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Hello and welcome to this episode of the St. Andrew's Enfield podcast with me. Steve Griffiths. I wonder if you've ever found yourself in a situation where you've been out with friends or when you've been at work for example, or when you've been with a group of people and the behavior turns from being sort of rowdy, good fun to crossing a line that you are uncomfortable with? Perhaps the conversation and the banter gets a bit close to the knuckle or becomes gossip or a bit malicious or full of innuendos. Uh, maybe the wine and the beer has been flowing, which has been fine, but now it's getting a bit too drunk and, and you're beginning to feel uncomfortable with how that is impacting, um, the behavior of the people that you're with. A couple of years ago, I was, um, out for dinner with a friend of mine who works for a Christian organization and we were meeting with a couple of very famous Christians from overseas, uh, who shall remain nameless obviously.

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And the purpose of the dinner, um, was to see if these guys would, um, put some funding into a major youth work project that I was launching. So quite simply that night I was chasing their money. Uh, dinner was fine, but as the evening wore on, their conversation, um, became less and less appropriate and I began to feel, um, quite uncomfortable, really. Now I wanted their money for the project, pure and simple. So if I said anything or if I left the meeting, I knew that it would cost me tens of thousands of pounds. But if I stayed, I would be compromising myself more and more. And I really wrestled with it, I'll be honest with you. And the temptation to stay and join him with the conversation was really strong. But after a while, um, I knew that that was not the right thing to do. So I made my excuses and left.

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Now, needless to say, I never saw them again and I didn't get the money. Uh, but I'm still convinced that it was absolutely the right thing to do. But tough as it is as Christians, we know that we should be behaving in a different way, but sometimes it's easier to say nothing than to stand up for what we know is right and true as a follower of Jesus. Peer pressure has an immense hold over us. Um, we think that it's just for children or for young people, but I think the peer pressure remains just as strong throughout our adult life. So I want to think a bit today about how we can resist peer pressure. And to do that, I want to look at a passage from 1 Peter chapter four verses 1 to 11. Now it's a pretty straight talking passage and the guidance to us is very clear because in this passage, Peter is calling us to stay strong and stay distinctively Christian despite the social pressure to conform.

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And that takes a strong and courageous spirit, um, as Peter points out in verse one here, he says, "Since therefore Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same intention." Christ is the pattern for us as an example of someone who stayed strong, even when he was deeply misunderstood. And Peter says here that like Jesus, we are to arm ourselves with the same intention. So how do we then resist peer pressure and live out our calling as Christians?

Well, Peter outlines four steps for us in this passage and that's what we're going to think about in the rest of this podcast.

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So the first thing that Peter says to us if we want to resist peer pressure, is that we've got to develop a new mindset. We need a mindset of strength and discipline so that we can stay strong in faith no matter what situation we find ourselves in. And that can only happen when we confidently claim our new identity as Christians. The truth is that since we've become followers of Jesus, we are not the same as we used to be. And we need to be confident in who we are. And Peter lays this on the line for us. In verse one he says, "Whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin". As Christians, we have finished with sin. Full stop. Now, that doesn't mean that we're never going to sin again. It doesn't mean that we will never get things wrong again or that we won't sometimes be tempted to behave as we used to, but the sinful life is no longer our starting point.

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It doesn't define who we are. You are not defined by your sin or by your propensity towards sin. You are a beautiful, wonderful, amazing child of God with the Spirit of God dwelling within you. And if we want to resist peer pressure, the first step is to develop a mindset that claims that truth through its own, to be able to say, "No, I am not that person anymore. I am different now. I am finished with sin." But then secondly, we need to make lifestyle choices out of that new mindset. Peter says in verse two, "So live for the rest of your earthly life, no longer by human desires but by the will of God". So in all the minutiae of life, in the course of our ordinary nine to five, if you like, we must be resolved to do the will of God rather than pursue our own human impulses.

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God first in everything that we do and in everything that we say. The will of God is our guiding principle in life. And then Peter goes on to contrast this with the type of behavior which is to be avoided. It's a, it's a fairly random list really. It covers a lot of types of behavior that we know don't really stack up with our calling to be a follower of Jesus. I think this is the crux of his argument though, that we can either live our lives by doing what God wants us to do, or we can live our lives by doing what other people want us to do. And here's the issue in verse four that so often, um, causes us pain as Christians. In verse four, Peter says this, he says, "They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses".

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Well, that's peer pressure, isn't it? And that is where the rub comes for us because we want to be popular, we want to be liked, we want to be seen to be in with the crowd and we don't want people to think that we're now somehow holier than thou or being judgmental towards them or being a bit pious or a stick in the mud who doesn't know how to have a good time. Well, read the gospels in the New Testament. Jesus was often found at parties and weddings and celebrations and more often than not you would find him where the wine was flowing and the music was playing and the dancing was happening and the laughter was raucous and loud. Jesus was no party pooper and he knew how to have a good time. But he also knew his limits. He had really clear boundaries

and he was able to say in a nonjudgmental way, "Thus far and no further for me, please".

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And that's what we've got to learn to do for ourselves so that we can still have a good time and enjoy life, but not give in to peer pressure. And in the light of that, Peter then makes a factual statement not as a warning or as a threat, but merely as a fact. In verse seven he says, "The end of all things is near". You know, someday Jesus will return and the current order of things will be wrapped up. And our lives fundamentally are a preparation for that moment of when Jesus returns. So Peter says in verse seven, "Be serious and discipline yourselves". Being a Christian is, it's not a hobby. It's not an optional extra to be fitted in around the rest of life. It's a lifestyle of spiritual discipline. It's not so that we can't have any fun or enjoy life or have a laugh, but so that we get the balance right despite the pressure we may face.

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So first then develop a new mindset. Secondly, live your life in the light of that new mindset in order to resist peer pressure. And then thirdly, uh, Peter suggests to us that we should be motivated by love for others, not a desire to be popular. Peter makes his priority, uh, really clear for us in verse eight, he says, "Above all, above all, maintain constant love for one another". Now I am completely convinced that the Christian faith is all about love. Love is the very heart of the gospel and it's what our lives are all about. Love for God and love for one another. And increasingly our churches have to become places that are hallmarked by love, places where people are loved and not judged. Safe places where we can be vulnerable and make mistakes and be comfortable in the knowledge that we are still loved and welcomed

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no matter how much we've got things wrong. And sometimes we will get it right, but sometimes we will get it wrong and each one of us needs to be sure that failure in our walk with God will not result in the loss of love and support from others. We need to be constant in love for each other no matter what. Keep loving, keep loving, keep loving. And as Peter says here, that is so important because "Love", as Peter says, "covers a multitude of sins". We all get it wrong on occasions. We all mess up, don't we? But if we love each other, the mistakes are easily forgiven and quickly forgotten. And a church that lives by that rule is a church that will become a real community haven because more than anything else, we all want to receive unconditional love and forgiveness, don't we? And so Peter fleshes this out a little bit further in verse nine

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uh, when he writes this, he says, "Show hospitality to one another without complaining". Now, hospitality, um, is about far more than drinking coffee together after a worship service. Hospitality is about absolute acceptance of one another for good and for bad and without judgment. Hospitality is about the unconditional welcome that we can give to one another, both when we are succeeding in the faith and when we're failing in the faith. So show hospitality to one another without any judgment. And in that way we can resist peer pressure without coming across as self righteous or having a pious attitude. We can resist and live out the Christian life. And if we do that with an attitude of

nonjudgmental love towards others, then we will be respected for who we are, we'll be respected for what we believe and how we choose to live.

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So in order to resist peer pressure, develop a new mindset, make lifestyle choices out of that mindset, but do so in a way that is always loving and never judgmental. And then finally, um, Peter encourages us to use the gifts that God has given us to build positive relationships. Um, as we make alternative lifestyle choices and choose not to go with the crowd, but resist the peer pressure to do so. It's tempting to move away from the people we have previously mixed with in an attempt to, um, somehow keep ourselves pure and holy. Now sometimes it's quite right for us to break from the past. Sometimes we need to do that in order to move on with God. And sometimes that does involve making a break with a certain group of people or a certain person from the past. Uh, so that's kind of up to your own judgment really, whether that's the right thing to do.

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Um, and sometimes we need to do that. Uh, but on the whole, on the whole, Jesus didn't do that. Um, he was renowned for going to parties with prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners and hanging out with the people on the margins of society. But rather than doing so in a way that led him to get involved in ungodly behavior, he hung around with these people out of a desire to love and serve them. And that might be the same for us too. We might need to make a break with some people from the past, but it might also be that we are called to maintain relationships with them, but to transform those relationships so that we are now seeking to love them non-judgmentally and serve them as well. And if that is the case for us, then Peter says to us in verse 10, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received".

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Now that's an important point to remember because God has given each one of us spiritual gifts. They are God's grace towards us and should be treated as such. And the spiritual gifts that we have received from God are to be used for ministry as we seek to love others better. And then Peter breaks these gifts down into two primary categories; gifts that relate to worship and gifts that relate to pastoral care for one another. In verse 11 he says, "Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God". Now that means the preacher or those who do the intercessions or those who do the readings from scripture, um, the welcomers at the door, those who are giving out hymn books and so on. "Whoever does the speaking do it as one bringing words from God". And then in the same verse he says, "Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God provides".

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And that's the sort of broader category of ministry encompassing love and care that we show to others in our everyday lives. So even if you struggle with the lifestyle choices of a friend or colleague, um, you need to think very carefully before you walk away from them and certainly never judge them because it may be that God has given you the gifts you need to actually build a stronger relationship with them, to speak to them words of God and love them and serve

them to the best of your ability. Sometimes you do need to walk away, but if you sense that God wants you to stay, then use the gifts you have to speak God to that other person and try to build them up in the knowledge and the experience of God in their own lives. We are called to live counter-cultural lives as Christians, uh, not giving in to peer pressure and doing what others want us to do, but to seek instead to do the will of God in our lives. And this passage from Peter is immensely helpful in showing us the basic principles on how to resist peer pressure in our own lives. To develop that new mindset as a follower of Jesus, to make lifestyle choices from out of that new mindset, to not judge others or separate ourselves from them in some pious way, but to continue to love and show hospitality and to respect and to serve. And in this way, we will resist the peer pressure and we will live the life to which we have been called as followers of Jesus.

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Well, I hope that you have found this a useful podcast, and as always, if you've got any comments or feedback, then please do email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. It's always lovely to hear from you. And wherever you are today, whatever you're doing, I hope that you have a great day and that you are able to live today as a precious child of God, reflecting his love and his grace in all that you do and in all your relationships. So see you soon. Bye.