



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Circles: Keeping God at the Center of Our Relationships

Pastor Stephen Hayes

February 11, 2018

**Main Idea** – Each of us is a part of different groups; we function within various circles of influence. As Christians, we should influence others to a higher level of understanding, rather than allowing ourselves to be pulled down to a lower level.

### Circles of influence

- We are all part of different spheres of influence – circles – among which we socialize.
- These circles of influence affect our thoughts and actions, and also provide opportunities for us to impact others.
- We have a choice: to raise the circle's standards, or risk hurting ourselves by being pulled down to a lower level by others in the circle.

### Initiate, instill, and maintain healthy circles

- People in our circles need to know who we are. We should be comfortable in communicating our Christian view of life.
- **1 Corinthians 15: 33-34 – Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.**
- In the above verse, the apostle Paul was admonishing the Christians in Corinth to avoid being pulled down to a lower level by others in their community.

### Just because we have the right to do something doesn't mean we should do it

- **1 Corinthians 10:23 – All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.**
- As Christians, we should be aware that what we do will be perceived in different ways by others.
- Everything we do has an impact of some kind on others.
- As Christians, our relationship with God is not established by what we do. It is established by what we believe about Jesus. Nevertheless, what we do can be misunderstood by someone else who does not know Jesus in the same way.
- If something we are doing could be misinterpreted, we should probably refrain from doing that thing – even though, in our mind, it is not sinful to do it.
- **Psalms 24:1 – The earth is the Lord's, and its fullness thereof.** Everything, and everybody, on the planet belongs to God. We should focus on edifying – to morally and spiritually build up – others.

- Our immediate freedom to do something is not as important as the effect our actions could have on the souls of others who are observing us.

### **Jesus sacrificed His life to have a relationship with us**

- When Jesus came to earth, He did so as a man. He did not simply appear to be a man, but fully was a man.
- Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, existed before time began. When He was born into humanity, that humanity was added to the divine nature that already existed.
- **Hebrews 2: 17-18 – Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.**
- Everything that Jesus did is also possible for us to do. Just as God unified humanity with the divine nature, we are to pursue unification with each other.

### **Fusion**

- Fusion is defined as “the process, or result of, joining two or more things together to form a single entity.”
- Fusion is what powers the sun and, thereby, sustains physical life in our universe.
- Jesus’ purpose was to unify us to Him, and to unify us with each other.
- John 17 is a prayer Jesus prayed before He was crucified. In this prayer He prayed for himself (verses 1-5), His disciples at that time (verses 6-19), and for you and me (those believers who would follow: verses 20-26.)
- **John 17: 20-23 – I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

### **Raise the standard**

- To build healthy relationships in our circles of influence, we need to raise the standards in those circles so our relationships will benefit one another.
- **Ephesians 5: 1-2 – Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**
- As we seek to build positive, healthy relationships in our circles of influence, we

should guard against becoming spiteful when others operate in weakness.

- God is our Father, and we should follow His example because others are watching us (see “I’ve Been Watching You” lyrics, below.)
- We want to demonstrate to others the importance of being submitted to a higher being.

## **Reflective Questions for Circles: Keeping God at the Center of Our Relationships**

1. Take a minute to identify two or three circles of influence of which you are part.
2. Which of those circles are edifying for you (tend to build you up)? Do any of those circles tend to drag you to a lower level?
3. Do you feel you are able to elevate others in any of your circles?
4. Pastor Stephen taught that, even though we may have the right to do something, we should not do it if it will not be correctly understood by others. Do you agree? Why or why not?

### **I’ve Been Watching You – Rodney Atkins**

Driving through town, just my boy and me  
With a happy meal in his booster seat  
Knowing that he couldn't have the toy  
Till his nuggets were gone  
A green traffic light turned straight to red  
I hit my brakes and mumbled under my breath  
As fries went a flying and his orange drink covered his lap  
Well, then my four year old said a four letter word  
That started with "s, " and I was concerned  
So I said, "Son, now where did you learn to talk like that?"

He said, "I've been watching you, dad, ain't that cool?  
I'm your buckaroo, I wanna be like you  
And eat all my food, and grow as tall as you are  
We got cowboy boots and camo pants

Yeah, we're just alike, hey, ain't we dad?  
I wanna do everything you do  
So I've been watching you."

We got back home, and I went to the barn  
I bowed my head, and I prayed real hard  
Said, "Lord, please help me help my stupid self."  
Then this side of bedtime later that night  
Turning on my son's Scooby Doo night light  
He crawled out of bed, and he got down on his knees  
He closed his little eyes, folded his little hands  
And spoke to God like he was talking to a friend  
And I said, "Son, now where'd you learn to pray like that?"

He said, "I've been watching you, dad, ain't that cool?  
I'm your buckaroo, I wanna be like you  
And eat all my food, and grow as tall as you are  
We like fixing things and holding mama's hand  
Yeah, we're just alike, hey, ain't we, dad?  
I wanna do everything you do  
So I've been watching you."

With tears in my eyes, I wrapped him in a hug  
Said, "My little bear is growing up."  
He said, "But when I'm big, I'll still know what to do."

"'Cause I've been watching you, dad, ain't that cool?  
I'm your buckaroo, I wanna be like you  
And eat all my food, and grow as tall as you are  
Then I'll be as strong as Superman  
We'll be just alike, hey, won't we, dad?  
When I can do everything you do  
'Cause I've been watching you."