

MEN'S MINISTRY

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Proverbs 27:17

Hanging With Sinners By: Jeff Searcy

Welcome to August ... the third quarter hump and the beginning of the off-ramp into fall. For so many of us, however, summer has not let loose its grip and continues to bring us to the question we have asked more times than we care to admit, "Can it get any hotter?" Of course, the answer usually ends up being, "Yes," as it never fails to ... "get hotter." Okay, enough about hot weather.

There have been times in my life where I have been cautious myself and cautioned by others about "hanging with the wrong crowd." In fact, one thing that my mother always told me was that: "I am known by the company I keep." How true that is. And, I have held that as a tenet of mine throughout my personal and professional life. However, I am so thankful that Christ didn't hold that sentiment as His mantra.

Earlier this year, I received a message from a friend warning me about an individual that I had had a conversation with. According to the information my friend was given, I was going to be affiliated with the individual in question. The person I spoke with told me of their serious lack in judgment that led to some really bad choices. And despite the fact the person had repented and was not condemned but forgiven by the only One worthy of casting judgment, the scarlet letter remained. The information my friend received regarding my affiliation was inaccurate. And despite the fact that I appreciated the spirit in which the warning was sent, it really struck a nerve in me ... so much so that I was compelled to write about it fueled by the Holy Spirit's fire in me and His conviction in my heart.

As I sat and thought about the warning from my friend, who was only looking out for my best interest, I came to grips with some hard realities in my own life. How often have I come across or heard of people who have made bad choices, lied, cheated, broke the law, even murdered or raped, and cast them aside? Rather than

seeing them as someone that should be cast aside or condemned, I should see them as someone who is in need of experiencing and knowing the grace and unconditional love of Almighty God. I don't have to condone the sin to love the sinner (a label that I carry as well). I must accept the reality that if I am going to be true to the calling God has put on my heart, to reach men of all ages, where they are, share with them the love of Christ, and love them as He loves them (which we are commanded to do), then I don't get to be particular about who I reach out or minister to. Do I engage or take part in what the other person is doing? If it breaks the law or goes against God's Word, absolutely not. Do I pray for them and do what I can to show and share with them the love of Christ? Absolutely.

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Throughout Jesus' ministry, He didn't spend all of His time with "church" people. He spent time with and loved, only as an all-sufficient Savior could, those society deemed outcasts: unclean and unworthy. In fact, when the disciples were asked by the Pharisees why Jesus ate with tax collectors and 'sinners,' Jesus overheard and responded by saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:12 NIV) We are assured "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," (Romans 8:1) and are told, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:1-2) Know this: The wrong we see in others, Jesus sees in us. Our challenge today, and every day, is to be open to opportunities to share the grace and unconditional love of Christ and the Message with other sinners.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Your love and grace, neither of which I deserve. Forgive me for judging others. Please help me to look inward before I look outward. Please give me a humble heart and spirit so that I see the plank in my eye before I see the sawdust in my brother's. Help me love as You love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Love as He loves. Keep it vertical. Armor Up. **PS**

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