

# Choose Your Friends

#0168

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—February 15, 1974

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” Proverbs 13:20.

According to this text, we become like the company that we choose. That’s what the wise man is telling us. This has its good side and its bad side. It has its happy side and its sad side. But either way, it’s a fact.

We all like the first part of this text, but the last part is just as true as the first.

Let me summarize what we’re studying in this way: “Choose your friends.” Choose those who can really help you, and choose those that you can help. Since only God knows all that’s involved in all of this, let God guide you in your choice of friends.

Who is a real friend? A friend is somebody who helps to *lift* me. A friend is somebody who, after I’ve spent an hour with him, or even five minutes, I’m better off than I was before. That’s a real friend. What if it’s the other way? What if, after I’ve spent an hour with my friend, or again even five minutes, I’m lower on the scale. Is that a good friend for me? No.

Who will you be a friend *to*? What is your *object* in being a friend to somebody? Your object ought to be to lift them. Certainly, nobody here would deliberately sit down and plan that they were going to get so and so for a friend and pull them down to hell.

The result of that happens every day. There are people who deliberately plan it. Our problem is not deliberately planning to do anything like that; it’s being used, perhaps ignorantly, perhaps without thought, to accomplish the same end. And remember, a gun is just as deadly when the bullet from its throat hits the heart, whether it was fired on purpose or accidentally.

There is an influence that reaches us from those whom we associate with that, in some cases, outweighs almost every other influence. The reading of the Bible, the reading of religious books, and the reading of the inspired counsels to the remnant church—all of that can be outweighed just by friendship. It’s happening all the time. The sermons people hear, good sermons, the articles they read in the *Review and Herald*, coming to Sabbath School, coming to prayer meeting, coming to this service—all of that can be outweighed. Some things can happen right here five minutes *after* the meeting that can weigh more than everything I have said *during* the meeting.

There are those of you who hold the souls of men and women and young people in your hands. You can either augment or neutralize everything I say. It is quite a solemn responsibility, isn't it friends? But it's the truth. I see it happen right along. The One who knows, and has sent me to preach, tells me that in every congregation, there are souls that are hesitating to be persuaded to be wholly for God. That same inspired Voice has told us that there are times that five words spoken after the sermon will have more influence than the whole sermon has. How wonderful it is to be with someone who will speak five words that lift you upward instead of five words that drag you downward.

It could be that, as the result of listening to some facts tonight, that somebody will be awakened to the importance of this from two standpoints. First, from the standpoint of the kind of friends who are influencing you, and second, the kind of friend God wants you to be to help influence others for the higher life.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not"  
Proverbs 1:10.

What does entice mean? Allure. Come. What does consent mean? What word would you use if you consented? Yes. "Consent thou *not*" means, instead of saying yes, you'd say no. It's an interesting thing that there are people who can resist the powerful influence of the Spirit of God in a meeting like this because they don't dare to meet the ridicule or the sneer of some "friend." Isn't that too bad?

The 15<sup>th</sup> verse:

My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot  
from their path" Proverbs 1:15.

Now turn to Psalm 1. It opens with the wonderful Bible word blessed. Other translations give us from this word happy. It comes from the word used to name one of the sons of Jacob—Asher; it means happiness.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the  
ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the  
seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD;  
and in His law doth he meditate day and night" Psalm 1:1–2.

Here is the way to be happy. There are three things to avoid in that first verse: don't walk in the counsel of the ungodly; don't stand in the way of sinners—don't stand around with them, don't laugh at their jokes, don't be influenced by their ideas—and don't sit in the seat of the scornful. So, don't *sit* with them, don't *walk* with them, and don't *stand around* with them. That's the counsel of God.

You say, "How are they ever going to be helped?"

It makes a great deal of difference whether we go in a burning building as firemen to pull out those who are about to be burned up, or whether we go in there to have a good time, doesn't it? A lifeguard plunges into a lake or ocean where someone is drowning to try to save them. This is friendship for Christ's sake. But we do not use people who are almost drowned themselves to be lifeguards. And we would not take a person who was almost overcome with smoke and say, We want you to be the fireman who goes into this burning building and pull somebody out.

So let no devil whisper in your ear that this is soul-winning when you are about to lose your way because you sit and talk and stand around with someone, and their influence is dragging you down. It isn't. It's soul-winning in reverse; for the Devil is in the soul-winning business also. And the One who knows says that the Devil succeeds in his plans almost every time. The Devil has won more souls than you and I ever thought of winning. He knows all about how to do it. And one of the greatest reasons he's successful is simply this law of gravitation—that it's far easier to slide down a hill than it is to climb up it. It is far easier to push somebody down than it is to pull and encourage them up. We need not be discouraged, but we ought to be wise and intelligent.

“Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird”  
Proverbs 1:17.

Some years ago, my wife and I were down in Mexico. We were taking a walk, and we came across a net. It must have been 20 feet wide, and there were several little birds lodged in it. It was made in such a way that a bird flying through the air would hardly notice it because the net was so fine. But when the bird got in it, and the more he struggled, the more he wrapped himself up like an insect in a spider web.

The wise man compares what we are studying to that net, and he's telling us that birds don't fly directly into a net that they see. So some of the nets we are studying about may be invisible. This is why, I repeat, we need to cry to God to *keep* us. I am talking to everybody here. Remember, Choose your friends. Don't just happen to be with this one or that one. Don't be like a leaf on the water, driven here and there by wind and tide. Choose your friends. Be sure that every friend you choose is somebody who can lift you higher toward Heaven and toward success in life. And if God has called you to soul-winning, and you get a close fellowship with Him, then reach out to try to help others. But be sure it's somebody you can help, not somebody who is going to drag you down.

Now to Proverbs 2. Notice what wisdom and discretion are going to do if you let them:

“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is  
pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee,  
understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of  
the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who

leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous” Proverbs 2:10–20.

What is flattery? It is telling people how beautiful they look; how cute and sweet and wonderful and interesting and talented they are—pouring it on. What’s the purpose of it? It may be deliberately seductive, or it may just be ignorantly being used by the Devil to divert people from Jesus Christ. Our human hearts, in our natural, inherited disposition, love that sort of attention. We like to be told how wonderful we are—how well we speak, how well we sing, how well we play.

Suppose I come to you and say, I hear that they’re not using you very well. I hear that you’re having a hard time. Never mind. Other people may not understand you, but God does, and I do. I think you are wonderful. I think those people that you can’t get along with ought to lay off of you.

What am I doing? I’m flattering. It’s another kind of flattery. There are many ways to do it.

Do youth need guiding? The one that you and I need to keep away from forsakes the guide of her youth. She gets out on her own, tosses her head, and shows how independent she can be. She boasts of it, glories in it, and tries to get others to go that same way. She forgets the covenant of her God.

Pretty solemn counsel, isn’t it? Does it make a difference who we go with, who we stick around, who we talk to, who talks to us, who we write to, who writes to us, who we call on the telephone, who calls us, who we let down our hair with and speak out our inner thoughts, and who we listen to? It makes a world of difference.

I’m glad we don’t have to spend all our time thinking about the dangerous kind of friends. Friendship is a wonderful power either to pull us down or to lift us up.

“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”  
Proverbs 18:24.

The last part of that verse we often think of regarding Jesus. He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, isn’t He? But the Bible is not merely talking about Jesus.

Solomon is stating a fact that it's possible to have a friend that will do more for you than even a brother would. It's possible to have ties in Christ that are even closer than the ties of flesh and blood.

David and Jonathan were like that. Wasn't that a wonderful friendship? Jonathan risked his own life to try to help and encourage David. He was willing to give up his place in the kingdom that David might have that place that had been chosen by God. It was a wonderful friendship. I like to think that David and Jonathan will be close together all through eternity.

The greatest work that one friend can do for another is to win a soul to Christ. If you are a real friend, God can use you to do that.

I want to read something wonderful:

"There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ's stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ" *The Desire of Ages*, page 297.

Isn't that wonderful? Yes. Think of it: There is God up in Heaven. But this poor, discouraged man can't see Him. But if I'm willing, I can have one hand in the hand of Jesus. Though unseen, He's not unreal to me; I know Him. I've found Him to be a Friend. And so, my hand is in His. And I can reach out that other hand to the man who is weak and discouraged and full of worries and fears. I can pull him up to get his hand in the hand of Jesus where mine is.

Notice that the purpose isn't that I will forever be the link that ties him to Christ. That's a *temporary* thing. I may be his friend forever, but he's not to get his spiritual nourishment from me forever.

If there is somebody here who has in your mind that you are always going to have to be dependent on others to get spiritual help, I bring you good news: you too can be a connecting link; you too can be used by God to get power directly from Jesus to help somebody else. But listen. If, when you try to get hold of this person, you think you have got to sin with them in order to help them, and appear to let the standard down in order to influence them, right then you let go of the hand of God whether you know it or not, and you have no power to lift them toward God. The thing will work the other way.

Your only hope of being a real friend is to keep that hand linked with Jesus, and then you can be the channel, the agent, that God uses to pull them out of the swift-running current and get their feet on the solid rock. And unless you are true to your *best* Friend, you can't be true to any *other* friend. So, the first thing is to get anchored in Jesus. Then reach out for somebody you can help. I want to read a similar statement:

“As Christ has pitied and helped us in our weakness and sinfulness, so should we pity and help others. Many are perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ’s stead, can be as a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon God. Oh, this is a blessed work!” *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5*, page 246.

Many of you know it is. Many of you know that the sweetest experiences, the happiest experiences of all your life have been when you have let God use you to be the connecting link between Heaven and some soul that needed help. Thank God, we can have more and more of these precious experiences. I want them. Don’t you?

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” Proverbs 17:17.

Whatever the need of the soul, a true friend will seek to meet that need. Thank God, if our hands are linked with Jesus, we will be able to help people, whatever their needs.

Here is one of the greatest texts on friendship I ever read:

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” John 15:13.

The greatest evidence any man can give of love for his friend is to lay down his life for him. Who did that for us? Jesus. Did He do it for you? Yes. Is He your Friend? Are you His friend? What a fellowship. What a friendship. Wouldn’t it be too bad to disappoint a Friend like that merely for the smile of some so-called friend that might pull us away from Him? And having accepted Him as our Savior, and having given Him our love, wouldn’t it be too bad to fail to let Him use us to help some other friend? Thank God, He is in the business of helping people.

I’m going to tell a little experience that I heard of just a few days ago. In a city a long way from here, one of our evangelists was holding some meetings. There was a woman who attended all these meetings. She had attended other meetings in the years before. She always came to church. She participated in Sabbath School. She gave her offerings. But she never took her stand for Jesus. Many people invited her and labored with her, but she never did. She was quite a forcible character. The stand she took was that she didn’t want people telling her to take her stand. That made it all the more difficult for her to get help.

But when this evangelist came to this city, he was told about this woman. He noticed that she came night after night. He was hoping that she would respond.

Finally, it came to the last night, and he was making a call. She didn't come. He turned the service over to somebody else, and he went down and came and stood by this woman. He invited her. She turned and gave the evangelist a real tongue lashing. She said, "Young man, when I get ready, I will do it. I don't need your help."

Did it prove that he had made a mistake, and there was no more use? No, it didn't prove either one. Somehow that man didn't know how he did it, and he wasn't sure he would recommend it to anyone else, but he turned to that woman and gave her one of the strongest talks he had ever given to anyone in his life. He let her know that God had been giving her opportunity after opportunity, and that if she didn't respond, it might be her last opportunity. He made an appeal, and she came right up.

When the time came for baptism, she got up before those people who had known her for years. She confessed how stubborn she had been. Then she said, "Before that last meeting, the Lord gave me a dream and told me that this was my last opportunity."

With a dream like that, you would think that she would come right away when the call was given. You would think that at least when the evangelist came and appealed to her that she at once would have meekly responded, but not so. The Devil doesn't give up that easy. And stubborn human nature doesn't give up that easy. Thank God that something was put into the soul of that worker for Christ that got through. And thank God that once she got on God's side, her stubbornness was just as strong for God as it had been for selfishness and sin.

Oh, my friends, there are no two lives alike. There are no two hearts just alike. I don't know whether God is going to give you a dream; I don't know whether He *has* given you one. But I can tell you this: God loves you. He will send every angel out of Heaven rather than let you be lost. But it's too late for us to be putting off a decision for Christ. It's too late for us to be dillydallying or playing around with sin.

My heart bleeds as I see people on the fringe of the kingdom. Their names may be on the church book. They may be considered in good and regular standing. But they're flirting with sin, flirting with the world. It may be good Seventh-day Adventist worldliness, but it leads to hell just as fast as the nightclubs, honky-tonks, and beer parlors. There are going to be plenty of church members in hell, and it won't be any comfort to you if you have a lot of other people like you keeping you company in the lake of fire. The last moments of consciousness will be used in pulling another's hair, and doing all kinds of mean and cruel things, in a vain endeavor to get vengeance against those who led them in the way of unrighteousness. That kind of friendship is not productive of eternal joy.

Thank God for this better road. Thank God for the privilege of being the friend of Jesus, and a friend of those who need help—but a *real* friend, a friend that lifts up, not one that pushes down or pulls down. God keep us from either thing.

God give us the joy of working with Jesus to pull people up. This is why Jesus came from Heaven to earth—to lift. This is why He invited Peter and John and Martha and Mary to join Him in His work. He wants to use every one of His children who accept Him to pull others, and others, and still others. It's a *simple* work; it's a *precious* work. And remember, one hand in the hand of Jesus, anchored fast so that nothing can pull you away, the other reaching out for souls that need help. How many would like to send the word to Jesus that this is your choice?

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