

FROM THE CHAPLAINCY



Dear Woodrose Parents

We recently came across an article that we want to share with you in this month's newsletter. As parents, you want the best for their children. You keep your children away from harm. You want your children to grow strong and healthy. You want to provide them with an environment conducive for their academic, character, spiritual and social development. You have their future well planned on your mind. However, there are factors that could influence your children in a negative way. Some of these factors can be managed by you while others are beyond your control.

The article that follows is about the influence friends have on your children. Some friends are forces for what is good while others for evil. That is why, it is important for you parents to get to know not only the friends of your children but also their background: their parents, their school, their lifestyle, their preferences as all of these bear on the character of each person. You need to be watchful and vigilant.

BY GREG TRIMBLE

The Most Dangerous Temptation That Faces Our Youth

Imagine your beaming little boy or energetic little girl. You're watching them grow and develop year after year and you wish that time would stand still. "Stop growing..." is a phrase you've almost certainly told your child at some point in time in their young life.

The years go by and you see this innocent and inquisitive child learn new things. You know they're going to be exposed to some filthy things in their life. But right now, you see the light in their eyes and the purity in their spirit and you hope in some miraculous way that they might avoid the storm of a secular world that is barreling toward them.

So, sometimes proactively, sometimes reactively, we plead with them to avoid porn, to be respectful of their own bodies and the bodies of others, to stay away from alcohol and drugs, to take a pass on vaping, to keep their clothes on, to keep their language clean, and to learn a good strong work ethic.

We beg them to find joy in the gospel, to attend wholesome activities, to respect adults, to read their scriptures, and to listen to good music. We tell them to get off their phones, to not be envious of others, and to not worry about what others think of them. And we hope that it'll be enough.

We know from experience how real and serious these temptations are going to be for any child that grows up in our day.

But sadly, for many parents, they end up needing to ask themselves... "What went wrong with little Johnny?"

"Where did we go wrong?"

"Where did he go wrong?"

We point the finger at many things... but we often overlook the catalyst for what is most responsible for draining the light out of little Johnny's soul:

His friends.

None of those previously mentioned pitfalls and temptations can approach the monumental decision making that takes place when choosing our friends.

For me, almost every single not-so-holy thing that I was exposed to in my youth came by way of my friends. And if you think back into your past, you'll likely come to the same conclusion.

It's taken me over 20 years to truly comprehend the importance of a single line that fell from the lips of my stake patriarch as he pronounced a blessing upon my head as an ignorant 20 year old who was trying to get his life together to go on a mission. "Now be careful Gregory..." this wise old man said. "Choose your friends wisely."

In the 20 years since then, I've been able to see young kids go through the entire cycle of childhood to adulthood. Some have turned out great. Others are in a world of sadness and sorrow. The universal common denominator that dictated the course of their lives came down to the people they chose to hang out with on a consistent basis. A group of friends, sports teammates, a girlfriend or boyfriend. The choice with whom to associate with was always the precursor to the consequences that followed. Good and bad.

I was always taught to be a leader and not a follower. But I don't care how strong of a leader you think you are, how spiritual you think you are, how resolute in your beliefs you think you are... no one, and I mean no one is strong enough to withstand the daily influences of the people you hang around the most.

But you say, "Well... Christ hung around with the worst of sinners." That's just not true. Christ loved the worst sinners and he surely went to teach them and to minister to them. But if you think he hung out night after night with Barabbas and his other buddies in some Judean brothel in the hopes he could be a "good example" on them, then you've got it all wrong.

You don't have to shun people who don't align with your values, but you do need to shun repeated interactions with them if they so choose to remain in their filthiness. I'm not being judgey here. There is in fact filthiness in this world that should be avoided like the plague. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat, but strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." You can bet that very few people went the way of destruction alone, and you can also be certain that very few people found that straight gate all by themselves either.

It's also likely that when Lehi had his dream wherein he saw people drifting toward that great and spacious building, it was the call of their so called "friends" that beckoned them to risk a trip through the mist of darkness to join them in all of their pseudo glory, happiness, and fun.

On the other side of the spectrum, it was also likely that Lehi would have seen people linking arms and pulling each-other toward that rod of iron until they could grab hold of it themselves. That's what good friends do. But bad friends... well... they're looking for someone to participate in their shame. If you assimilate, somehow it makes them feel better about themselves.

The truth is that we generally go in the direction that our closest friends go. Almost as a universal rule, we're the sum total of the five people we hang around the most.

We know that porn, and drugs, and all that other stuff is dangerous. Sure it is. It will most certainly drag you down to the depths of sorrow and guilt. But it wouldn't even be a thing to you if you weren't exposed to it in the first place or if you ran with people who avoided that stuff like the plague. The friends you choose are the catalyst to your own happiness or destruction.

Friends, especially in your youth, have a more powerful influence over you than anything else. No kid just goes out and seeks after porn on his own or on a whim. No kid goes out and seeks to fill his lungs with dangerous carcinogens. No kid seeks to drink a beverage that is notorious for being so disgusting that people need to "acquire the taste." They are usually "introduced" into these situations by their friends, and in most cases blind-sided into making a poor decision that could lead into a habit or an addiction.

In the days when I was growing up, how many 13 year olds were innocently sent with a friend to have a "spend the night party" at a house where the parents allowed their kids unfiltered access to late night HBO, Showtime or Cinemax? But in the days we live in now, how many 10, 11, and 12 year olds can show one of their friends unforgettable animalistic and pornographic videos in just a few taps of their smartphone.

To avoid all of that together, the key is to help the youth discern how to choose their friends. The friends they choose will likely dictate the path they'll go down in life. Most of the emotional, mental, and spiritual pain associated with this generation will be a direct result of the friends they'll choose.

Social media is not the culprit. Traditional media in general is not the culprit. Music is not the culprit. Yes, those outlets can be horrible, immoral, and soul crushing. But the real culprit lies in the quality of the friends we choose both within the media and in real life. Choose good friends on social media and you'll have a good feed. Choose good friends in real life and you'll probably stay away from bad movies, TV shows, music.

If you listen to a certain musician all day and all night, that musician will become one of your closest friends and mentors. If you watch hours and hours of a filthy reality show, those actors and actresses also become your closest friends. You start to talk like them, think like them, and act like them.

Without a doubt, the future of our children's souls and the integrity of their future family depends on it. It is, to me, the greatest temptation that the youth will ever face.

Everyone wants a friend. The temptation will be to gravitate toward the people who are fun and exciting. But if you do anything in this life, do what my stake patriarch begged me to do and "Choose your friends wisely."

It will make all the difference in your life.