

"Don't Jump to Conclusions"

Allan Pole



Theme: Cook your conclusions as slowly as possible.

Text: Proverbs 18:17

Here's a thought: Someone has pointed out, "The only exercise some people get is from jumping to conclusions, running people down and dodging responsibility."

I read a book about Steven Truscott when I was a boy. On the evening of June 9th, 1959 Steven was seen giving his classmate Lynne Harper a ride on his bicycle in Clinton, Ontario. They parted ways. Later that evening, her father reported his 12-year-old daughter missing. Two days later, Lynne's body was found in a nearby wooded area. She had been sexually assaulted and strangled to death. On June 13th, 1959 Steven was charged with Lynne's murder.

Despite being 14, Steven was ordered to stand trial as an adult. A factor leading to Steven's wrongful conviction might have been that police and prosecutors focused too early on Steven as the only suspect in Lynne's murder; this phenomenon is known as "tunnel vision." Steven was put on death row then imprisoned and paroled after ten years. After his release at age 24, Steven moved to Guelph, Ontario, changed his name and worked as a millwright, a trade that he had learned in prison. In October 1970, he married Marlene and they raised three children. He has never been charged with any other criminal offence. He lived with the label of "murderer" for 48 years.

Solomon warns against jumping to conclusions in Proverbs 18:17: The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.
NIV

Decision-making starts with choosing a:

Microwave Oven

or

Crockpot

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Our courts and our governments are built upon this principle of cross-examination and debate in the pursuit of truth and wise decisions. It bothers me when the name of someone who is arrested and charged for a crime is released to the public. Our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law that any person charged with an offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal (<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>). Instead, we often rush toward declaring someone guilty while the media feeds this rashness.

A kangaroo court is often held to give the appearance of a fair and just trial, even though the verdict has in reality already been decided before the trial has begun (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo_court). We might not say it but we can think, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up.”

There is something in us that enjoys pinning the blame on someone or declaring them guilty. We like to find a scapegoat who will take the blame for wrongdoing. Perhaps this helps to ease the pain of our guilt by deflecting it on to someone else.

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After sitting and suffering with Job for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13), his friends followed the path of logic to their conclusion – Job must be guilty for God to punish him so severely. Let’s be honest - we would typically side with this reasoning. Why else would bad things happen to good people? Ah, but wait a minute! Life is not always so simple. There might be reasons for tragedies and triumphs that we neither see nor understand. This is why God rebukes Job in Job 38:1-4:

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said: 2 "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? 3 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. 4

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. NIV

The view from where we stand in the midst of the trees can be very limited. However, there is One who sees the entire forest!

Let's jump to Job 42:1-7:

1 Then Job replied to the Lord: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 [You asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4 ["You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." 7 After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." NIV

The longer I live the more questions I accumulate. The more I know the more I know I don't know. In our quest for answers we can begin to speculate on why people do what they do and on why things are happening to them. It seems the Internet has given us just enough information to make us dangerous, as we diagnose illnesses and prescribe medication.

We can jump to conclusions by anticipating or assuming what someone else is going to say or do. We begin to question motives and even finish sentences for others. This is a great way to get people to shut down and close themselves off to us. While we try to draw near to others we become our own worst enemy when we use such tactics. Job and his friends were doing well in the testing until they started to speak. We can learn a lesson that will take us a long way in relationships – don't rush to solve problems.

When someone presents their opinions or their problems, will you make your objective to understand rather than to solve? When you form your opinions will you choose to listen to opposing views?

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There are times when you need to make decisions quickly. Paramedics, police officers, firefighters and emergency room nurses are often called upon to make instant decisions. You need to make quick decisions in your conversations, clothes closet and car. Obviously you can't take all day with each decision!

My father-in-law claims it takes longer for him to buy a shirt than to buy a car. I understand what he is saying because there are some decisions I can make on the spot that would take others days while I will try on the size smaller and size larger than me before I feel settled that I have found the right size of shirt or shoes. However, many decisions require more time, thought, prayer and counsel to become good ones.

No one likes a tattletale - someone who takes pleasure in detecting and reporting the wrongdoing of others. We taught our children to tell us if their sibling was in danger or if they were being hurt by their sibling but generally the words and actions of others was not to be their focus.

Solomon addresses tattletales of all ages in Proverbs 25:8:

What you have seen with your eyes do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame? NIV

The Ancient Greek philosopher (384–322 B.C.) Aristotle noted, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

This principle can be helpful when you are making a decision – don't just go to people who will say what you want to hear or who will agree with everyone else. Go to people who will challenge your opinions and the opinions of others. This will enlarge your perspective. Many people are not willing to do the work or take the time to sort through views that might challenge them too much.



I grew up watching Star Trek and Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise

sitting with his closest advisors – Bones, Spock and Scotty – while they hashed over an issue with great enthusiasm. Many times they would see the world through different eyes. Having listened to these various perspectives, Captain Kirk would make wise decisions.

First impressions are lasting impressions. We often form opinions about people and situations based on first impressions or one person's statements. We can look at how people appear and let their words carry more or less weight accordingly. By doing this we can miss many opportunities for wise input. However, it can be challenging and liberating to say, "You know, I had never thought of it that way before."

A bus driver stopped at a bus stop. There a big hulk of a man got onto the bus. He was 6'8" tall and was built like a wrestler. He glared at the bus driver and said, "Big John doesn't pay!" Then he sat down. The bus driver was only 5'3" tall and wasn't about to argue with Big John. The next day, the same thing happened. In fact, it happened over and over. Finally, the bus driver signed up for a body-building course, karate, judo and a class on self-esteem. By September, he was ready. The next Monday, Big John stepped on the bus and said, "Big John doesn't pay!"

The bus driver jumped up, glared and said, "And why not?!"

Surprised, Big John replied, "Big John has a bus pass!"

I can't tell you how many times I have heard one person's story of a conflict then the other person's version and wondered to myself, "Wait a minute. Are we talking about the same situation?" We humans have an amazingly ability to view the facts through our own lenses. Often each person in a dispute has their take on things and somewhere in between is the truth.

Here is another reason why it is better to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). We can end up being perceived as "taking sides" with the first presenter and lose the opportunity to be peacemakers. If we are quick to take sides, we will find our relationships becoming complicated and contentious. We will turn into polarizing, divisive people rather than unifying, peaceful people.

Some have called the Book of James "The Proverbs of the New Testament". James 3:17-18 teaches:

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. NIV

One of the adjectives James uses here to describe wisdom is “impartial”, without prejudice or favouritism. James takes a strong stand against favouritism in chapter two, where well-dressed wealthy people were treated one way while poor people were treated another. The upper class were given the upper hand in church influence or dare I say “church politics”. Wow, *now* we have touched a nerve!

In a previous church I pastored there were men stirring up dissension so we pastors and elders sat down with them and asked them to stop. I promptly received a note from a retired pastor in our church defending his friends and warning me to leave them alone. His note strongly encouraged me to remember who paid my salary. Wouldn't this make *your* blood boil? Well, mine did.

Whether it is in the church or in the legal system, there can be a standard for the poor and a standard for the rich. This should not be! We dare not jump to conclusions, assuming that someone is more or less guilty because of their net worth.

When someone is expressing their views, does it matter how they are dressed or how they express themselves? Will you choose to look beyond people's appearance and listen to their hearts?



On August 28th, 2007 the Court of Appeal squashed Steven Truscott's conviction and acquitted him. The Ontario Attorney-General apologized to Steven on behalf of the provincial government. Steven was no longer a convicted murderer in the eyes of the law. He was awarded \$6.5 million in compensation by the Ontario government in 2008, part of which Truscott used to launch the Truscott Initiative in Justice Studies at the University of Guelph, funding two scholarships for students in the field.

If DNA testing had existed in 1959, police could have used it to determine if Steven was guilty or not and, equally important, track down Lynne Harper's real killer.

The Court of Appeal commented that Steven had spent “his entire adult life in the shadow” of his wrongful conviction. In response to Steven being awarded \$6.5 million in compensation, the Truscotts issued a statement explaining,

“Although we are grateful for the freedom and stability this award will provide, we are also painfully aware that no amount of money could ever truly compensate Steven for the terror of being sentenced to hang at the age of 14, the loss of his youth or the stigma of living for almost 50 years as a convicted murderer.” It is extremely fortunate, and worthy of admiration, that Steven has been able to rebuild his life and start a family but the Truscotts will likely never be able to step out fully from the long, dark shadow of Steven’s wrongful conviction. (From www.aidwyc.org/cases/historical/steven-truscott , www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/steven-truscott-case and <https://crimestory.wordpress.com/2010/01/29/steve-truscott-and-the-death-penalty/>)

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