

We are in week 3 of our series called “How to Ruin Your Life.” In week 1, we covered how wisdom will always fail you, and last week we talked about four ways you can start a fire with your phone.

This week, I want to talk about six signs that you have found the perfect cellmate. That sounds like weird advice, but we’ve all heard or seen this phrase somewhere on the internet: A good friend will bail you out of jail, a best friend will be sitting next to you in the jail cell.

For most of you, this sounds like a really epic goal of friendship. We see it everywhere, from books to movies to TV two best friends sitting in jail saying out loud, “That was fun...” and then it ends with a high five.

As cool as this squad goal may look, I think if your friends are leading you to a path of imprisonment, you may be on the wrong path with the wrong friends. No one really plans for failure, and no one wakes up at age 13 with the goal of becoming a prison inmate. Yet the friends you have today will always impact your future tomorrow.

Proverbs 13:20 reminds us of this reality this way: *“Walk with the wise, you’ll become wise. Surround yourself with fools and you’ve sealed your own destruction.”*

This might sound too simple to believe in, but it’s true. The people involved in your life will always determine where you are going. I’ve heard it said like this: “Show me your friends; I’ll show you your future.” So here are six signs you may have found the perfect cellmate, along with some practical ways to not end up in the cell with them.

1. They think they’re wiser than adults.

The first sure sign you’ve found your future cellmate is that they think they’re wiser than most adults. Let’s be honest; every teenager thinks they’re smarter than most adults. The friends I’m talking about are the ones who think they are the ultimate source of wisdom.

You know the ones I’m talking about, right? It’s the friend who hears practical, sound advice that will lead them to a better future, and then they think they have a better plan. Not only that, but their plan sounds terrible. Usually this friend is more interested in looking awesome than in doing the right thing. When adults call them out, they will fight anything they say without budging.

1 Kings 12:4 gives a great account of a situation just like this. Rehoboam was the new king of Israel, and while he was in his new position, the people of Israel came to his doorstep and pleaded with him, saying: *“Your father Solomon was a harsh master, he worked us to the bone. Please lighten our yoke and we will serve you.”*

So Rehoboam tells the people that he will give them an answer in three days. Rehoboam goes on to ask advice from the wise, old men who counseled his father. Their response was wisdom at its best: “You need to win their hearts if they’re going to trust you. Lighten their load and they’ll will serve you.”

Then Rehoboam goes to his young friends and asks them for advice. His friends tell him this: “Your people need to know that you’re the man. They need to see how powerful you are. Tell those people that Solomon whipped them with whips, but you will beat them with chains. Double their workload and show them who’s the boss.”

Unfortunately, Rehoboam took his friend’s advice, which resulted in a bloody civil war and a nation splitting up. Rehoboam’s friends led him down a deep, dark path that he never wanted to go down, and it’s all because he valued his friends’ wisdom over the wisdom of those who were wiser. Show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.

2. Your parents don’t like them.

The next sign that you’ve found the perfect cellmate is this: your parents don’t like your friends. This might not sound like a serious crime, but how someone treats their own parents reveals who they are and what they value.

I get it, though; some people don’t have the best parents in the world—some have the most frustrating parents, and some have parents who have never really been there for them. Not everyone has the same parental experience, and lucky for us, the Bible never tells us that we have to love our parents. That’s right, not one Scripture tells us we have *love* our parents. What Scripture does say is that we have to honor them. We have to see them as valuable and the advice they give as a valuable.

Ephesians 6:2-3 says that we must honor our parents because it’s commanded of us, and because when we do it leads us to success.

God’s Word is very blunt about those who refuse to honor their parents. In fact, Paul lists it as one of the many acts that show we work for Satan’s kingdom. Romans 1:30:

“...slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.”

Paul even goes on to say that they deserve the death that comes with their decisions. When we see someone dishonor their parents, we get a glimpse into what they will do for others. If you don't value someone who loves you unconditionally and is only trying to give you the best future, how will you treat other people in your life?

How your friends treat and honor your parents or their own parents will give you a sign about their character. Do you love and honor your parents? If so, should your friends challenge your family relationship, they aren't really trustworthy. Hopefully your parents love you unconditionally and will always be there for you. If that's true, then you need to value that over your friend's opinion. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.

3. You have to be someone different around them.

The next sign of a toxic friendship piggybacks off of the last sign: you have to be someone different around your friends. Honoring your parents' viewpoints can be hard, especially when it means not hanging out with specific people.

But there will always be that friend or crowd of friends who we would never want our parents to meet. We know that if our parents ever encountered a certain group of friends, they would not approve of them. You might try to justify your friendship to your mom and dad like this: “Jesus was called the friend of sinners; in fact, my parents wouldn't approve of the people Jesus hung out with. I guess you could say I'm just like Jesus.”

I'm going to burst your Jesus bubble by pointing out that yes, Jesus was the friend of sinners, but when those friends left Jesus' presence they could never call themselves sinners; they were called forgiven. The difference between you and Jesus is that Jesus transformed people, but you end up being transformed by your friends.

Romans 12:2 tells us that we are to never be conformed to the image of the world. The word “conformed” comes from a Greek word that means “to masquerade.” What Paul is describing is that we should never find ourselves in a situation where we are masquerading as something we aren't.

You might act one way around your parents and at church, but as soon as you're around a certain group of people, your entire personality changes. It's like you are literally putting on a mask to hide who you really are.

If you find yourself in a friendship where you have to act like a completely different person, can you really call that an authentic relationship? If you have to act one way to gain someone's friendship, do you really want it? Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.

4. They gossip about your other friends.

The next sure sign that someone is your potential cellmate is this: when they gossip about your other friends. I'm talking about that friend who will talk bad about your other friends, when you are alone with them. This may not seem like a big deal, because nothing bad is being said about you. But let's be clear: if they'll do it *for* you, they'll do it *to* you.

If your friend likes tearing down your other friends in secret, chances are they tear you down when you're not around. If your friend lives for gossip and is the first to tell you what others are saying, that's a sure sign that they love tearing people down. It's even worse when they always know what others are saying about you.

I love this quote from Jay-Z: "Don't tell me what was said about me. Tell me why they were so comfortable saying those things about me to you."

If your friend always knows what others are saying about you, it might mean that instead of stopping what other people are saying about you, they are encouraging it. This type of friendship shouldn't even be called a friendship. This is a toxic relationship that will only go up in smoke.

Proverbs 26:18 describes this destruction like this: **"A meddler is like a madman shooting fiery arrows of death."** This person shoots arrows in all directions. They can't decide who is a friend or foe; they only have victims. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.

5. They tell you what you want to hear.

A sure sign that you've found a future cellmate is when they tell you what you want to hear; not what you need to hear. When life convicts us and we need guidance about whether or not what we're doing is wrong, this friend will always try to pump up your ego instead of correcting you. It takes zero effort to say nice things about our friends; it takes courage to step up and correct our friends when they are wrong.

In 1 Kings 22, King Ahab was trying to get all of Israel to go to war with Syria. The Israelites weren't too keen on going to war, so they had Ahab summon all his prophets to hear what God had to say. So Ahab summoned 400 prophets, and they all "prophesied"

the same thing: if you go to war, you will win.

The Israelites were still a little uncertain, so they summoned a prophet named Micaiah. Ahab hated this prophet because he only prophesied bad things, and never anything positive, and to Ahab's credit, he was right. Micaiah prophesied that Israel will fail. Still, Ahab chose to believe the "good prophesy," and as it turns out, Israel got demolished.

It's easy to believe the good things people tell us. It's easy to say only good things. It's when we need to redirect our friends that it gets tough. We might think that by not causing friction, we are doing our friends a lot of good. But the reality is, we are just allowing them to continue on their course of destruction. If you don't call out your friend's behavior, what you're actually doing is blessing it. There is no neutral stance when it comes to friendship.

King David experienced this in a big way in 2 Samuel 12. Just to give you some background: King David had just committed adultery with a woman named Bathsheba. Bathsheba was married, but David still took her into his bed. To cover up his sin, David attempted to get Bathsheba's husband to sleep with her, that way if she became pregnant, no one would know that David was the father. Her husband refused and said, "If my comrades are at war, how can I relax? I will not dishonor them." So David had the guy put on the frontline, and ordered his men to pull back and leave Bathsheba's husband to battle by himself. David had this man killed to cover up what he had done.

Most of David's friends refused to call him out on his behavior. They were too scared of losing his friendship, his trust, and worse off, their lives. But there was one courageous man, David's friend, Nathan. Nathan went to David and told him a story about how a poor shepherd had only one sheep. This shepherd loved this sheep with all his heart, but there was a rich man who had hundreds of sheep and this man stole the poor shepherd's sheep, and killed it for his own amusement.

Then Nathan asked, "How shall we punish the rich man?" David is outraged and yells, "This man must pay fourfold for what he has done." Nathan agrees and breaks the news, "David, you are the rich man, and God has seen what you have done."

Against all the odds, Nathan told David how it really was. Imagine if David had kept living the life he wanted to live. Because Nathan cared about his friend, he redirected his life toward a better direction, and didn't allow David be someone he was never meant to be. Nathan held his friend to the highest standard. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.

6. They are never there for you.

The last sure sign that you've found your future cellmate is this: they are never there for you. This might seem like a no-brainer, but Proverbs 18:24 really clarifies it for us: **"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."** This is confusing at first. How can someone of many friends come to ruin? It's because you might be surrounded by a lot of people, but the title of friend belongs to the person who comes forward when things get tough. When your "friends" scatter, they are showing that they never deserved the title of friend. A friend is someone who sticks closer than a brother. They will go above and beyond, and it's in that moment that you know they're your friend.

1 Corinthians 12:26 describes a godly friendship like this: *"If one suffers we all suffer. If one celebrates, we all rejoice."*

It is my hope and desire that all of you would find a friend who will be there no matter what. That's what a godly friendship with other Christ-followers is supposed to look like. When one of us is suffering and grieving, we jump to their side and we grieve with them. When they are celebrating a win in their life, we celebrate with them. The worst part about this friendship quality is you never know who your true friends are until the unthinkable in life happens. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.

Conclusion: It's not what you lose, but what you gain.

So maybe you have already seen one or more of these six signs in some of your friendships. You might be thinking, "Do I really need to lose these people in my life? Is it really that drastic that I need to lose these friendships over their flaws?" Let me be very blunt: When it comes to giving yourself the best future possible, it's not about what you lose, but what you gain.

If you don't let go of some of the toxic friendships in your life, you might gain a toxic future. Losing someone you can hardly call a friend while gaining a bright future sounds like a nice trade-off to me.

Hebrews 12:1 tells us to cast aside every weight as we run our race with endurance. Your future is too important to allow deadbeat friends to hold you back. Show me your friends; I'll show you your future.