

For some of you don't know by now. My wife and I had our 2<sup>nd</sup> child, Harlow, and he's coming up to 4 months. At home, we have a small storage room that's like a giant Jenga puzzle. We're constantly in there pulling stuff in and out based on the needs of the baby. Not too long ago, I was clearing out that space and I found a box of my wife's old toys. To my surprise, I discovered a mint-condition "Tamagotchi" lying in the box. It instantly brought back some fun nostalgic memories I had as kid. Just so I know, who here has ever owned a Tamagotchi?

Ok, if you don't know what I'm talking about, <sup>1</sup> Tamagotchi was a Japanese toy that everyone had to have in 1997. Before the time of iPhones, this was the toy that every kid carried around in their pockets or chained to their backpacks. The goal was to take care of your digital pet so it wouldn't "die." You had to feed them, play with them, give them medicine when they're sick, discipline them, put them to bed. People were literally glued to Tamagotchis for hours and days, while they were at school, during recess, eating and sleeping, going to the washroom - just to make sure their digital pet was alive and healthy. This frenzy continued on for about 2 years.

Even though the Tamagotchi craze is long gone, I find it fascinating that there was a time in history when kids were not just hooked to a game, but on a simple principle that their choices would drastically change the outcome of something they cared about.

For parents, we know the feeling of how it's like to raise our own children. We constantly and tirelessly make choices for their health, their lifestyle, enrolling them into schools and extracurricular activities, because we know that these decisions will ultimately shape and form who they become.

### **Introduction to the Sermon:**

This morning, we're continuing in a teaching series called *Navigating Relationships*, where we explore various topics inspired by the Book of Proverbs. Now I'm not sure how familiar people are with the book of Proverbs by now, but I think it's important to note that before Proverbs became the written version we have today, that many of these proverbs were practiced in Hebrew homes. They were orally passed down from a father to his son, from one generation to the next. Just like how parents are today, Hebrew parents cared about their children's development, but one thing they emphasized on that is maybe less popularly talked about today, was their emphasis on wisdom. And when it comes to wisdom it's about how to live well.

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<sup>1</sup> Image "Tamagotchi"

Christian author, Robert Hick's writes on the subject of wisdom:

*"The secret to living well lies not in finding the right formula, or going to the right books, or even working the right kind of program. It's always concerning who you are as a person"*<sup>2</sup>

I love this. Living well is not necessarily about what you do or even what you have, but who you are as a person. In short, wisdom is about character building.

Didn't Christian Evangelist, Billy Graham once say?

*"When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost, when character is lost, all is lost"*

As we read our scripture verses for today, I want us to imagine a Hebrew father sitting down with his 5- to 6-year-old son, preparing him for the world. Son, I have something to say to you:

*"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companions of fools suffer harm"*<sup>3</sup>

*"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared"*<sup>4</sup>

It is clear in these verses that who we spend our time with has implications on who we become as a person. This is why today we will discuss on the subject matter about the **company we keep**.

In our time together, we will explore three main points:

- 1. The Importance of Keeping Good Company**
- 2. The Limits of Keeping Good Company**
- 3. The Importance of Being Good Company to Others**

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<sup>2</sup> In Search of Wisdom, Robert Hicks

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 13:20

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 22:24-25

## 1. The Importance of Keeping Good Company

*“Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companions of fools suffer harm”*

Here, we have an instruction followed by a warning. First, the instruction:

When encouraging your kids to spending time with wise people, what does that mean? What does a wise person look like? Let’s take some time to unpack that.

Here the word wise (in Hebrew is, *chakham*) refers to a person’s character and their skill in making sound judgment over living morally.

- Fear of God (Proverbs 9:10) – Reverence for God in their lives
- Humility (Proverbs 11:2)
- Discernment (Proverbs 14:8) – Knowing right from wrong and make thoughtful decisions
- Patience (Proverb 14:29) – Being slow to anger
- Self-control (Proverbs 29)
- Listening and Learning (Proverbs 1:5)
- Righteous (Proverbs 10:31) - Upholding strong moral principles
- Peacemaking (James 3:17-18) – Longing to bring people together over creating division

In other words, if you want to be humble than you probably want to hangout people who are not arrogant and don’t’ think too highly of themselves

If you want to learn to be righteous spend time with people who have strong values and live with integrity

If you want to draw closer to God, maybe you want invest your time with people who care about the same things. I hope you get where I’m going with this.

Now, the warning. *“For a companion of fools suffer harm.”* Proverbs 22:24-25 goes on saying, *“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared”*

Here, “fools” comes from the Hebrew word *kesil* – referring to someone who is immature, lack foresight, resistant to instruction and correction. *Kesil* is characterized by stubbornness, recklessness and tendency to make poor decisions.

What traits does a foolish person have? Let’s break it down:

- Ignoring wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7)
- Quick Tempered (Proverbs 14:29, 29:11)
- Speaks without thinking (Proverbs 10:14)

- Mockers – (Proverbs 14:9) laugh at people who do right things and takes sin lightly
- Complacent and Lazy (Proverbs 6:9-11, 24:30-40)
- Rejects Correction (Proverbs 12:1, 15:5)
- Trusting in themselves (Proverbs 28:26)
- Being disruptive (Proverbs 17:14, 20:3) – creating havoc and damages relationships

Do not make friends with \_\_\_\_\_ or you will learn their ways, and your life will become a mess. It is like setting up a trap for yourself and your life will lead to chaos and disorder.

In his book, *Practicing the Way*, John Mark Comer writes that all of us have been shaped and formed since before we came out of our mother' womb.

He writes, *“the question is not are you being formed? It’s who and what are you being formed into?”*

You see, all of us are shaped by our experiences - the good and bad ones. So If you pick up good behavior from the company you keep, it will shape both you and your relationships. However, if you develop bad habits and foolish tendencies, they will also shape you and those around you. As Galatians 6 goes, *“Do not be fooled. For whatever you sow will harvest.”* Be careful of the company you keep and how they might influence you.

### **Personal Story:**

Some of you may not know this, but I only started going to church in late high school. Not too long after that, as a 2-year-old Christian, one of my pastors rallied a bunch of us from church to join a summer camp working with at-risk children living in low-income housing in the city.<sup>5</sup> This was my first "mission trip," so I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I remember being paired with a group of 5- and 6-year-olds at this day camp. The activity was to draw what you want to be when you grow up, and then share it with the group. Kids were saying things like "princess," "bus driver," and "McDonald's worker." It was cute because that's what a 5-year-old would know. Then there was this cute kid named Chunky. When it came to his turn, he showed us a picture of a guy in a car holding a gun. He said, "I want to be a gangster when I grow up." I thought it was funny at first, but then when I asked him why, what he said broke my heart: "I want to be a gangster so I can be rich and no one can hurt me." Chunky lived in a part of town where violence was rampant, and the only way to protect yourself was to be part of a gang. The organization we were with sought to intervene by operating in these communities to provide leadership opportunities, mentorship, and family support. They did all that because they knew relationships shape and build people.

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<sup>5</sup> Images Group 1, Group 2

## 2. The Limits of Keeping Good Company:

However, keeping good company is not enough. Some of you may be thinking, "What if I don't have it all together? Does that mean I won't have any friends, because Proverbs says we shouldn't be friends with people who exhibit foolish tendencies? What if I'm struggling with some foolish tendencies right now? What should we do? Do we divide the room between the wise and fools?"

This is where grace comes in because wisdom without grace becomes exclusive.

Remember the story of the woman caught in adultery, when a group of religious leaders wanted to stone her to death? Jesus intervened and said to them, *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*<sup>6</sup>

In our conversation about keeping good company, it's easy to divide people into categories of right and wrong—the wise and the foolish. But here's the truth: just like in Jesus' encounter with the woman, no one is perfect. Christians fully acknowledge that they don't have it all together. I don't care how old or young you are, how many degrees you have, or what you've done in the past, we all need God in our lives. As Ephesians 2 reminds us: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, grace doesn't mean we give up on improving ourselves. Shall we go back to our old habits? The Apostle Paul asks in Romans, *"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!"*<sup>8</sup> Christ has died for us so that we can have new life in Him. The life we live now is our new life in Christ. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we're on a lifelong journey to work on our weaknesses and become more like Him. So yes, if our goal as a community is to build healthy relationships with those around you, and you're struggling with anger, gossip, or pride, then you should work on those areas. Do you know who real fool is? The person who says I'm good the way I am. I don't need to change.

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<sup>6</sup> John 8:7 NIV

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Romans 6:1 NIV

My hope is that in our pursuit of wisdom this morning, we're not doing it for our own pride or ego, as if we have something others don't. Instead, I hope we can adopt a posture of humility. That our desire to become wise alongside others is our response to the new life that Jesus has given us.

### 3. The Importance of Sharing Good Company with Others

True wisdom, through the lens of Jesus, I believe is loving and draws people in

As Allan Mosely writes,

“We want influence **to us** from wise people. We also want influence to flow **from us** to people who are not walking in wisdom. We want to help because we love them”<sup>9</sup>

To truly love others and desire to spend time with people who are different from us, we first need to understand what it means to be loved. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer beautifully captures this idea:

*“It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. He who will not suffer this does not want to be in the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared. His people are scattered, scattered ‘into all the kingdoms of earth’ I will gather them; for I have redeemed them...and they shall return (Zech 10:8,9)”<sup>10</sup>*

For those of us who have been in church for a while, I'm not sure if you can relate to my own experience as a young Christian: You're following Jesus and you're doing good. You find your own group of friends that also love Jesus. There's this one point where you get comfortable with how things are and you don't really want anything to change. This could be in your small groups, your school fellowships, the church programs you've been doing for years. Sometimes we forget why we're doing all this.

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<sup>9</sup> Living Well, Allan Mosely

<sup>10</sup> Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoffer reminds us that church - the people - is not just an exclusive club for Christians to be nurtured spiritually. He invites us to remember how it was like for Jesus to be uncomfortable for us, so we should be uncomfortable for others. As much as we are undeserving of his grace, and yet, Jesus still reaches out to us. Shouldn't others get a chance too?

Remember the story about the Lost Son, where the younger son squandered his father's wealth and eventually comes home broke and completely dishevelled. Instead of scolding his son for his disgraceful actions, His father embraced him. There's also an older son in this story who is disgusted by his father's loving response. As a Jewish child who practiced the proverbs, I wonder if Jesus was thinking about Proverbs in 28:7 when he was telling this story "*A discerning son heeds instructions, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.*"<sup>11</sup> – *a foolish son should not be spared*. The older brother says to the Father, "I've done all these things for you, I've done all the right things and wise things, and you're treating your foolish son with love and care? What did he do right to deserve all this?"

Then his father said to him "My son, all I have is yours. Your younger brother was lost and now he's back. We should celebrate!"

Do you see what Jesus is teaching us? Christian maturity is not just about doing the right things and then receiving the reward for it, that's how we teach children. But there's a point where scripture said we've been drinking milk and now we're ready for solid food! The real coin drop happens when we stop asking, "What's in it for me?" But you start to see things from the Father's perspective, feeling what he feels. We care about what he cares about. Like the father in this story, Jesus is inviting us to be the older brother that doesn't scoff at the foolish and lost brother, but to run out and receive him with open arms. Do you see his scattered people?

- Andrew shares the burden for the hurting marginalized in society. That is the heart of Jesus!

As we consider the company we keep and how they will foster our development, I hope we can share in Jesus' heart to care for and invest in others.

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<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 28:7 NIV

## Conclusion

As we conclude this message about keeping good company, we all make choices for our families and ourselves every day that shape and form who we become. And one of the reasons we pastors encourage people to come to church regularly is because we believe when people gather in the name of Jesus that life transformation would happen. Sure, it's always possible something supernatural can happen, but to be honest, many transformations that I've seen, including my own, happens slowly and prayerfully over a long period of time.

For me, it's the people I spend the majority of my time with - the mentors and pastors who have invested in me over the years. But here's the thing: I believe that deep transformation can only happen through intimacy. We can come to church every Sunday for a number of years without truly being known. If there's any wisdom I can impart in my 22 years of following Jesus, it's this: if you're in a season looking to grow as a person, you need to find a space to know and be known by others intimately. As you come together to spend time with each other, get to know Jesus and his heart, and let his teachings and values shape who your character

As Saint Benedict would invite us to sit with this question: *"Who am I becoming?"*

I would like to add to the question, *"Who do you want to become this morning?  
If it's more like Jesus, who can you surround yourself with so you can be more like him?"*

Let's pray!