

Friendly Advice from the Wise

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (**Proverbs 13:20**, ESV).

Who are your friends? Who do you hang out with? Who do you turn to in time of need? Who do you run to when the going gets tough? Who do you call when you are rejoicing over some blessing?

The fact is our friends matter. Our companions usually reflect our values. We don't usually spend a whole lot of time with people who don't mirror what we care about. As the old saying goes, birds of a feather flock together. Certainly, there is the exception to every rule and outliers may exist in every group. But think back to high school days. Consider the groups or cliques. Using the terms from my day (because I realize I'm getting too old and out of touch to know the present terms), jocks spent time with jocks, hoods with hoods, nerds with nerds, preppies with preppies, cheerleaders with cheerleaders, etc. Within the groups, the members of each one talked similarly, thought similarly, dressed similarly, wore their hair similarly. I always thought it was interesting that was even true of the nonconformist group. All those nonconformists nonconformed the exact same way. Weird. What do your friends reflect about you?

Further, our friends influence us like no one else. I recall learning in my days as an education major in English and linguistics, that the number one influence on language, dialect, and accent is not the parents but the peers. I was amazed. That anecdotal piece of information seems to reflect the issues of values, morality, and worldview also. Paul says, “Bad company ruins good morals” (**I Corinthians 15:33**, ESV). Let's face it. When we view people as important, we want them to think highly of us. We know they will likely think highly of us as we measure up to their standards. As we strive to impress them, we often adopt their mindsets and worldviews. In fact, that can often happen without us even knowing it. That is, we often know the right answers to questions and will give them if asked directly for instance in a Bible class. However, when push comes to shove, in the heat of the moment, we don't respond based on our Bible class answers but based on conforming with our companions.

Additionally, our friends advise us. I can't help but think of Rehoboam in **I Samuel 12**. If you haven't read that account, go to it now. It is eye-opening. Here was a guy that heard the good advice of his elders, but instead turned to his friends and peers. He listened to their folly and Israel was split apart. Ten of the tribes were ripped from Rehoboam's hand and from his father's house. A problem comes up at work and we turn to our friends. Will our friends give us biblical advice or push us to pursue our own passions and demand our rights above our responsibilities? A fight with the spouse is followed by a call to our friend. Will our friend listen honestly, calling us up short for our part in the debacle and also help us have patience with our spouse for their part, or will our friend simply increase our anger and push our desire to abandon the relationship? We want to spend some money, so we call a friend to get some advice. Will our friends help us keep our responsibilities in perspective or simply push us to go for the gusto?

I'm sure you can see why the Proverbialist says the companion of fools will suffer harm.

However, let's take a different approach to this. Because we may have a host of foolish companions that we simply don't recognize for what they are. As an avid reader of books, watcher of television, and listener to radio, I have come to realize that some of my best friends are people I don't even know. Some of my dearest companions are fictional. We spend more time in a week with our favorite TV character than we do some members of our family. We devote more attention to our favorite hero or heroine in our favorite series of novels than we do with real life people around us. I remember once when a character from a TV show I watched died unexpectedly, and for days I was in mourning and shock. You would have thought a relative had died. I literally felt like I had lost a real friend. To be honest with you, I would be embarrassed to admit to you the television show because I've gone back to watch it years later and question its appropriateness. And of course I should question, because those companions affected me.

I certainly know that the matter of what we watch, read, or listen to is more complex than simplistic judgmental standards. I don't go around checking out people's movie collections, libraries, or playlists so I can find out if they are as spiritual as I am. And I certainly hope no one does that to me. I'm sure I allow things that some others would gasp at and disallow things that some others wouldn't think twice about. I simply hope we can recognize that our companions in these entertainment venues are actually that. They are companions. And if they are foolish companions, we had better take care. That is especially true because popular culture is not exactly known for its great biblical worldview. It is not known to hand out great, godly advice. Sadly, these entertaining companions are even more dangerous because usually when we are spending time with them, our guard is down. We don't know

they are influencing us; we just think we are being entertained, having a good laugh or cry. Their messages sink in without even realizing they are affecting us.

“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Who are you walking with?

—Edwin L. Crozier