

## The Christian To-Do List: Surround Yourself with Mission-Driven People

When asked what he would print on a billboard if he had the chance, author and podcaster Tim Ferriss chose: *"You are the average of the five people you most associate with."*

The rule suggests that the five people you spend the most time with shape who you are. It borrows from the law of averages, which is the theory that "the result of any given situation will be the average of all outcomes." We might interact with many people, but the few who are closest to us have the greatest impact on our way of thinking and our decisions.

### Strength in Numbers

One of the deepest human desires is to belong. We see this in the fact that humans have, since the beginning, belonged to tribes. Very rarely do we see people who truly live alone. Even then, to some extent they are reliant and therefore influenced by some group, even if it's not constant contact.

We find our identity in these groups, these associations. We pick up mannerisms, we find purpose, we work together to do bold things...for good or for worse.

#### Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

9Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

These attachments start from the moment we're born. They begin in the most intimate association: family.

### Habits

The habits and social norms we pick up from our surroundings as a child dictate much of what our lives look like going forward.

First of all, what are habits?

*A recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior that is acquired through frequent repetition.  
An established disposition of the mind or character.*

Why are habits important?

They are our baseline mentality. The actions and thoughts we have that underlie our entire being. What we allow to make up our habits ultimately decide our personality and our interaction with the people around us and with God.

How many of you have noticed habits and behaviors that are similar to your parents? Do you do anything for a reason that you just don't understand? You've just "always done it that way?" There's a good chance those habits have been embedded since childhood.

*"We don't choose our earliest habits, we imitate them. We follow the script handed down by our friends and family, our church or school, our local community and society at large. Each of these cultures and groups comes with its own set of expectations and standards – when to celebrate, how much money to spend on your child's birthday party. In many ways, these social norms are the invisible rules that guide your behavior each day. You're always keeping them in mind, even if they are not at the top of your mind. Often you follow the habits of your culture without thinking, without questioning, and sometimes without remembering."*

- James Clear, *Atomic Habits*

Think about behaviors in your family, or from your past. Do you need to embrace them or eliminate them? You don't have much control over what was programmed early on.

This is just to underscore the power of association.

Understanding where some of your thoughts come from can greatly help in identifying the behaviors you need to get rid of or double down on to pass down to your kids.

Behaviors are attractive when they help us "fit in". We follow the habits of 3 groups in particular: 1) The close 2) The many 3) The powerful

While we can't do much about the second and third groups, we can exercise control over the first.

*"One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior."* - James Clear, *Atomic Habits*

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## **Bad Company**

It seems like there are more admonitions about joining groups and cultures that are antagonistic to our faith, than positive examples.

### **1 Corinthians 15:33**

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

### **Proverbs 13:20**

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,  
but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

### **2 Corinthians 6:14**

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

### **Psalm 26:3-5**

For your steadfast love is before my eyes,  
and I walk in your faithfulness.  
4I do not sit with men of falsehood,  
nor do I consort with hypocrites.  
5I hate the assembly of evildoers,  
and I will not sit with the wicked.

I heard an interesting quote at the Westside church in Searcy. An older man was teaching and asked "Why is it that we say our gloves get muddy and not that the mud gets glovey?"

There are times when it seems you aren't the influencer, only the influenced.

Why is it so much easier to get dirty than to be clean?

It's the same way in the physical sense as it is the spiritual. "Bad company ruins/corrupts good morals."

I had a period of time that I changed friend groups around 5th or 6th grade. These kids taught me a ton of new words...and many of them are words I still fight to not use today.. After basically an intervention from my former friends, I finally got back to them and found a better path, but it wasn't without its continual effects, and I can't say that I wasn't a negative influence even after that. Again, mud and glove.

Anybody have stories you want to share? Any lessons learned through the wrong associations?

## **Mission Driven Partnerships**

### **Psalm 119:63**

63 I am a companion of all who fear you,  
of those who keep your precepts.

I enjoy listening to former special forces operators - SEALs, Rangers, Jocko Willink, Tim Kennedy, etc. Jack Carr, a former Navy SEAL, is one of my favorite fiction authors. I think a large part of that is because they describe kinships with their fellow teammates that run incredibly deep. There is a respect in that community that is hard to find anywhere else.

Not only are these friendships and connections forged by the heat of battle, they're built around the concept of mission. They have an objective - actually a series of objectives - that they are constantly sent out to accomplish together.

Through incredibly harsh environments, conditions and stress, these operators are able to carry out some of the most daunting feats that you'd almost think were impossible. How? Because of a trust and reliance on each other. They know the person on their right and on their left have their back and are striving for the same goal.

It's important to be associated with people who share the same mission, the same objective. How much easier is it to live your life when the people around you have the same goal? Remember the quote from earlier:

*"One of the most effective things you can do to build better habits is to join a culture where your desired behavior is the normal behavior."*

What type of behavior do you desire? Be specific with yourself.

We are to be constantly "looking upwards," as Jordan Peterson would say. We're trying to improve ourselves, not just in the earthly sense, but in our spiritual walk toward God.

Not everyone will share that goal. Our best bet is to find a "**reciprocal arrangement.**" It's not easy to surround yourself with people who have the same upward goal. Many folks are content to keep the status quo, or worse, wallow in the bad choices that they continue to make.

That's not to say we can't reach a helping hand to people. I think it's quite obvious from scripture that we are to help lift people into better circumstances and ultimately a relationship with God. But there is a difference in the people you're trying to help and the people you surround yourself with to draw strength.

One of the major differences in these relationships is that people who have that upward looking goal want you to be better and will call you out when you're not meeting that mark. It's so easy in life to listen to people who just want us to stay as we are or to debase ourselves to come to their level. It's not easy to be corrected and made sharper.

#### **Ecclesiastes 7:5**

It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

#### **Proverbs 13:20**

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

*"Don't think that it is easier to surround yourself with good healthy people than with bad unhealthy people. It's not. A good, healthy person is an ideal. It requires strength and daring to stand up near such a person. Have some humility. Have some courage. Use your judgment, and protect yourself from too-uncritical compassion and pity. Make friends with people who want the best for you."*

- Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life*

## Discerning Who We Follow

Beyond those who are in our close social circles, it's amazing how much influence complete strangers can have over us. We have to be very discerning of the voices that we listen to. All we have to do is open our social media app of preference to hear voices and thoughts from any and everyone. Thought they may be strangers, they are kept close through technology.

How many of you follow certain accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter and actively use that information?

How many of you have followed accounts that seemed to have good information that turned out to be total frauds in the end?

Even Paul speaks to that about what he called "super-apostles" - doing that in a very sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek sort of way.

### **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

If even the servants of Satan disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, what does that tell us about our need to be wary of our companionships and influences?

We need to continually vet our associations. Not in some dramatic way, but even just keeping an open dialog and not being afraid to challenge our friends is helpful.

Again, *"You are the average of the five people you most associate with."*

But you are also influencing and adding to the average of someone else's life. Right now, you will be your kids' greatest influence and skewing that average in their lives.

What types of people are influencing your life that, in return, influence your kids?

For me, that's a fascinating question and something I'm trying to keep in mind everyday.