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BY FAITH

The
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Guys**

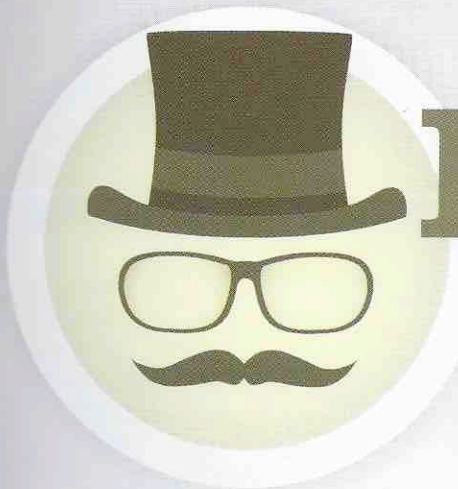
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WILL YOU FOLLOW
GOD AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

LOVING DIFFICULT PEOPLE

magazines **D6**



MAN TO MAN



By Jeffrey Dean

CHOOSE FRIENDS *WISELY*

WHEN I MET JASON, HE WAS THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK, SERVING THE FIRST YEAR OF A LIFE SENTENCE WITHOUT PAROLE FOR MURDER. JASON WAS 19.

Jason could have made excuses for where he was. He could have laid blame for his poor choices on his past, his broken home, and how he had grown up on the streets of Baltimore, dealing dope and packing heat before the end of fourth grade. Instead, he looked me square in the eye and said, "There's no one to blame but me. I chose my friends. Now I'm paying the price."

Before he received his life sentence, Jason never stopped to ask himself if the people he hung out with were hurting him or helping him. He wanted so badly to be cool that he ignored his better judgment when his friends encouraged him to join a gang, pushed him to sell harder drugs, and, later, decided to rob a convenience store. By that time Jason's character was so changed he hardly paused before going all in. He didn't consider how wrong it was. He didn't think about what could happen when they had loaded guns in their pockets. He didn't think someone could die and he could go to prison. But now he has a lifetime to consider all of it—a lifetime to wish he had chosen better friends.

Your friends are one of the most powerful influences in your life. They are your friends for a lot of reasons: *They've accepted you. You have a lot in common with them. They make you feel secure. You trust them. They're loaded!*

Okay, except for that last one, all of those are pretty valid reasons. Here's another one: *They are godly and encourage you to be the same.* Your

friends seriously impact you—how you dress, how you talk, how you act, whom you date, what music you listen to, and even how you treat your parents. You're probably thinking, "I don't let my friends influence me like that. I decide what I want to do." Well, it might seem that way. But think about this:

FRIENDS = TIME

Friends are not just people you know. They're people you *do life* with. School, lunch, sports, parties—it's safe to say you spend a lot of time with them.

TIME = INFLUENCE

The more time you spend with another person, the more he or she influences you. That's natural. As you commit time to friendships, their lifestyles will affect yours more and more.

INFLUENCE = CHARACTER

First Corinthians 15:33 warns that bad company will corrupt our character. How's your character? Do you make choices today that you wouldn't have made if not for your friends? If so, do these choices honor or dishonor God?

CHARACTER = CHOICES

Think about the five choices you most regret making. Now, think about whom you were with or whose voice was in your ear when you made those choices.

God knows friendships are important to you, and He wants you to have truly great ones. But He also knows how much bad friendships can hurt you.

So, how do you know the difference between good friends and bad ones? Unfortunately, your friends are not like bags of Doritos. They don't have labels on their backs listing all of their ingredients. But God does give us a promise and a warning that can help in choosing the right kinds of friends: Spend time with wise people, and you will grow wise. Spend time with foolish people, and you will suffer (Proverbs 13:20).

If you hang out with wise friends—people who know right from wrong and choose right—you will grow wiser. Wise friends are better able to offer you good advice in times of need because they believe God's ways are right and they follow them.

It only makes sense, then, that if you hang out with fools, bad stuff will happen to you. Proverbs 13:20 doesn't say bad stuff "might happen." God's Word is completely clear!

Distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy friendships can be hard. But, if you stay in consistent communication with God, He'll give you wisdom to know the difference. God wants you to have awesome, fun friendships because He knows what can happen if you choose the wrong friends. Choose wisely!



Jeffrey Dean is a pastor, international evangelist, and author. Jeffrey has spoken to more than 3 million people. He is the writer of several books, including *Watch This*, *This Is Me*, and his latest release, *The Graduate Handbook*. You can connect with Jeffrey at www.Jeffreydean.com.