

Choose Your Friends Wisely

(by Pastor Trent Boedicker)

Text: Proverbs 4:10-19

1/17/16

*“Do not enter the path of the wicked
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on.
For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;
And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.”
Proverbs 4:14-16*

Choose your friends carefully. Those were the words of wisdom given to a young man named Frank, by his mother, before the first day of high school. He was a good kid, smart, and came from a pretty solid home. But it was a big adjustment moving to new a town, going to a new school, having to make new friends.

Frank felt a bit out of place, and desperately wanted to fit in. And so he was excited when a group of guys from his class invited him to hang out with them after school. “Where are we going,” he asked.

“There’s a cool place where we go, come on, we’ll show you,” they replied. They took off down the street, until they came to an old abandoned house. A little fence wrapped around the property, on big sign was posted in front which read “keep out.” But that didn’t hinder the boys from climbing over into the yard

Frank stopped. He wasn’t so sure about this. “I don’t know guys; maybe we should keep out, like the sign says.”

“Nah, we come here all the time, nobody ever catches us. You’re not chicken are you?” the boys scoffed.

He stood there for a few moments, thinking about what to do. This didn’t seem like the sort of thing he should be doing, but he wanted his classmates to like him. He told himself, “I’ll just go with them for a few minutes, and then I’ll make up an excuse to head home.” And he jumped the fence to join them on the other side.

One of the guys picked up a rock and threw it at one of the windows. All the others laughed at the sound of breaking glass. “Good shot,” one of them cheered. Soon, all the boys were picking up stones and throwing them towards the house. “Come on Frank, let’s see what you’ve got.”

“I don’t know guys,” he answered.

“Aw, I bet you throw like a girl,” one of them taunted.

Frank wanted to prove them wrong. It seemed harmless. Nobody lived here anyways. So Frank reached down and picked up a rock. He gave it his best throw, shattering the front window. All of the boys erupted with applause. “Way to go!” “High five!” Frank smiled. Finally, he felt like he was part of the group.

Their celebration was cut short, however, when a police siren sounded behind them. All of the other boys scattered, but Frank froze. As the officer put him in the back of the car, he couldn’t help but think, this was not how he had hoped his first day of school would end.

Our passage this morning warns us to be careful about the company we keep. **We must choose our friends wisely, because the crowd you follow will influence the kind of person you are going to become.**

Peer pressure can be a powerful thing, especially for young people: even for those who grow up in a good home, go to church, and have parents that teach them right from wrong. When someone is desperate to fit in, it doesn't take much before they will begin to compromise their values to gain the acceptance of their peers. They do what everyone else does, and go along with the crowd. One bad choice leads to another, and pretty soon, they forget who they are.

But even as we get older, that threat doesn't go away. We still have to be careful about the kinds of influences that surround us. Our friends can either have a positive impact in our lives, or a negative impact. It is very easy to be led astray, when we run with the wrong crowd.

That's the message Solomon is trying to impress upon his son, and the young people of Israel, in these verses. The wise king realized that one day, his days would come to an end. His son, would take his place, and ascend to throne after he was gone. Solomon wanted to prepare him for that day. He wanted his son to do well, to become a successful leader, and to make the kinds of decisions that would please God. And so urges him to be very careful about the company he kept. If you want to be a godly person, spend time with godly people. The last thing in the world you need, is to make friends with foolish fellows.

There are a number of principles throughout the proverbs, that teach us about the qualities we should look for in a friend, as well as the type of crowd we should avoid.

1. First of all, the passage warns us to beware of the kind of friend who will get you into trouble.

Again, verse 14 urges us: *“Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not even pass by it; turn away from it and pass on.”* This is a pretty urgent warning. Imagine a great big sign with flashing red lights that says “danger ahead.” Watch out! You don't want to go down that road. If you keep going, you're not going like where you end up.

A husband tells his wife, “I think I'm going to spend some time with the guys from the factory, after work, tonight.” She gives him a look, “I don't want you going to bars with those guys, I know how rowdy they get, and the trouble they get into. You don't need to be a part of it.” He argues, “It's okay. I won't get sucked in to doing the things that they do. Don't worry, I know where to draw the line.” Maybe so, but the problem is that when we put ourselves in a compromising position it doesn't take much for us to fall. The more you hang around with troublemakers, the more apt you are to learn their ways. Even if you don't see it or realize that it is happening. At first, you are uncomfortable with the language they use, the jokes they tell, and their behavior. But before long, you grow accustomed to it; it doesn't bother you as much. One thing leads to another, and before long you find yourself participating in those very same things. More and more, you take on the characteristics of the people who surround you.

It's sort of like someone who spends time in another part of the country, without even knowing it you pick up the way they speak, the things they say, even their accent. A guy who spends a few months in Texas comes home and the very first thing he says is "ya'll miss me while I was gone?" He's only been away a short time, but he's already talking like a Texan. We pick up more than verbal mannerisms, from our friends, we can pick up their habits and lifestyle.

Verse 16 says that the wicked, "...are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble..." They're not content just to do wrong by themselves, they are eager to get others to go along with them. Have you ever noticed that people who know they are doing something wrong try to convince others to join them? "Come on, it's fun." "Are you chicken?" --Why? Maybe to try to convince themselves it must be okay.

In the NT, the apostle Paul makes the same point in [1 Corinthians 15:33](#) when he writes, "*Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.*" We might tell ourselves we're not going to change, and we may not see it happening, but the reality is that it's very difficult to stay on the right path when we walk with those who are going the wrong way.

Now there is a tension here. It's not that we are to isolate ourselves from the world, or wall ourselves in, ignoring the unsaved people around us. How can we show people the love of Christ if we refuse to go near them? But at the same time, we are called to be holy, and set apart. Following Christ means leaving behind the entanglements that would keep us from walking in fellowship with Him. It's not always easy to know how close is too close. That's why we need wisdom. There is a difference between building a bridge, and building an alliance. There is a difference between reaching out to those going the wrong way, and being dragged along. It's one thing to build a bridge, but another to become partners. Jesus was a friend of sinners, but never joined in their deeds of darkness. He didn't go along with the crowd, He invited people in the crowd to change direction go along with Him.

Turn the page to [Proverbs 13:20](#) "*He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.*" If you want to be wise, if you want to be godly, if you to make your life count you need to spend time with people who share those same values. Look for friends who are going to help you be a better person, who will build you up, not drag you down and who will inspire you to grow closer to God.

2. Scripture also warns us to beware of fair-weather friends.

Turn over to [Proverbs 18:24](#). "*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*" We might read that and wonder, "how can it be a problem to have too many friends?" The more the merrier... right? Not necessarily. Don't mistake quantity for quality. I'd rather have one or two great friends, than have a roomful of people who are only there when it's convenient.

People today might brag about how many friend they have on Facebook. "I have 500 friends." "Well I have a 1,000 friends." Really? How many do you really know? How many can you depend on? How many would be there for you in heartbeat if you needed them? There are *friends*, and then there are **friends**. A lot of people will be there when it is fun, when things are going well, they will

show up if you're throwing a party, or when you can help them out in some way. But when things are rough, and you need a shoulder to lean on, they are nowhere to be found.

A friend who sticks closer than a brother is someone who is loyal, who stays by your side through thick and thin. Maybe you have that friend, who knows you better than anyone else. He is the kind of person who will show up at your front door with a pot of chicken noodle soup when you are sick, or who visits you when you are in the hospital, who gets your mail when you are on vacation, or who pulls you out of the ditch in a snowstorm. Those kinds of friendships are developed over time, and require commitment. Cherish them. Don't take them for granted.

Turn to **Proverbs 25:19**. *"Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble."* That's an interesting picture, isn't it? Have you ever taken a step, and your leg gave out on you (pulled a muscle or twisted an ankle). How did that feel? Not good. You didn't expect to end up on the ground, you thought it would hold you, but there you are. Or have you ever had a bad tooth? You go to take a bite of your sandwich, expecting to enjoy your meal, but instead pain surges through your nerve endings. You're not even able to finish the meal. That tooth is not doing what it was meant to do.

By definition, friends are people who are supposed to be there for each other... they are faithful and trustworthy, you can lean on each other through the ups and downs of life. If someone is only there when they need something, or when it is beneficial for them, if they leave you high and dry in your hour of need, they are not really much of a friend.

There are many examples of friendship throughout the Bible. In the NT, the apostle Paul is someone who valued the special relationships that Christ placed in his life. He knew the difference between true friends, and fair-weather friends. He had come across both kinds. Towards the end of his life, he was a prisoner in Rome, and things were not going his way (at least from an earthly point of view). He wrote his final letter to one of his closest friends, Timothy and said "Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world has deserted me..." **(2 Timothy 4:9-10)**. That had to be frustrating. This was a man who had been there in the past, who had been part of the team, but now when things got tough he walked away. Paul had been abandoned, but he realized that he wasn't completely alone. He goes on to say, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me..." **(2 Timothy 4:16-17)**

Even in those moments when it feels like everyone in the world has deserted you, there is always one friend who will stick closer than a brother. That is the kind of friend we need. And that is the kind of friend we should seek to be.

Somebody asked me recently if I was Cleveland Browns fan, and to be honest I hesitated. "Sort of," I answered. "I guess, if I have to own up to it, I root for the Browns, most of the time." I'm kind of a fair weather fan. I would cheer for them a little more if they won more games. I'm not really devoted. I miss more games than I watch. If a better game is on, I don't hesitate to turn the channel. You can tell someone is committed when they wear their hat or coat in public.

Watch out for fair-weather fans. That's not the kind of person you'll be able to count on when things are rough. Look for those who will stick by your side, if

3. Finally, we need to beware of friends who only tell you what you want to hear.

Turn with me to **Proverbs 27:6**. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”* There are a lot of flatterers out there, in the world. They are nice and pleasant, when you are around, but as soon as you turn your back, it’s a different story. They are deceitful, and two-faced. That’s not a friend.

A real friend is sincere. What you see is what you get. You don’t have to guess what he is really thinking. You don’t have to wonder, “was he just saying that to be nice, or he does really mean it.” Friends are honest with each other. They care enough to tell each other the truth, even when the truth hurts.

“Hey, this path that you’re on, it’s not good. You’re not headed in a good direction right now. This isn’t the way a child of God should be acting.”

“What are you talking about? I think everything is just fine.”

“Look, I care about you, that’s why I’m saying something. If I wasn’t concerned, I wouldn’t have bothered.”

If I’m driving down the road, and not paying attention to what I’m doing, and I start to swerve into the other lane, into oncoming traffic, I would rather you yell at me and say “WATCH WHAT YOU’RE DOING” than for you to say nothing and let me crash. My feelings might momentarily be hurt, but that’s okay, it’s better than the alternative.

I mentioned Solomon’s son, earlier. We might wonder if he listened to his father and chose his friends wisely? No. Solomon’s son must have been sleeping during that lesson. When Rehoboam became king, he surrounded himself with yes-men, who only told him what he wanted to hear. He wouldn’t listen to the wise counselors who had served his father, but appointed some of the young men he had grown up with, to be his advisors. At a critical moment, in the history of the nation, he ignored the counsel of the wise, and followed the advice of his foolish friends. As a result, the nation was torn in two.

Find friends who are wise, and who will speak the truth, they just might spare you the pain of making a poor decision. Be that kind of influence in the lives of your friends.

Conclusion –

These verses challenge us to think about the kind of friends we hang around with, and the kind of friend we are to others.

Spend some time thinking about your closest friends. Ask yourself: what kind of influence have they had on my life? Is it positive? Or have they gotten you into trouble? Are they helping you grow closer to Christ? Or are they leading you away? Do you need to seek out better influences? Are there relationships that need to end?

Think about the kind of friend that God wants you to be. Are you setting a good example? Are you modeling Christ? Are you reliable, eager to help when others need someone to lean on? Are you genuine, and sincere, speaking the truth in love?

Sometimes our friends let us down. None of us are the perfect influence that we would like to be, and so we need to show each other patience and grace. But there is one friend who will never disappoint, who will never let you down, who is perfect in every way. – the Lord Jesus Christ. We need Him above all others. Spend time with Him. Cherish His affection. Value His opinion more than the rest. You can be sure that He will never lead you astray. He will be there through all of life's up and downs. And He will always lead in you in the truth. Make sure He is in your life.