

"Birds of a Feather Flock Together"

Allan Pole



Theme: You will become like the people with whom you spend the most time.
Text: Proverbs 13:20

Here's a thought: "There were two dry logs of wood, and one green log; but the dry logs burned up the green log."

While we were in Namibia recently I saw more flamingos in the wild than I have ever seen. With their bright feathers and strongly hooked bills, flamingos are among the most easily recognized water birds. They are social birds, and tens of thousands can live together in a single colony (www.webexhibits.org/causesofcolor/7D.html).

Surprisingly, flamingos are not naturally pink. They are born with grey feathers, which gradually turn pink in the wild because of a natural pink dye called canthaxanthin that they obtain from their diet of brine shrimp and blue-green algae. Flamingos in zoos would often lose most of their pink colouration until keepers started adding synthetic canthaxanthin to their diets (www.sciencefocus.com/qa/why-are-flamingos-pink).

Birds of the same species do typically flock together to seek protection from predators. Like-minded humans also tend to congregate and influence each other.

Solomon observes in Proverbs 13:20, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." NIV

You can choose to:

Walk with the Wise

Or

Be a Companion of Fools

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Walk with the Wise



There are three kinds of people in the world: those who are good at math, and those who aren't.

We typically think of wise people as smart people and we think of foolish people as stupid people. Let's stop and think, though - who has the right to determine who is wise and who is foolish? According to this method of appraisal we would conclude that anyone who has a higher IQ than us is wiser than us and whoever has a lower IQ than us is foolish. The standard by which we measure wisdom and foolishness then becomes very subjective and confusing.

Proverbs 9:10 introduces a very different gauge for wisdom:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. NIV

Solomon valued wisdom highly even though he did not consistently practice what he preached. Our regard and reverence for the Lord as the source of all wisdom and knowledge is the prerequisite for wisdom. Godly wisdom is not just a head full of knowledge but it dramatically affects who we are and how we live each day.

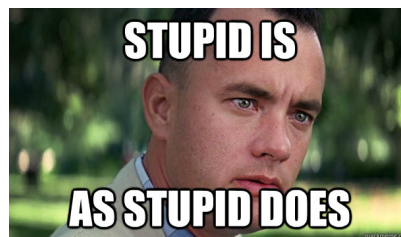
James describes it this way in James 3:13-18:

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 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

I do not endorse the language used or morals portrayed, but I love the story of

Forrest Gump. Nominated for 13 Academy Awards and winning six, Forrest Gump tells the tale of a slow-witted Southern boy who grows up to make history in extraordinary ways, albeit through a series of accidents and happenstance. Interweaved bitter sweetly through his adventures is Forrest's lingering love for his childhood sweetheart neighbour, Jenny Curran, who struggles to find peace within herself amid a turbulent time in America's history — the psychedelic, social and civil unrest of the 1960s (www.biography.com/news/forrest-gump-quotes).

Even though Forrest lacked some mental horsepower he repeatedly demonstrates more wisdom than Jenny. In one of his classic quotes, Forrest Gump echoes what his mother taught, “Stupid is as stupid does.”



Who do you recognize as wise in your life? How can you spend more time with such people and glean from their wisdom?

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Jesus warned us not to call others “fools” in Matthew 5:22 because we do not have the right to hold the measuring stick to determine who is wise and foolish. We can talk about certain words or actions being wise or foolish but such traits are not determined in comparison to us but to the One who is the source of all wisdom. The Biblical worldview places the Creator at the centre of the universe. God alone has the right to decide who is wise and who is foolish.

David cuts through the confusion and draws the line clearly in Psalm 14:1-3:
1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. 2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. NIV

Here is the summary from God's perspective: wise men still seek Him and foolish men ignore or reject Him. If a wise person seeks God, then a foolish person walks away from God.

The Apostle Paul warns against ungodly influence in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" NIV

There are many sayings like this among the Greek poets and there is a proverb much like this among the rabbis: "There were two dry logs of wood, and one green log; but the dry logs burned up the green log." (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Choose your closest companions carefully. This does not mean we should isolate ourselves from people who would benefit from our godly influence. The question is, "Who is influencing whom?" If I were to stand on a chair and you were to stand on the floor, would it be easier for me to reach out and pull you up to the chair or for you to pull me down to the floor?

The angel of the Lord had directed the parents of John the Baptist not to let their son drink wine or other fermented beverages (Luke 1:15). In obedience to this call John pursued an ascetic life of self-denial and self-discipline as he called the people to prepare their hearts for the Messiah.

The people that gave Jesus the most grief were those that had religious and political influence. Jesus warned His followers (in Mark 8:15), "Be careful, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." These leaders looked good on the outside but were rotten on the inside. They used their positions not to serve others but to benefit themselves. Jesus knew their bad influence could spread to others like yeast in bread dough.

Jesus rebukes this spiritual unresponsiveness in Matthew 11:16-19:

16 To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." 18 For John [the Baptist] came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and

‘sinners.’” But wisdom is proved right by her actions. NIV

Jesus was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners but these are not the people with whom He spent the bulk of His time. There were men and women that travelled with Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). Amongst the twelve apostles there were three with whom Jesus was particularly close – Peter, James and John. Amongst the three there was one that understood His heart most dearly – John. I admit that I scratch my head over why the Lord included Judas Iscariot amongst the twelve and made him treasurer but it is clear that Jesus knew all along that Judas was not really with them. Jesus reached out to Judas many times but their relationship did not go as deep as the others. Jesus did not let Judas influence Him or the direction of their ministry team.

Jesus prayed in John 17:15, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” NIV

The same person who lived and preached the gospel also taught other followers of Christ in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18:

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." NIV

The Lord does not want you to run from difficult or even hostile situations. He wants you to shine His light in these dark places. The darker the place, however, the closer you need to stay to Him and to His people who will pray for you, support you and encourage you. This narrow road has wide ditches – one ditch calls you to live in a Christian ghetto where you have no interaction with people who don't know Jesus while the other ditch calls you to live so conformed to the world that people can't tell you are a follower of Christ.

Donald Miller, author of “Blue Like Jazz”, explains “You Become Like the People You Hang Around” (<http://storylineblog.com/2010/04/09/you-become-like-the-people-you-hang-around/>):

Last month I visited a prison in Texas. I had the chance to guest-teach a class in a progressive rehabilitation program. I taught, but mostly I listened. As the guys told me their stories, their reasons for being in prison, I noticed a common thread. They had been affected by their

community, by the people they hung out with. Almost all problems and successes in life boil down to relationships. These guys had gotten themselves into relationships that led to trouble. Either they had joined gangs or hung out with drug addicts or met girls who took them down a bad path. The reason they were in prison was because their friends, in a way, put them there.

I'm not saying they weren't responsible for their own actions, because they were, but I am saying that taking responsibility for their lives should have started a long time before they committed their crimes. It should have started when they chose to get involved with the friends they got involved with. We become like the people we hang out with. This isn't me being judgmental, this is actually what they told me.

It's possible to take control over who it is that influences us. And it's something I recommend everybody do, especially if you want to be successful... A few years ago, I handpicked some guys I wanted to be friends with. I already had some good friends, but knowing you become like the people you hang around, I decided I wanted to take more responsibility for who I was becoming. I looked around and identified four guys who didn't know each other very well, but each of whom I wanted to be like in some way. They owned their own businesses, they were faithful to their wives, they were intelligent. I asked each of them if they would get together for breakfast on Tuesday mornings in Portland. To my surprise, each of them said yes. And so we met. I told them that, essentially, I thought of them as great guys, and wanted to figure out how we could spend more time together, helping each other's businesses and running our lives through the collective filter of our experiences. Amazingly, each of these guys had been looking for the same thing. The guys loved the idea, and for more than two years, we'd get together and talk at the same cafe on Tuesday mornings.

All that to say, it might be time to take a closer look at the people you're hanging around. Are they the kinds of people you want to be like? I know that sounds terrible, like I'm asking you to disrespect your friends. I'm not. But I am asking you to be honest. Are they holding you back? Are they really good friends, or are they just using you? Are you going to end up in jail if you keep hanging out with them, if you keep doing the things you are doing?

If you don't want to leave your friends, it might be time to have a hard conversation and explain you want to move on, maybe go to college or learn a skill. And you can invite them to join you. If they don't want to, you certainly gave them a chance.

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