



Rev. Jeremy Vaccaro  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church  
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## *God's Twitter: Wisdom for Friends* Proverbs 13.20

Today we're continuing our series on the Proverbs called God's Twitter. Today's tweet is about friendship. How many of you have friends? I have 674 friends ... on Facebook that is. And since Facebook is the source of true friendship, you should listen to me – I'm obviously an expert in this area (ha ha). Actually, I think I struggle in this area. I often approach friendship selfishly, arrogantly and sparingly. That's why it's a good thing this isn't Jeremy's Twitter on friends. But friendship is an incredibly important topic.

You were designed for friendship. You were made for community. Having good friends is one of the sweetest things in life. Don't you agree? Friendship can be a wonderful life-giving thing in your life. But, friendship can also be extremely dangerous. Think about it this way. If you consider a list of the greatest joys in your life, chances are that many of them involved your friends. And, if you think about some of your greatest regrets, chances are that many of them involved friends. The nature of friendship is that it is a safe relationship. So in friendship we let our guard down. Sometimes that leads to wonderful Christ-honoring relationship, but sometimes it leads to you doing something that you would normally be disdainful of. Think about when you were a kid. Chances are that dumbest decisions you made were with friends. I'm no exception. The first time I drank a beer, I was with friends. The first time I looked at pornography, I was with friends. The first time I publically disgraced someone with my words, I was with friends. The first time I said racially offensive jokes, I was with friends. I'm not proud of any of these and I'm not saying that someone else is responsible for them ... but they all had something to do with the friends I was with at the time. But on the other hand, when I decided to give my life to Christ, I was with friends. When I first understood God's call on my life to ministry, I was with friends. When I first considered coming to Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church, I was with friends. There is something profound about friendship – it impacts our lives; it impacts who we are. And the stakes of getting it right seem to be pretty high ... sometimes they are even life or death. That's why it is so important for us to have wisdom about friends.

The scriptures are a wonderful place for us to find that wisdom, especially the scripture that we're going to look at today. The fact is, that if we don't understand this truth and leverage it in our own lives we will miss out on the opportunity to protect ourselves from future regrets. And, if we're not wise about our friendships – it's not only damaging to us personally, but it can be damaging to our families. And it can even be damaging to the witness we have as a church to the good news about Jesus Christ. So, let's pray and ask God to help us understand the truth of the scripture today, and then we'll dive into it together.

Prayer and then read Proverbs 13.20 **He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.**

This verse talks about a principle that is true for everyone. It doesn't matter if you're a Christian or not. It doesn't matter how mature you are in your faith. It doesn't matter if you're 15 or 50.

In general, when you walk with the wise you grow wise. "Walk with" simply means that you're doing life together or that you are friends and spending time together. The proverb says that when you spend time with people who are wise it affects you; the affect is that you become wise as well. In a sense, wisdom is contagious.

On the front of the bulletin I shared with you a definition of wisdom that I like. I got that definition from Pastor Andy Stanley; in fact, much of my message today comes from teaching I've heard from Andy over the years. A person who is wise sees or understands that all of life is connected. They get that the things they do today or think today or say today will influence their life tomorrow. They get that there are no isolated events in your life; everything in your life is connected. So, a wise person makes decisions today recognizing their long term impact.

According to this definition, I am wise ... sometimes, but not all the time. But according the Proverbs 13:20, if I become friends with and hang out with people who are wise – people who make decisions based on the fact that all of life is connected – it will help me to be wise. This is one of things that is so cool about friendship!

But, "a companion of fools suffers harm". A fool is someone who knows the difference between right and wrong but doesn't care. Proverbs 1:7 "but fools despise wisdom and discipline." When you try to correct a fool they're going to laugh in your face because they just don't care. When you say to a fool, "Don't you know that what you're doing is going to lead to destruction?" They say, "Yeah, but I don't care." Have you ever had that kind of a conversation? When you see the word 'fool' in Proverbs that's what it means. A fool is a person who lives as if life is disconnected; they live as if their actions today won't impact their tomorrow.

A companion of fools suffers harm. If you hang out with fools you're affected too, only this time the affect isn't so positive. In fact, it can be utterly devastating. If you have these kind of fools as your friends you will suffer harm.

Now, notice what it does not say. It does not say, like the first line of the verse, that you will become like them. It says that if you are companions with them you will eventually experience harm because of their destructive behavior. Sometimes we give excuses for unhealthy relationships by saying that we'll never join our friends in their mindset or behavior. And because we're convinced that we won't become like them we think we'll be fine. But this Proverb essentially says that if you think that way, you are absolutely wrong.

You've actually seen this happen. If you're hanging out with fools, their lives are eventually going to blow up in some way, shape or form – and when they do, even if you're not acting like them, you will experience the collateral damage. You'll be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and you will suffer harm.

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. This verse is basically pointing to this truth: **your friends will influence, and sometimes determine, the quality and direction of your life.** Many of you are thinking about your children as we talk about this, and that's good, but this is true for you too. Are you walking with the wise or you a companion of fools? Your friends will be a positive or negative influence in the quality or direction of your life. And this isn't the only Proverb that points to this reality. Look at Proverbs 22:24-25. **"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."** Hang out with a hot-tempered man and chances are you're either going to become like him or suffer harm because of his behavior. But on the other hand, look at Proverbs 27:17. **"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."** Friendships are one of the best ways to grow as a disciple of Jesus. Good friendships make you better; they sharpen you. Scripture makes this point so clear: your friends will influence the quality and direction of your life.

There are some questions you should be asking yourself about your friendships. They help to serve as warning signs that your friendships are going in an unwise direction, and that you need to make some adjustments. **Have you noticed that your friends are moving in a different direction that you want your life to go?** If yes, you probably need to create some space between you.

Most of you probably remember driving on the Narrows Bridge before the new bridge was built. I always grabbed the steering wheel with two hands when I drove in that middle lane, because you just never knew what might happen. There were cars just a few feet from your right side going in the same direction as you, and there were cars a few feet on your left – separated only by a narrow piece of chicken wire between two slabs of asphalt – going in the exact opposite direction. The wise thing to do in that situation is create space between yourself and the cars going in the opposite direction, unless of course that means sending the cars and people on your right to certain death over the edge of the bridge. So, now we have one bridge that goes one way and a completely different bridge that almost looks the same going in the opposite direction. And I bet it's much safer.

The problem is that most of the time the direction of your friends' life is usually not so overtly opposite of yours. It's normally just a bit off at first, but the farther you get down that road you realize just how far off course you've traveled. It's subtle, so here are some other questions to think about. **Have you found yourself pretending to be someone you're not? Are you feeling pressure to compromise? Do you hear yourself saying, "I'll go, but I won't participate"? Are you hoping that your family doesn't find out what you've been doing or where you've been or whom you've been with?** If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you need to create some space in those relationships.

Some of you might be resistant because you feel like staying close is the compassionate and Christ-like thing to do. Andy Stanley makes a great point when he talks about this. He says don't neglect wisdom for compassion. Some of you may be putting yourself in really unhealthy situations and relationships because you think it's the compassionate thing to do, but compassion and wisdom do not contradict each other. The most compassionate thing to do is probably step away a

bit so that when that person's life blows up there are some healthy people around to help. Are you putting yourself in an unhealthy situation for the sake of compassion? Remember, "a companion of fools suffers harm." Wisdom and compassion work together.

The bottom line is that the God's wisdom on friends teaches us that friends influence the quality and direction of our lives so we need to be paying attention to who we're hanging out with and how they are influencing us. But God's wisdom on friends also bears this important question: What kind of friend are you? Maybe today you're realizing how your current friends are influencing you, but don't forget to think about it the other way around. How are you influencing them? What kind of influence are you having at your work or at your school or at your church or in your neighborhood?

If you're a follower of Christ, this question about the kind of friend you are is about much more than just you're well-being. The scriptures say that you are called to be an ambassador for Christ in the world. The kind of friend that you are matters to the mission of God in the world. On the night before his death on the cross, when Jesus tried to demonstrate to his friends the kind of friends he wanted them to be, he made himself like a servant and he went around and washed their feet (even the one he knew would betray him). Later that night, according to the gospel of John (John 15.13), he told them "**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.**" And that is exactly what he did the next day. For the sake of salvation and wholeness, for the sake of relationship – for the sake of love and friendship – Christ died and rose again in victory. And now, by grace, through faith in Christ, we can be called friends of God as we participate in His mission to the world.

Are you the kind of friend who points to that reality? Does your life point to the wisdom of living God's way in God's world?

Your friends will influence the quality and direction of your life. "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." So may you seek wisdom from the Lord so that you and your friends can grow wise together, and so that your life can demonstrate the incredible love of God.

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Read Proverbs 13:20. Write down or talk about in your group some reflections you have about this proverb. Is it true? How have you seen or experienced it in your life?
2. Read Proverbs 27:17. Who are the people that are the most influential in your life right now? Are they wise or fools? Are they going in the same direction in life as you want to? How are they influencing you?
3. Read Proverbs 18:24. In friendship, which do you think is more important quality or quantity? What are you doing to develop true friendships in your life?
4. Read Proverbs 17:17. What kind of friend are you?
5. What is God speaking into your life through this sermon and these Proverbs?