

## A Faithful and Missional Life

Living the Christian life can be a great challenge. For some it seems like an almost impossible task. Here's what I mean ... the Bible encourages us to be careful about the company we keep; for example, in 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul even quoted an old Greek poet who wrote: **"Bad company corrupts good character."** Yet, at the same time we're called to seek out those who are living apart from Christ and somehow share the Gospel with them. How can we do both? That shows the difficulty and the challenge of the Christian life, that's for sure. How might the Bible help us understand this?

Just looking at the passage itself, the point being made is not whether to have non-Christian friends but to make sure that we aren't participating in any sinful activity because of our friendships. So, the Bible doesn't call us to a total separation from the world. In fact, we, as Christians, are to engage the world, to get to know and serve our neighbors whether Christian or not. We're to be **in** the world, not **of** the world. Think about it, none of us would have been saved if God waited for us to be good enough or religious enough to receive Him.

The most important thing for a Christian is to be connected to Jesus Christ through His gifts of Word and sacrament and to be connected to a body of believers for fellowship, prayer, and encouragement. Even as Christians, you were never meant to be alone. If you were to cut yourself off from God's gifts and from the company of fellow Christians, you're, in fact, cutting yourself off from the very things that God designed to strengthen and sustain your faith. So, if your group of friends is solely non-believers and the activities that you share with them cause you to start missing church or to not read your Bible, that is like deliberately forgetting your first love. That's what Paul is talking about in the passage as well. He points out that he engaged some pretty rowdy people in Ephesus, but he never forgot who he was in Christ. In fact, he engaged them in order to share the Gospel with them.

That's the second point. As we befriend and care about people that God brings into our lives, we need to learn to be ourselves with them. That doesn't always mean we have to be overtly Christian at every moment, but we need to let people see us as we are, believers in Jesus who live a life to honor Him and serve others in His Name.

It's been said people don't care what you know until they know that you care ... it summarizes, also, the way that Christ served us and brought us to faith. Remember in Romans 5 where it says, **"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** He served, saved, and sought us first. Again, we need to maintain our connection to Him to fellow believers for the sake of our service to those who don't know Jesus as their Savior.

We can make sure to do both by keeping it simple. Make sure that you have a disciplined approach to reading the Bible, going to church; keeping connected to the things that keep you connected to Jesus, and then be open to the people that God brings into your life. Be the kind of person that is gracious to all those you meet and be interested in those He brings to you, that should give you plenty of opportunity to keep the tension of building a variety of friendships,

without falling into the trap of being friends with those whose life and lifestyle disconnects you from Jesus.

Maybe another way of saying that would be "If you find your friendships are starting to pull you away from the things of God and the people of God, something's out of balance somewhere." That's a good way to think about a lot of things ... our friendships, our work, and even our leisure.

At the same time the other extreme can be a problem as well. That is, when all our friends are Christian, when you're totally within that Christian bubble. That's a life out of balance too, because being a Christian means that, yes, you enjoy the fellowship of the found; but with the same openness of Jesus to those who are lost like you were. So to not have that openness to those who don't believe, it dishonors the spirit of those who shared Christ with you, even the spirit of Christ the Savior who came for all. I just think that being more intentional to those God brings into your life, is one great way of letting Him keep one's openness to new friends and neighbors as well as being connected to Christ and His Church.

It is especially important when we see someone at church we don't know ... perhaps they are a visitor here for the first time. You know, we only have **one chance** to make a **first impression!!**

That's the View from Here.

Pastor Bill Winter