

Q. My parents have a problem with some of my friends because they have “tats” (tattoos). They think that I will want to get tattoos, even though I said I’m not interested. I’m frustrated when my parents say they want me to hang out with “good people”—but that’s what my friends are!

A. **Auntie Lian:** It sounds to me that you are clear on your boundaries: you’re willing to be friends but don’t intend to take on their tattoo lifestyle. However, for some people—both in and out of the Adventist community—tattoos are not always looked upon favourably.

Pastor Shawn: It is important to remember that Jesus befriended many people who were considered “unfavourable”: lepers, Zacchaeus “the tax collector,” and others. Jesus did not become like them as a condition of His friendship. Also, Jesus always lifted up the Father, in their presence, even for those who did wrong.

So as an Adventist, being friends with those different from us is an important part of our gospel mission. I know you’re not thinking *mission*; you just want to hang out with your friends. But sometimes a little theology can help. 😊

You also mentioned in your letter your friends are good people. That’s important because the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (NIV), and Jesus gives us a practical test of people’s character in Matthew 7:18–20, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ... Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (NKJV).

So if your friends’ behaviour hasn’t “soured,” then you’re in good company. In fact, your beliefs may even start to rub off on them!

That being said, I also hear where your parents are coming from. Your parents simply want the best for

you and are worried your values may change.

Auntie Lian: The best thing to do is ask your parents to tell you specifically what they are concerned about. Sometimes parents may know or see things about your friends that you might not know/see.

If your parents share information about your friends that clearly demonstrate they are in fact “bad company,” you need to listen carefully and decide, with your parents’ help, what to do.

Pastor Shawn: If it turns out your parents’ feelings are based on perception and not facts, you might want to share a little theology with them (I told you it can help 😊). You can also remind your parents that you’re not looking to hang out with “bad apples.” That might make them feel more comfortable.

Embracing differences is not easy. Your parents just want to know that as you expand your friendship circle, you will not lose your way from your Christian values. However, as a young person, and as an Adventist, you are called to befriend all types of people, helping where you can, teaching Christ through how you live, sharing the gospel when possible, and, hopefully, having fun with your friends along the way. ■

*Do you have a question for Pastor Shawn and Auntie Lian?
Email it to messenger@adventist.ca.*

NOCAP

Straight Talk

w/Pastor Shawn and Auntie Lian

