

Under the Influence

By RLD Editorial Team

for use as
STEP 1 

Lesson 7**Focus:**

The best friendships
put Jesus first.

Lesson 7**Bible Basis:**

Acts 20:16-25, 36-38

Lesson 7**Memory Verse:**

“By this everyone will know that you are
my disciples, if you love one another.”
—John 13:35

Students will consider some of the ways that they can be positively and negatively influenced by friends.

Materials:

- Internet access

- **If I told you that someone was “driving under the influence,” what would I probably mean?** (The person is driving while drunk or high.)
- **Why is “driving under the influence” a bad idea? Why?** (Accept all reasonable answers.)

Let’s check out a short video about the dangers of driving under the influence.

Play the following video for your students [3:41; stop at 2:53]:

The Deadly Truth About Drinking and Driving

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uH75bY8Gd0>

Those are some staggering statistics! We all know that driving a car while drunk or high on drugs is really stupid. A person could wreck his or her car, land in jail, or even kill somebody. However, we live our whole lives under the influence of something else that can be dangerous—and we don’t even think about it. What’s influencing us? It’s *friendship*. Friendships *can* be dangerous, though they can also keep you safe. It all depends on the friends you choose and how you let them influence you.

- **What’s one way that a friendship might be dangerous?** (A friend could talk you into making a bad choice, like bullying someone or taking a pointless risk to show off.)
- **What’s one way that a friendship might keep you safe?** (A friend could help persuade you to make a good choice, like being kind to someone or refusing to engage in risky behaviors.)

Because our friends have so much influence over us, it's important for us to choose wisely the people we hang out with. People make bad decisions for all sorts of reasons. Maybe we don't any know better. Maybe we're in a bad mood. But often, we do dumb things because of what our friends will think. Maybe you think you're too smart for that, but chances are, you've probably made a crummy decision because of peer pressure. *All* of us have—even adults!

- **What are some peer pressures you've faced?** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
- **Why do you think people give in to peer pressure?** (We want others to like us.)

The Bible warns us to be careful when we choose our friends. It's better to avoid temptation in the first place by choosing your friends wisely.

All of us are under the influence of friendship. That influence can be a force for good, or it can be a force for evil. The friendships that do the *most* good are centered on Jesus. Let's learn about some of Paul's relationships that made a major difference for good!

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your teacher's guide; your Step 4 appears below.)

middle school



Lesson 7 / January 14, 2024

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for use as
STEP 4 

Lesson 7

Focus:

The best friendships put Jesus first.

Lesson 7

Bible Basis:

Acts 20:16-25, 36-38

Lesson 7

Memory Verse:

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
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Materials:

- Students’ smartphones
- Optional: Index cards
- Pens/pencils

We suggest allowing students to use their smartphones during today’s Step 4 to send an encouraging text to a friend. If some of your students don’t have phones, or if you prefer not to use them for this activity, provide them with index cards and pens/pencils to write encouraging notes. If your class is meeting online, invite your students to bring an index card or piece of paper, along with a pen or pencil, with them to class.

If you don’t choose your friends wisely, they can lead you into some really bad decisions. But if you put Jesus at the center of your relationships, you and your friends can influence each other for good!

➤ **Let’s say that you decide to put Jesus first in a friendship with someone else. What are some ways you might influence that friend for good?** (Encourage students to suggest concrete ways that they can exhort a peer to make God-honoring choices. For example, a teen might ask his friend to join him in serving others. Or, a teen might encourage her friend to spend time with God in prayer, or call her on it if she’s about to make a negative choice.)

Take a minute to think of one of your friends. This shouldn’t be your crush or girlfriend/boyfriend—just someone you hang out with. Now, think of something you could tell your friend to influence him or her for good. Maybe you’ll encourage your friend to keep going as he works on a difficult project this weekend. Maybe you’ll speak some kind words to a person who’s having a rough life at the moment. Maybe you need to apologize for a way that you’ve hurt your friend.

How can you figure out what to say? Think about it this way: What’s one thing Jesus would say to your friend if He was here in person? Begin by giving your own answer as a model for the students to follow. Challenge your students to take this activity seriously, even though it may be difficult for them. (They need to apply both empathy and higher-level thinking—two skills that middle schoolers are still developing.) You might need to help some students think of a good answer.

If you've opted to have your students handwrite encouragement notes, pass out writing supplies (or have students get them if your class is meeting online). Adjust the following instructions appropriately. If you're having students use their smartphones for this exercise, say something like this: **Take out your phone and send an encouraging text to a friend. Remember, if you can't think of what to say, imagine what Jesus might say to your friend. What can you say that will show your friend you care about them, and that you're focusing on Jesus instead of yourself?** Give your students a few minutes to type out texts to their friends. If students struggle with what to say—and some of them probably will—be ready to provide some on-the-spot coaching. You may want to type out a text addressed to one of your friends in advance, so that you can share it with your students as an example.

All of us live under the influence of friendship. Today, you've influenced one of your friends for good! Keep working on putting Jesus at the center of the relationship with the person you texted and with all of your friends. You can lift them up by keeping your eyes focused on Jesus!

Close in prayer.

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