

Group Pressure

A few years ago psychologist Ruth W. Berenda carried out an interesting experiment with designed to show how a person handled group pressure. The plan was simple. They brought groups of ten adolescents into a room for a test. Each group was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. What one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line.

Regardless of the instructions they heard, once they were all together in the group, the nine were not to vote for the longest line, but rather vote for the next to the longest line. The experiment began with nine teen-agers voting for the wrong line. The subject would typically glance around, frown in confusion and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Time after time, the self-conscious subject would say a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group. This remarkable conformity occurred in about 75% of the cases and was true of small children and high-school students alike.

Have you ever felt peer pressure? Did your parents ever tell you, “How many times have I told you ... stay away from them. That’s the wrong crowd. They are dangerous. If they told you to jump off a bridge, would you do that too?”

Now the real question: How many times have YOU as a parent said those exact words? After you swore you’d never talk like your mom and dad, how many times have you said, “Well, if they told you to jump off a bridge” And then thought, “I can’t believe I just said that”

But guess what? The problem of orthodoxy and congruity and compliance is as bad as it ever was.

It’s the constant lure to conform, to blend in, to be accepted, to not be labeled a Loser, a chicken, gutless, a nerd, a dork, a schlemiel, a dweeb, a goober, a moron, or any combination of four-letter expletives. Take your pick of adjectives. And it is not just our children who face the pressure to conform.

This is the message today: the call vs. the culture. It is a never-ending battle between being different, set apart, and the same as everybody else.

As you read *The Story*, notice only one generation passed and both God and what He had done were foreign concepts. You’ve heard about how important it is to equip your kids because, “the church is only one generation away from extinction.” This is not an exaggeration – this is not an overly dramatic preacher trying to make a point. This is history! It’s happened! And right after the conquest of the Promised Land!

Reflection:

1. In what times of your life have you dealt with peer pressure?
2. What sinful areas of our culture have the greatest pull over you?
3. Name a few strategies you can use to lessen the power of peer pressure.