

Proverbs, Part 3 8-15-21

Choose Good Friends

Proverbs 1:1-3a *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*
²*To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, ³to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice and equity.* It really is a tremendous blessing of God that He has laid out before us His teaching in wise behavior. That is what Proverbs is. We can read it and gain understanding, we come to know with confidence what we can do to experience the favor of God upon our lives, to enjoy a life of victory and abundance. Today we hit on another theme from Proverbs which is *choose good friends*. To put it more fully, I would say our theme from Proverbs is *don't spend time with the wicked; do spend time with the righteous*. For this study we need go no further than chapter 1:10 for our first relevant passage. 1:10-14 *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. ¹¹If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us ambush the innocent without cause; ¹²let us swallow them alive like Sheol, even whole, as those who go down to the pit; ¹³we will find all kinds of precious wealth, we will fill our houses with spoil; ¹⁴throw in your lot with us, we shall all have one purse."* All that is what the sinners say. Here now is what wisdom says 15 *My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path.* The emphasis within this theme of choosing good friends is really on the negative. Don't mess around with the wicked, don't get involved with them. In chapter 2 you have the warning about the folly of associating with the sexually loose woman. He says, *stay away from her*. Usually, where there is a negative directive in the Scriptures there is also a positive command. Don't be with immoral people, do be with good men. You can see that in Proverbs 13:20 *He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.* That may state the theme as clearly as any. You see the glaring contrast. If your friends are wise you too will be wise, but if your buddies are fools, you are in a world of hurt. That is why Proverbs 14:7 (NLT) *Stay away from fools, for you won't find knowledge on their lips.* And finally, Proverbs 22:24 *Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, ²⁵or you will learn his ways and find a snare for yourself.* Don't hang around with, don't be buddies with evil people but instead make friends of

the righteous and wise. This is a major concern for our God and now I want us to consider why that is.

Why is the company that you keep such a big deal? I suppose the reason is obvious when you face it honestly. Those who surround you make up one of the most powerful influences in your life. They exert a pressure upon you that will invariably, unless constantly and vigorously resisted, squeeze you into its mold. You don't have to be a psychologist or a Bible scholar to realize that. We all know that what we are today is largely a result of the combined influences of many people, family and friends alike. This is a major, major factor in the development of children. Who their buddies are can make a world of difference. You parents who are now raising children should be intensely interested in who your children are playing with and learning with and growing up with. It is very possible that all your good parenting will be a waste if you neglect this one vital concern. There is nothing wrong, indeed I can see everything right, in parents taking an active role in your child's choice of friends and playmates. I reflected on the influence of early friendships in my life this week and I could see very plainly how much they shaped what I became. I don't really know how much of a conscious attempt my mother made to get me in with the right crowd as a little boy but I look back today and thank God, I thank God, that my best friends as a kid were the cleanest, straightest, and most honest kids I knew and they came from terrific families. To a large extent this was due to being raised in church and going to a good elementary school, but, whatever the causes, I want to share with you what I believe my early friendships did for my life. They reinforced the system of values I was being taught at home and church. That doesn't sound like much until you compare my experience to others. Countless are the children who are taught well at home or church but go off to school and are surrounded by kids who display violent tempers or nasty speech, or disrespect for authority. These kids become their friends and, as time goes on, the values of the home are totally swept aside and replaced by the standards of the gang. You know that happens time and time and time again and parents start wondering what happened to my sweet little child, where did I go wrong and the whole problem lies in the type of friends little Johnny has developed. That is why I praise God that my best friends as a child were from Christian homes and approached life from the same set of values that I had. I saw that their parents had the same basic set of rules mine did. I saw that those families were solid and loving and industrious. In fact, those homes were superior in character to my own and served to strengthen my sense of right and

wrong. My early relationships served to reinforce my values. When I hit Jr. High and went off to a much different school I really had my eyes open. I confronted a world that was much more corrupt and difficult than I had imagined, but I was able to survive it alongside those same close friends who would support rather than oppose my values. This monster called peer pressure, which eats many youngsters alive can be greatly weakened, if you get into the right group. By the grace of God, I did. I've seen the scars on those who did not and so I know what Proverbs means when it says Proverbs 13:20 *He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.* Do you also know this from personal experience?

Apart from friends and family there is another set of characters whose influence we should not overlook. They are the public figures who enter your life via the media. With these actors and speakers and authors and singers we have a one-way type of relationship that influences us greatly because we welcome them into our homes and care for hours at a time. It's easy to get to the point where you feel closer to a podcaster or a media figure than you do to your own family. I know that I have felt a close kinship with the teachers I have heard via audio for years and the authors whose books and articles I have read. These get through to you and to your children and they shape what you and yours will become. You cannot afford to be undiscerning in whom you choose to be your media friends or your personal friends. The influence upon you that both groups will have is too great to ignore.

Now the reason for this is two-fold. Your friends will greatly affect your life because you invariably tend to go where they go and do what they do. First, we see that where your friends go, you will go. If your friends go to the bar or the party or the movie, or if they go to church, that is where you will likely be found as well. If your friends walk into temptation you will walk there with them and that is why it's best to avoid those kinds of friends. As a pursuer of righteousness, you cannot afford to let other people lead you into temptation. You will go where your friends are going and because of that you want to figure out first where it is you want to go, where God wants you to go and then find friends who are going there, too. Do you see the reason in that? You don't let your friends determine your destination, you let your destination determine your friends. That may sound unkind to some of you but I can't apologize for that. Just because you're my buddy doesn't mean I'm going to follow you over a cliff. There are lots of people ready to go with you, arm in arm to hell, it doesn't matter where we're going just

so we're together. How about this instead? I am bound for the promised land, I am walking the highway of holiness and if you want to come walk it with me, I'd love to have you along but I can't leave the path to join up with your group. My goal is set before me in God's word and I want companions who will not lead me away from that but will even keep me straight and steady as I go, who will pull me back when I stray and urge me onward and upward. Good friends will help me reach my goal, bad friends will pull me down. Remember too that we are trying to avoid temptation. *Flee temptation* says the Lord. Making friends of evil men is running toward the temptation not away from it. Proverbs makes clear that to do so is just asking for trouble. Proverbs 16:29 *A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good.* You say, "well, I'll go with my godless friends but I won't do what they are doing." That is not fleeing the temptation. Your choice of friends is critical because you will go where they go.

Then, too, you will do what they do. You will. This is the principle of imitation. You become like those around you. You do. Why is it that none of your children have British accents and yet in a country across the ocean almost all of the children do? Why do kids in Alabama tend to have Southern accents and kids in New Jersey don't? The principle of imitation. We tend to become like those around us. It is true with speech and dress and morals and religion. It is a fact of life that says a great deal about who you want to surround yourself with. 1 Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.* That is simple isn't it? It is obviously true. But so great is our ability to deceive ourselves that Paul had to say, "Do not be deceived." I have come to see precisely why he added that warning. All the time people are saying to themselves, "It won't hurt me to be with them. I'm strong enough not to let them influence me. It's okay to date that non-Christian guy, to take that job with the bad influences, to listen to that musician." Who are you kidding? The point of this theme in Proverbs is that sinners will lead you astray because you will become like your friends. Proverbs 13:20a *He who walks with the wise will be wise*, but he who walks with fools? Over and over in the Torah you will find God's warnings to the nation of Israel as she approached Canaan about getting overly involved with the pagan peoples that surrounded them there. At the end of his life, after leading the people into the Promised Land, Joshua delivered his final sermon, his last expression of concern for Israel. Joshua 23:6-13 *Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn*

*aside from it to the right hand or to the left, ⁷ so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. ⁸ But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. ⁹ For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. ¹⁰ One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you. ¹¹ So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God. ¹² For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³ know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you. They are warned not to marry or join themselves in any way to these other nations. Do you know why? In Deuteronomy 7 Moses gave the same orders and explained that Deuteronomy 7:4 *They will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.* Essentially, he says you should not associate with them because if you do you will become like them. You may not become as bad as them but you will be influenced by them.*

I could see how clearly this was the case in my own life, especially in one area of cussing, the use of foul language. My parents did not cuss, I was taught not to do that and grew up assuming I never would. Although I knew kids who cussed when I was little, it never became the dominate language of my culture until I was in Junior High. Even then I withstood the pressure because my best friends did not cuss. But about ninth grade two things happened. First, some of my friends started to succumb to the cultural norm and, secondly, a summer as an exchange student put me around a whole new set of companions. My friends from Colombia cursed like sailors in two languages. In fact, I first started using foul language in Spanish and then upon my return to the states, made the easy transition to American. In fact, I remember going thru customs in Miami and for the first time ever I blurted out a cuss word in front of an adult. That I still would not do but of course my new habit fit in perfectly with the high school sub-culture I was a part of and eventually even the last holdout among my friends picked up

the lingo. It was a set of ungodly friends that led me into that sin. Guess how I stopped it? I didn't leave the world. I still heard the verbal garbage on the basketball court and around school but I developed a new set of Christian friends. It is not your acquaintances that affect you as much as your closest friends. My new friends did not cuss and they did not want me to either. My conscience was renewed.

Well, ponder this principle of imitation. What it means for us is to determine what kind of person we want to be and then surround ourselves with people like that. I know that when I went about trying to find a wife, I looked for someone who was the type of person I wanted to be. Of all the people who will shape you your spouse may be the most influential. I wanted someone who would not pull me down but lift me up. I knew she would shape what I became. Now that may frighten some of you singles because you look around and find no one you would care to be like. Look past what the person is now to something that really is more important and that is what he/she is becoming. I heard of an elderly man who had just been remarried to a woman just as old as he. Someone asked him how he and his bride got together and he explained that he was sitting on a bench when this lady came up to him and said, "Say, you look just like my third husband!" He asked her, "How many husbands have you had?" She said, "Two." See what someone is becoming, where they are going because it is less true to say that you will become what your friend is than to say you will become what your friend becomes. But this much is very clear, your media friends and your personal friends will influence what you do and shape what you are.

To bring all this down to where we can use it, where it will really make a difference let me offer three applications that flow from our lesson. To live according to this emphasis of God's wisdom here is what you do. First, #1 - Don't enter into harmful relationships. We've seen verse after verse in Proverbs on this point. So, don't do it. Don't join in with people who are going to lead you into sin. Now this point always raises a few questions. What about my job? I have to work in an environment that drags me down spiritually, what can I do about that? Well, some relationships are voluntary on our parts and some are not. Obviously, you could not choose your parents or siblings. Your friends you can choose. The people you work with fall somewhere in between it seems to me. Those of you whose work environs lead you into sin need to realize that you may have the option of getting out of that environment. You don't like that solution do you? You agree that your job is hurting your soul but you wouldn't think of letting that

ruin your career. I believe I have the mind of Christ when I challenge you to consider what is most important, your career or your relationship with God? There comes a point where you gotta say, “what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul.” If you can’t maintain spiritual health where you are, doing what you do, I urge you to get out and trust God to supply your needs some other way. The word of God to all of us is to stay away from the wicked who would lead us into sin. That applies for your business and your marriage. You will become like those you are around. What does that say to single people about who you will marry? What really counts in a husband or wife? Do you want to be like that man or woman you have your eye on? Are you moving in the same direction in life? If not, stay out. The Christian life is tough enough without you adding to your temptations by getting tied up with the unrighteous.

Application #2 is to break off harmful relationships. This is the same point as the first one except it assumes you are already in the relationship. If it is dragging you down spiritually, break it off. Quickly let me qualify that statement. I’m not saying you should divorce your unbelieving husband or reject your non-Christian parents. Those are relationship God has put you in. But friendships are things which you freely enter and may freely exit. Now I’m not suggesting for a moment that you be rude and unkind to anybody. If you need to break off a friendship for the sake of your soul, do it but be careful how you do it. There are two basic way to do this. One is that you can directly communicate to the person that for our own sake, because of your own weakness, you need to back off from the relationship. The other way is to take control of the relationship and make it so boldly Christian that the friend will either get straight or get away on their own initiative. And doing this is not mean. Who you will have as friends is your choice and God commands you to make it wisely. He calls us to flee temptation, even if that temptation comes in the form of a person.

Before I move on to a third application I want to briefly comment on the ‘*but what about Jesus*’ response. This is the objection that says Jesus was a friend of sinners, shouldn’t we be, too? That objection reveals several misunderstandings. First of all, it misunderstands what I mean by friend. Yes, we should be friendly with the ungodly. We don’t need to shun their presence or refuse to eat with them or anything like that. If you mean that Jesus socialized at times with sinners, fine, I have no problem with that. But his companions were not those who were immoral and rebellious. They were his disciples who were trying

to live as He taught. Secondly, Jesus was a friend to sinners in that he sought to help them. He didn't spend time with them for his own sake or because he enjoyed it. If your goal in being with the unrighteous is to help them then have at it. Make sure that you are the influencer and not the influenced, and make sure you are doing what you claim. I applaud you if you go out and minister to the immoral but for self-development you had best go elsewhere.

Application #3 is to establish quality relationships. To establish quality relationships with people that will encourage you in righteousness. Again, determine your goals and then let your goals determine your friends. Look around you and see who you would like to build a relationship with that would be mutually beneficial. Find the church where you are going to get the most support in your Christian walk. Pretend you are new in this area and ask the question, who would I really profit from as a Christian companion? Times when you do move give you a great opportunity to do that. When college students go off to school they can make a conscious choice of who they will have as friends. When I entered the University of Florida, I had this idea that I would have to be a lone Christian among all these wolves and it just was not so. There were more Christians at that huge school than at most Christian colleges. What you had to do was find them and enter into that Christian community where the peer pressure was more positive than negative. You can get into the drug scene, the frat scene, the party scene, or the Christian scene. The choice is yours and that choice will go a long way toward making you who you become. The wise man wants wisdom, he wants righteousness, and so he seeks out companions who are seeking those things as well. I encourage you to do the same, to heed the wisdom of God and choose good friends, beginning with the best friend you can ever have – Jesus the friends of sinners and the one who lays down his life for his friends.