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→ MINISTRY UPDATE ←

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# UPDATE

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised! God is so good. He's always there to make a way for us when there seems to be no way. And I am truly amazed each time I get the opportunity to hear the testimony of one of our men. You would be amazed too. The big change doesn't happen overnight. Their thinking changes a little each week until you see a solid Christian who now controls his flesh instead of it controlling him. There is an old saying that most people believe as truth. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. That's true without grace. The world, and even most Christians, believe it and treat people accordingly. Grace changes the thinking of that apple, so that it moves away from that tree and nearer to a tree of like thinking, according to the power that works in it. A miracle takes place. That "BAD APPLE" becomes a "GOOD APPLE", making a good tree bearing "good fruit." I pray I will have time soon to start recording and put in print all these great things that

God is doing.

We also are very close to applying for a loan. We will see what God will do. I just ask your prayers be with us. We're changing mayors, governor, and some state officials. Pray God will use that to further His kingdom.

We also bought 100 chickens for our property in Chandler. If that works well, we may add more later, and a couple of calves. Who knows what the future holds. The possibilities are limitless and all good gifts come from above,

We are also putting bathrooms on the last two cabins at Chandler. That will give us a total of 26 beds for men on social security. These men would be homeless or in prison without this place. A neighbor up there called me to let me know he had sold his place and was moving. He said the sheriff told the buyers the men were no trouble to their neighbors and no trouble to anyone. We've been there seven years! Good report. The neighbor is not leaving because of us.

We are at 100% occupancy and working hard to get 4 more beds. This is at all three locations combined. We pray God provides more bed space somewhere. The homeless numbers keep growing every week.

—David Nichols

# TESTIMONY

I grew up in a very dysfunctional family in a small town in Michigan. I was rebellious, and I was always in trouble. I did drugs and alcohol when I was a teenager, and I was a danger to myself and others. At age seventeen I was placed in a foster home to await sentencing for a crime I had committed. I fled to Oklahoma before I was sentenced. I was taken in by a good church family in Purcell. They introduced me to Jesus, but, as my life would later prove, I never truly got saved. I got married, but my life fell apart during the oilfield crash of 1982.

I lost my job, and I started committing crimes. I got divorced, but I remarried. I had a nervous breakdown in 1995, and I went to a mental hospital. Soon after this I turned myself in to the police, and I spent seven years in prison. I spent the entire seven years in a mental health ward.

Hand Up Ministry accepted me in November, 2004, even though I was a paranoid schizophrenic with major depression. The Christians at Hand Up embraced me, and they told me that God loved me and wanted me. They also told me that God could change me. With all of the Bible studies, church meetings, and love shown to me by others, I began to change. I accepted Jesus as my Savior during a Hand Up church service, and God began to heal me. Over the years I grew spiritually, and

my mental illness subsided. Thanks to our Genesis One groups and our church services, I am faithful and I have a sound mind.

This could never have happened if I hadn't had a place to live and grow in the Lord Jesus. My life has changed dramatically at Hand Up. Fifteen years ago I couldn't even keep myself groomed and clean. I rarely talked. Now I am the transportation director for Hand Up, a Genesis One leader, and a church deacon. All of these things are because of God's grace.  
—Bernard Lagrow

## BREAKING UP WITH BAD COMPANY

How do we break up with bad company? Perhaps the first step is to identify the people whom Scripture warns us to beware of. Proverbs, especially, describes a number of foolish behaviors we would do well to avoid when we see them in others: gossip and division (Prov. 16:28), anger and violence (16:29), lying (12:22), greed (15:27), and lack of compassion (29:7).

At times I've been tempted to believe I could easily spot bad company. But recognizing someone's negative influence hasn't been automatic for me. Negative influence isn't always obvious. Again and again, we're warned to be on the lookout for wolves in sheep's clothing, outwardly "spiritual" people who lead God's children astray (2 Thess. 2:3, 2 Pet. 3:17, 1 Jn. 4:1).

How do we learn to discern? In addition to keeping an eye open for the characters described above, it's critical to understand how the corrupting power of bad company works and why we sometimes give in to its influence.

In Hebrews we read, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin

that so easily entangles" (Heb. 12:1). It is the nature of sin to entangle, to trip us up, to drag us down. When we're around those whose lives are enmeshed in sin, we are exposed to its entangling influence. Here are three:

### 1. The appeal of rebellion

If you have raised a child, then you already know rebellion lies at the heart of man. "No" is one of the first words out of most children's little mouths. Growing up doesn't change that tendency. We don't like anyone telling us what to do—not even God. Submitting our lives to His leadership is hard for us, and it was hard for some of the characters in the Scriptures.

The sinful nature of our hearts predisposes us all to rebellion. Like Eve in the garden, we are easily enticed to disobey God through the snakelike influence of bad company.

### 2. The desire for man's approval

Accolade. Kudos. Respect. We all crave the endorsements we believe will validate our worthiness as a person. But when our desire to please the crowd overshadows our reverence for God, we've allowed man's influence in our lives to supersede His. Sometimes the cost of doing so is far greater than we ever imagined. For Saul, the first king of Israel, the price of man's approval was ultimately his monarchy.

When someone influences us to make a choice we know is wrong, we have, in effect, decided that person's approval is more important to us than God's.

### 3. The pleasure of sin

Let's face it: Sin is pleasurable, at least in the beginning. Whether it's the excessive use of something that

we could be thankful for in moderation or the tantalizing allure of illicit pursuits, sin promises to satisfy our deepest longings. Eventually, however, everyone who indulges in sin will pay the price.

Usually, sin's siren song is most tempting when I'm struggling to cope with life. During such times, I must be aware of those who would have me believe the pleasures of sin aren't worth worrying about. If I comment to a friend that I need to restrain my appetite in this area, and he responds, "Oh come on, it's not that big a deal," I need to pay attention to his negative influence upon me.

### Going Down?

Sometimes negative influence is obvious because it encourages us to indulge a known weakness. At other times, however, corrupting influence is more subtle. It may not lead to blatantly sinful decisions. Instead, we may have little more than a troubling sense that something isn't quite right in this relationship.

### Things we can do

1. Setting parameters. We might not have a problem spending time with this person in the office, but we may need to hanging out after work.

2. Distancing yourself. We may need some space for a time in order to decide how to handle the situation.

3. Fleeing. Sometimes drastic measures are necessary, and we must flee unrighteousness (1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:22). When our soul is in immediate peril because we're tempted to sin by someone's bad influence, we simply need to get out—just as Joseph did when he fled the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:1-12).

4. Another decision we'll have to make is whether or not to communicate with this person about our reasons for limiting contact or ending the relationship.

I once had a friend whose outlook on life was consistently negative. Because I, too, had struggled with pessimism, I knew that spending time with him could drag me down. At first, I chose to avoid him. Eventually, I decided I could spend time with him if others were present to offset his negativity. Relating to him in a group protected me from being overly swayed by his gloom. In retrospect, I wonder if telling him about my struggle with his pessimism might have been a better solution. Sometimes talking openly with someone about his/her influence can open the door to a deeper relationship. It might also encourage him/her to take inventory of their own vulnerabilities.

However, there are also times when it's best to act without explanation. For example, if we have concerns about a person's trustworthiness, it's probably better to limit our vulnerability.

5. Submitting to positive influences. In addition to limiting negative input, we also need to submit our lives to the positive influences that will protect us.

Submission to other believers. Who are the good influencers in our lives? Jesus prayed for His disciples to be one just as He and the Father are one (Jn. 17:20-23). He knew that the temptation to follow the crowd would be great; I believe that's one reason He emphasized unity with other believers. Being in relationship with like-minded friends shields us from the corrupting power of bad company.

6. Confession. One way we can express our submission to other believers is to confess our sin (Jas. 5:16). If we've repeatedly been drawn into another person's entangling influence, we may need help to break free. Confession is an important first step; it frees us from false guilt and gives us

an opportunity to recommit to pursuing a holy life. Confession also paves the way for others to protect us where we're vulnerable through their ongoing encouragement and support.

Submission to God through His Word and prayer. Joshua 1:8 commands us, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it."

When I focus on God's truth, it transforms my thinking (Ro. 12:2). The Word inoculates my mind against the lies and deception of sin, and I am less likely to make choices that fly in the face of God's commands.

As we encounter Scriptures that address our temptations and struggles, our response is to submit ourselves to God in prayer. Through prayer, we allow our hearts, minds, and wills to be influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bad company does indeed corrupt good character. But if we remain vigilant, if we're honest about our own weaknesses, and if we seek out the protective, positive resources God has graciously given us, we do not have to be drawn into the destructive power of sin.

By God's grace, we'll grow in exercising the kind of Christ like influence He wants us to embody in our relationships. —Jeff Wendel

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