, "This officer sets low standards and fails to achieve them". We all know people like that. And when we have one or two of those in our lives, particularly if they are close to us at work or at home, it's tough.

Maybe we start off with all these good intentions of living a good life and doing the right thing and doing our best. Whatever. But these people want to drag us down. Down to the lowest common denominator. Down to their level. I've been in that place and after a while you start thinking 'Maybe there's something wrong with me. Maybe it's me who's going nuts here'.

I want to share this story with you. Recently I was in a book store with my 16 year old daughter Melissa. She is a great kid. Great young woman I should say. They watch so much TV and internet these days, we decided she needed to spend some time reading as well. And so Jacqui and I went into the bookstore with her to look around and we left her there for a while we did some other shopping.

And we came back. And she'd chosen some books, the ones that all her friends were reading. And I had a look at a few these. You know how you look at the back what the book is about. I tell you, they were nothing short of pornography for teenage girls. And they were in the teenage girls section of the bookstore.

Now, this is a tough position for me. Because on the one hand I'm encouraging her to get away from the television and get away from the internet and read; but on the other I had to say 'No' to these ones. Well, you know the position she's in. She's 16 so she says, 'But all my friends are reading these books and I go to a Christian school so what's the matter?' As a teenager, I don't know how it was for you, but for me peer group was really, really important. And that's normal. So I had the opportunity for a discussion and we talked about it.

I said to her, I'm not afraid of her engaging with the issues of sexuality. I mean, some of those things have to be worked through at this age. But what I couldn't allow her to do, is to read stuff that basically said and reinforced the world view that teenage sex outside marriage is normal. And that's what these books were about. So what about the peer group thing? That was the tough one. The discussion was really around the fact that just because other people do something, in fact, just because most other people do something doesn't make it right. We ended up choosing a book called "Sold", which was about a

young girl in the developing world who was sold into slavery and into prostitution. So in reading this book Melissa was still confronting those issues.

I wanted her to know that I trusted. But this book was both gritty and edifying. Now this isn't just something that teenagers go through. It's something that adults have to deal with too. Peer group pressure. Everyone does this or everyone does that. You know, a lot of men I used to hang around with in my consulting firm – an attractive woman would walk past and they would all leer at her and they'd make comments.

You know something, when I married my wife, Jacqui, I said to her, 'My vow to her was I've set myself apart for you and for you alone'. And just because all these other guys do it, doesn't make it right, and it's not something I should be doing.

I used to be the don of dirty jokes in my consulting firm and when I came to Christ I had to step back from that. And there was derision, there was, 'Oh well, Berni's got religion'. And when you're under that sort of pressure, it can really make you lose heart.

I had an email from a young woman not so long ago. She's the only Christian in her family and she really felt persecuted by the rest of her family at home. So it is easy to lose heart.

Let's put that into perspective today. The Apostle Paul had a huge conversion and turnaround a couple of thousand years ago. He was a Jewish religious leader who went from persecuting Christians and having them beaten and locked up to writing almost half of the books of the New Testament.

Now don't you reckon his peer group would have given him some curry. And this is what He writes in the New Testament. One of the letters he wrote, Galatians. You can read it in chapter 1 verse 10. He says this:

"Am I now seeking human approval or God's approval, or am I trying to please people. If I was still trying to please people I wouldn't be a servant of Christ."

At some point we need to decide whether we're going to be God pleasers or people pleasers. And to some extent that's the discussion Melissa and I had about that book she was looking at. It was a great learning time. The question is, Do you believe in Jesus? Because at the end of the day, we have to live out that faith. My experience is that everybody around us is not always going to be overjoyed with the fact that we've laid our lives down for Christ. It's hard. Jesus said, '*They persecuted me so one thing's for sure they're going to do the same to you.*'

And when we come up higher; when we start living a life that's a good life; a life that glorifies God; a life that's wholesome and real and genuine and good; we might lose some friends. Some people might poke fun at us. They'll want to laugh. But we have to decide. We have to ask ourselves am I prepared to

stand completely alone amidst the whole of this earth for the sake of Jesus Christ. Whatever the pain, whatever the suffering, whatever rejection, whatever derision, whatever the persecution.

Now it's probably not going to be like that every day, although, depending on where you live, it may well be. But this is an important decision. It's a decision to put my faith and my hope in Jesus Christ. And for me, like Paul, it was a huge step because I came from a parallel universe. But I decided this is who I am. Am I seeking human approval or God's approval. Well, I tell you, if I was still pleasing people I wouldn't be a servant of Jesus Christ.

I decided I am born again; I'm a new person. Jesus said, 'You cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless you are born again'. So this is not some optional extra. This is taking a big change in direction away from all that rubbish we know is wrong and towards God and saying, 'You're my Lord, I'm going to walk Your way'. And when I decided 'This is who I am', some people accepted me, others rejected me. It was tough but it's the way it is.

Now I haven't become some religious nutter, but at the same time I'm different. I have an allegiance to Christ, I have faith in Him. And there are some things that are right and there are some things that are wrong and that's it. When we make that decision and grow in it, what happens is, we become mature and lacking in nothing. And we can walk into the world with a genuine, and a kind confidence and share this Jesus with those who don't know Him yet.

When we put our faith in Him, we don't have to lose heart anymore. We don't have to worry about the fact that some people will reject us, or persecute us, or laugh at us. If we don't make this clear decision, 'Am I a God pleaser or a people pleaser?' we are going to continually wax and wane between the two: from God pleaser to people pleaser, from God pleaser to people pleaser. And ultimately you can't live like that, ultimately you end up losing heart.