

## “My Peers – Part 1”: influence

We spent last fall seeing what God says about your relationship with parents... Now we want to shift to God’s perspective on your relationship with peers... We want to begin doing that from the book of Proverbs, chapter 13

In his book, *‘The Tipping Point’*, Malcolm Gladwell tells about the come-back of ‘hush puppies’ shoes. How many are familiar with the shoes called ‘hush puppies’?

They were these brushed suede shoes, and in the mid-1990’s the brand was all but dead. Sales were down to 30,000 pairs – and the company that makes hush puppies was thinking of phasing them out altogether.

But then, in 1995, the company suddenly sold 430,000 pairs of the classic Hush Puppies. In 1996 they sold 4 times as much. They went from 30,000 pairs, about to be eliminated as a brand – to, suddenly, 430,000, and then over a million. Why?

What caused the popularity of hush puppies to sky-rocket like that? What happened to Hush Puppies was ‘influence’.

Classic hush puppies suddenly became ‘hip’ in the hang-out places of Manhattan. Kids in the area thought to be really ‘with it’ started to wear them because no one else would. They were trying to make a fashion statement by wearing what was considered ‘out of fashion’.

And then, a couple fashion designers saw this and began using Hush Puppies in their shows, and a fad was created. That’s influence.... It affected what millions of people put on their feet, and – more importantly – it affects how we live.

Influence doesn’t just affect what shoes we wear – influence affects everything about us... including our spiritual lives. And we see that in **Proverbs 13.20**, *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*. We want to see three things about influence this evening...

### 1. the reality of influence

Look at our verse again... *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*.

It’s a picture of someone walking with people called the ‘wise’ – and the second half of the verse shows us what it means to ‘walk’ with them. It means they are ‘companions’... what’s a companion?

People we're hanging with.... friends, etc. If our companions are wise, what happens to us? We become wise. But if our companions are fools, what happens to us? We suffer harm – we become fools. That's the reality of influence...

Here's how Charles Bridges put it commenting on this verse: "It is not left to us to determine, whether there shall be any influence; only, what that influence shall be"

That's the reality of influence... It's not – you might be influenced, so be careful. It's – you are being influenced... It's happening right now, it's happening all around you. Not so sure???

Well... (YAWN)... Oh, sorry... (YAWN), I must not have gotten enough sleep last night. (YAWN) Boy, I really must be tired... (YAWN) Wow... (YAWN)

Now, how many feel like they need to yawn right now? How many did yawn? Why was that? You were influenced by me. That's influence...

Human beings inevitably influence each other – it could be in the shoes we wear, or the words we say, or in a thousand other ways. It's like yawning... it's contagious – influence inevitably spreads.

That doesn't mean we should try to withdraw into our rooms and never come out into the light of day for fear that we might be influenced. That's not the point either. We can't deny the reality of influence – it's always happening.

We can't deny it, so we must discern it. We must discern what that influence currently is... That's what this proverb is giving us - discernment. When it comes to influence – don't deny it, discern it. Discern what that influence currently is.

So the question is not IF I'm being influenced – the question is how? Not IF, but HOW? How are you being influenced? That's the question... HOW?

And to determine 'how' we must ask 'by whom?' – we must consider the sources of influence...

## 2. the sources of influence

Who are the sources of influence in this verse? That's right – our companions... But the issue here is what kind of companion are they? God, in Proverbs, puts everybody in two basic categories... there is some variation – but two basic categories: the wise and the foolish.

The wise are those who know God and fear God. Today, they would be people who – because of the gospel, because of what Jesus has done for them, they want to glorify to God.

The foolish are those who do not know God or fear God. They spurn the grace of God, and do not want to glorify God. That's the issue here – the verse assumes influence, and asks are your sources of influence wise or foolish?

Now, this isn't like a promise, that all you have to do is show up at the wise and instantly you're transformed. And it's not a statement against evangelism either. We want to take the gospel to all who do not know the Savior and His love...

This is telling us how things typically work in God's world – and they work like this: Your companions are sources of influence for your life... those you hang with will affect you, either for wisdom or foolishness - that's the point.

How many have heard the saying: "You are what you eat"? What's that mean? It means what you eat affects your health in real ways. You are what you eat.

This verse is saying something similar – it's saying: you are what your companions are. Or maybe, you become what your companions are... Be a companion to the wise and you'll become wise! Be a companion of fools and you'll become a fool.

So who are your companions – are they wise or foolish? Those you hang out with - do they fear God, love God, and want to glorify God? Or do they not fear God, love God, and want to please God?

Are your companions pursuing godliness or ungodliness? Are they pursuing a passion for Jesus, or are they drifting away from Jesus?

But, don't just limit this to personal companions - in our day we have all kinds of media companions as well... radio talk show hosts, web sites we visit, the TV shows and movies we watch – not bad things necessary, but they are companions. They influence us as we walk with them....

As a staff we have been reading the outstanding book called "*Worldliness*". I would urge every parent here to take your youth through this book, discussion each chapter together. Parents, this is on the 'crucial reading list' together.

We were discussing the chapter on media, and I shared how we as a family like to watch Jane Austen movies. We like *Pride and Prejudice*. We like *Sense and Sensibility*. I enjoy those – I enjoy the character development, the dialog.

And I enjoy the romantic ending – guy marries girl, and live in huge mansion together. And I find that I'm influenced by that... I like that idealized portrait of life.

I can want Jane Austen as my companion – because I want to have that influence... life is all about living in a mansion. And I realized, I've got to be discerning about that influence.

If I have a hard day... let's call up my companion, Ms. Austen – I want the world of the idealized world of romantic mansions... I need to be discerning as I walk with those companions...

Sometimes I like to tune into sports radio... catch a little Mike and Mike in the morning as I'm making my breakfast. But I realize, they're becoming my companions. Not bad guys necessarily – but walk with sports talk show hosts and I begin to love sports more than the Savior

Who are your media companions, and how are they influencing you? If you're walking with TV or movie companions who are foolish, you will begin to think or want more foolishness... it's inescapable.

If you say, "I can watch it, but I'm not influenced by it" – you're mistaken! According to this proverb, if you're a companion to fools, then you will become like them.

If you say, "I can listen to that band, even though their lives and songs glorify foolishness. It's having no effect on me." Proverbs would say – you're mistaken, because that band is your companion – a source of influence to you.

Our companions are the sources of influence in our lives... either for wisdom or for foolishness, either for passion for Jesus or away from passion for Jesus.... so what should we do? What's the solution to influence?

### 3. the solution to influence

The solution comes in two forms. I put this in your outline – it's Proverbs 1:7-8 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*<sup>8</sup> *Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching...*

I can't develop this at length tonight – but the solutions are to fear God and involve parents. That's the solution: fear God and involve parents.

Fearing God means you are holding him in awe and reverence. It means you want to please him and glorify him, because of the Savior. Because of Jesus paying for your sins – because you have turned to him and he is your Lord...

Because of that, now you want to live for Him who died for you. That's where the fear of the Lord comes from – trusting in and following Jesus, who died for your sins. You fear God because of the gospel... You say, wisdom and foolishness matter to me because they matter to my Lord.

That's how you fear God... he loves you – HE sent His Son for you... He wants you to be wise by letting the gospel determine your companions. Be wise in wanting to live for Him who died for you...

Let the fear of the Lord guide you... and to do that, you need your parents.

In three weeks, we're going to begin a Sunday series in Proverbs with you in mind. Because a significant portion is about a father or a mother instructing their youth. That's what you see being introduced there... *Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching...*

You need your parents' help. So here are a couple questions for application. Please write these down:

- do my parents know all my companions?
- do my parents know all their influence?

If you cannot answer 'yes' to both of those questions, then you need to talk with your parents as soon as possible. If you're going to be wise, then it's crucial that your parents influence you far more than your peers... Pursue them... involve them – tell them what would be of concern to them.

Parents – it is not intrusive to ask, "with whom did you speak at the youth meeting?", "what did you discuss... had any conversations lately that you know I would want to know about? any concerning topics, comments you've heard or made?"

It's not interrogating... it's: but because I love you and want to serve you, let's talk about those things...

The issue here for all of us is not to withdraw from all influence – I don't think that's possible. The issue is to use discernment about what is influencing you. Recognize your companions... and recognize the influence they are having.

The issue at stake is a lot more important than what shoes we're wearing – Hush puppies or not...

The issue at stake is whether we're growing in wisdom or foolishness, godliness or ungodliness, passion for the Savior or drift from the Savior.

Because, when it comes to influence, it's not if, but how – and the how is determined by the 'who'... are we walking with the wise, or are we the companion of fools.

Commit this verse to memory – Prov. 13.20