



## How Do I Overcome Peer Pressure?

**Exodus 23:2: (NASB) *You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice.***

Peer pressure. When we say those words we typically think about teenagers, school and bad decisions, and those thoughts are accurate. Young people face inordinate amounts of peer pressure on a regular basis and its effects can be devastating! Here's the thing; adults are also subject to peer pressure, and its place in our lives and its effect on our lives is far greater than we might anticipate. For the sake of not only our young people but for our own sake as well, what do we do about it? How do we recognize, address, and deal with the pressures of life that press us into compromised circumstances and bad decisions? Even more importantly, how do we reverse the process and create an environment in which positive, righteous and loving peer pressure is the order of the day?

**God addressed peer pressure from the very beginning of the nation of Israel's independence:** Exodus 23:1-3,6-7: *You shall not follow the masses in doing evil* - this is the core of peer pressure - feeling like you have to follow even though you know it is going down the wrong road.

**Pressure Point:** Following along with the flow of many is a natural and potentially harmful action.

*You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute* - when someone who is unfortunate in their life circumstances, someone poor, is in a dispute, they should be treated equally to the other individual. You do not bend justice to their favor just because they are poor. Sometimes our feelings are so strong, they override our better sense.

**Pressure Point:** Our attachment to helping the needy can pervert our sense of appropriate action.

**Pressure Relief Valve:** Be upright clear and fair in your thinking and actions, even if your feelings may be guiding you in a different way.

**While this is a foundation principle, it is easier said than done:** Galatians 2:11-14: (NASB) When certain distinguished Jews came along and felt the Law still had a place in Christianity, Peter succumbed to deserting people without a Jewish background. Status was his downfall.

**Pressure Point:** Peter caved in to the presence of those who had been dignified Jews under the Law

Because Peter was so well-respected, his hypocrisy contaminated many of the Christians around him and created a difficult situation.

**Pressure Point:** Peter's example was a powerful influence for inappropriate compromise.

**Paul had to call Peter out to set the record straight:** <sup>14</sup>*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?*

**Pressure Relief Valve:** The courage of a strong and righteous voice can change the tide.

**Sometimes you know better but are not sure what to do:** James 1:5-8

**Pressure Relief Valve:** Make God's wisdom your guide through faithful prayer and focus.

If we were to begin consciously observing our environment and interactions, we would most likely be amazed at how often we are exposed to peer pressure. It comes in a myriad of different ways that range from utterly subtle to normal exchanges to blatantly overt. *Any expression of the bad kind of peer pressure is a direct challenge to our integrity!*

**Gideon, before his days as a mighty military leader found strength to stand against peer pressure:** Judges 6:1,11-13: Gideon was chosen to right the wrongs. His character was strong, and his faith was intact!

Judges 6:25-27: The pressure of society pushed his father to this point. The angel of the Lord told Gideon to tear down the altar and make sacrifices to God with the wood. Gideon was afraid to act in daylight. By the cover of darkness, he and his men did what the angel said.



**Pressure Point:** All of Israel was idolatrous and that created fear of consequences for any rebel!

It is odd to think of someone doing the will of God as a "rebel," but does that not sound like our world today? Gideon went up against an established, idolatrous habit done by God's own people.

**Judges 6:28-31:** The men of the city come out and are angry. They go to Gideon's father to have him turn over Gideon. Joash is not as courageous as Gideon but still puts up the argument to have Baal fight for himself. He diverted attention without agreeing with the wrong and did not give up his son.

**Pressure Relief Valve:** When we are too afraid to make a public statement, making it more quietly will work. **THE KEY IS MAKING THE STATEMENT!**

**Pressure Point:** Because youth rages with a hormone-filled desire for belonging and satisfaction, every young person is a PRIME target for peer pressure's tidal wave of seductive emotions.

Emotions can seduce us into doing or saying what is not appropriate.

**This classic saying comes to mind: Just because you *can* does not mean you *should*:**

**1 Corinthians 6:12,18-20:** How will I stand up and be counted in relation to my own integrity? Parents should be teaching this principle to their children.

**Pressure Relief Valve:** Be well armed and prepared for the inevitable battle by not only rehearsing what is right and wrong, but WHY things are right or wrong.

Peer pressure comes in all shapes and sizes. Let's look at peer pressure in the context of the development of the early Christian church, a format that is much closer to our reality. Their challenges were new because Christianity was new, and yet those very same challenges still present themselves today.

**Acts 18:24-28:** (Source: Biblical commentary from McGee) *Apollos/Alexandria in North Africa founded by Alexander the Great, was one of the great centers of Greek culture. A great university was there and it had one of the finest libraries in the world. It was there that a Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was made.*

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria. He was well-educated and had access to some of the greatest learning in the entire world at that time. He understood Old Testament prophecy and began to learn about Jesus.

Apollos is passionately talking about Jesus but does not know the whole story. He knows Jesus came as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy because of his great Jewish education. He is affecting many around him. He is teaching an incomplete message.

*But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*

"We appreciate your grasp of the Scriptures, but there is more." They explained to him more about the baptism of Jesus to sacrifice vs. the baptism of repentance taught by John.

*<sup>27</sup>And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, <sup>28</sup>for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*

Apollos was a powerful, zealous, educated and articulate speaker. His heart and zeal were well-placed, but his "presence" was misconstrued and became a catalyst for divisions. Many Christians started to flock around Apollos, creating a sub-movement within Christianity that did not belong.

**Pressure Point:** Sometimes we find someone who touches our hearts and we end up forming ranks around them in an unhealthy way.

**This in many ways is peer pressure at its best, and it needs the best response to disturb it:**

**1 Corinthians 3:1-8:**



Paul instructed them: *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* (1 Corinthians 11:1 KJV)

Pressure Point: Divisiveness caused by inordinate attachment to this leader or that one puts our focus on establishing and protecting our peer group's legitimacy instead of on the Gospel.

Pressure Point: Peer pressure speeds up the feeling of needing to urgently comply

Proverbs 14:15-16

Pressure Relief Valve: STOP! THINK! It only takes a moment to remind yourself of what's important!

While our last example was perhaps peer pressure at its best, this next example is peer pressure at its most broad based level of consequence. When the pressure has to do with the physical wellbeing of others, we come to a whole new level of responsibility. Here we find the truly difficult challenge of fear causing a real potential to be unable to truly listen. Fear can take away our ability to think clearly.

Numbers 13:17-19,21

Twelve spies were sent, all would see the same things, but what did they "see" (in their own minds) that they would report back?

Numbers 13:25-28: (NASB) <sup>25</sup>When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, <sup>26</sup>they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel ...and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup>Thus they told him, and said, We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. <sup>28</sup>Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large.

Once you feel fear, it is hard to see anything else. Fear was instilled in the people through this report, feeding peer pressure.

One polite disagreement changed the responses of the group. Holding our integrity at a high level can cause positive change.

Pressure Point: Fear - fear of harm, fear of failure, fear of exclusion - fear feeds peer pressure!

Numbers 13:30-32

Pressure Point: Fear cuts off and ignores the reasoning of those who would challenge it.

Numbers 14:1-2,4,6-9: Fear spreads and with it the peer pressure to obey that fear, and fear then becomes irrationality.

Pressure Relief Valve: Powerful big picture perspective - see the challenge through God's eyes!

Pressure Point: With your mind in overdrive, peer pressure disengages your rational self.


Proverbs 24:5-6: (NASB) <sup>5</sup>A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power. <sup>6</sup>For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Pressure Relief Valve: Remember who you really are and what you really stand for. Focus can overcome fear - just be sure to create spiritual muscle memory by daily absorbing godly principles.

As we take our final look at this incredibly difficult matter, there is one thing that can change things. One thing that can shift the mood - alter the thinking and redirect the actions of a group of peers heading down a slippery slope of darkness. The best part is that this one thing is not miraculous or impossible - it is present in each of us! There is great power in this one thing!

We will review all of our lessons today in the context of when Paul assigned Timothy to take a leading role in the early church. Paul focused Timothy on not giving in to the pressures of being minimized because he was such a young leader.



 <b>1 Timothy 4:1-2, 6-7, 10-13: (NASB)</b>	
<p>Be upright, clear and fair in your thinking and actions, even if your feelings may be guiding you in a different way.</p>	<p><sup>1</sup>But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup>by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron...</p>
<p>The courage of a strong and righteous voice can change the tide.</p>	<p><sup>6</sup>In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.</p>
<p>Make God's wisdom your guide through faithful prayer and focus.</p>	<p><sup>7</sup>But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness...</p>
<p>When we are too afraid to make a public statement, making it more quietly will work. <b>THE KEY IS MAKING THE STATEMENT!</b></p>	<p><sup>10</sup>For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.</p>
<p>Be well-armed and prepared for the inevitable battle by not only rehearsing what is right and wrong, but <b>WHY</b> things are right or wrong.</p>	<p><sup>11</sup>Prescribe and teach these things.</p>
<p>A strong voice of perspective - Paul was unequivocal in his assessment: All is from God and we are mere instruments, so get over yourselves!</p>	<p><sup>12</sup>Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.</p>
<p><b>STOP! THINK!</b> It only takes a moment to remind yourself what is important.</p>	<p><sup>13</sup>Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.</p>

One of the keys to overcoming peer pressure is to make sure you are standing for your own integrity before God. How *should* I react in this situation? How *could* I react in this situation? Falling into peer pressure can be a choice. Choose to have godly wisdom crush the peer pressure out of your life!

<p><b>Powerful BIG PICTURE perspective:</b> See the challenge through God's eyes.</p>	<p><b>Hebrews 10:24 (NASB)</b> ...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...</p>
<p>Remember who you <b>REALLY</b> are and what you <b>REALLY</b> stand for. Focus can overcome fear – just be sure to create spiritual muscle memory by daily absorbing godly principles.</p>	<p><b>1 Timothy 4:14-16: (NASB)</b> <sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. <sup>15</sup>Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. <sup>16</sup>Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.</p>

**So, how do I overcome peer pressure?**  
**For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...**  
**Think about it...!**