

# **“The Company You Keep”**

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**First Presbyterian Church  
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Daniel 3:10-30**

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Four college friends were so confident about their upcoming finals that they decided to go to the big game out of town. Penn State vs. Notre Dame! I don't believe the students were from either Wilkes University or Kings College. Oh, and this weekend trip included "partying!"

They had a great time.

But, after all that partying, they not only slept through church, they slept all day Sunday and did not make it back to their college until early Monday morning. Rather than taking the final then, they decided to talk to their professor after the final and explain to him why they missed it.

They explained that they had gone to the Penn State – Notre Dame game, with plans to study over the weekend, but unfortunately, they had a flat tire on the way back, didn't have a spare, and couldn't get back until this morning. As a result, they missed the final. The Professor thought it over and agreed they could make up the Final the following morning. The four students were elated.

The next day, the Professor placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet, and told them to begin. Each one looked at the first question, worth five points. It was something about free radical formation. "Cool," they thought at the same time; each one in his separate room. "This is going to be easy." Each finished the question and then turned the page. On the second page was written: (For 95 points): "Which tire?"

Friends, have you heard, "You are known by the company you keep!?" At whatever age, the people you associate with, will impact on your life, for good or ill! An old saying that is always up to date! "The company you keep."

Now I generally keep great company. Just this week, Tuesday evening I had the pleasure of being with several wonderful people at our Book Study on C. S. Lewis' Narnia saga. And then most of us went to dinner – and had a great time.

The company you keep!

Also on Tuesday, I had lunch with a friend, who was in church last Sunday. Great conversation!

And I golfed nine holes with two kind and witty church friends. (By the way I had a great game!)

- Visited a lovely lady from our church – and enjoyed a delightful conversation
- Had lunch with a monsignor, and dinner with another Presbyterian minister – who arrived on a Harley Davidson.
- Friday and Saturday I had the joy and honor of officiating at the wedding of Ben and Alicia – young members of our church. Met new friends, and visited with many other friends.

And of course – today – I am blessed to be with all of you!

The company you keep!

Did you know according to the new study of religion and public life – titled American Grace - that religious Americans make better neighbors by almost every index?

They are more generous with both money and time.

They are more civically active in community organizations and political reform

They are more trusting and trustworthy

They are even measurably happier

The company you keep!

Not a small, insignificant consideration!

This morning I want you to think about the people you hang out with, the circle of friends, co-workers, that you spend your time with.

The people you associate with will impact who and what you become!

- Successful
- Visionary
- Open
- Inquisitive
- Honorable
- Trustworthy

Or:

- Mediocre
- Lazy
- Critical
- Without goals
- Gossip filled
- Angry
- Negative

You need to befriend those who will inspire and challenge you. Those that will bring out the best in you!

Proverbs 27:17 declares:

“Iron sharpens Iron,  
so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend”

As I reflect on my youth, most of my friends were good for me. (I can think of one exception – but I learned my lesson.) My friends, the importance of “associations” doesn’t end with adolescence and youth. By no means! Adults – whether you realize or not, the company you keep feeds or starves your soul! If you live on criticism, negativity, anger, and frustration from those you associate with, guess what? You will reflect all of it!

I am blessed in being able to associate with an inspiring and positive congregation. I draw strength from you!

Consider this: Are you, or have you been pro-active in the associations you have made, or did they just happen?

Of course some serendipity is great, but planning is often of great benefit.

Over the years I have greatly benefited from two groups that came together through shared interest and planning. In one group one of my friends presents a topic for consideration: Immigration Policy, Religion in America, Supreme Court decisions, Insurance issues, etc. Professors, Lawyers, Educators, Newspaper Editors, Social Services Directors, Clergy – enjoy each others company, inform, enlighten and challenge those around the table. I have been blessed and enlarged by these friends.

Another group includes Monsignors, Rabbis and a Muslim – and they greatly enhance my vision and understanding of God’s world. They lift me up!

The company you keep!

My friends, you need friends who will inspire and challenge you!

Shadrach, Meshak and Obednego were three young friends taken away from their home, Judea, by the Babylonians. They were youths... “skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning and competent to serve in the King’s (Babylonian – Nebachadnezzar) palace.” These three friends supported, inspired and informed each other! The foreign King found them ten times better than all the local magicians and enchanters.

Shadrach, Meshak and Abednego at one point found themselves in trouble with the foreign King. Someone ratted on them. In their integrity and honor, they refused to bow down, to bend the knee to false idols no matter what. Even in the face of a fiery furnace!

What great friends!

Answering the King’s threat of a fiery death; “...we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

How powerful!  
No matter what!  
Integrity. Honor. Bravery!

How these friends uplifted each other!

They are delivered by God from the fire. This beastly king relents, backs the boys!

A great story to inspire the ancient Jewish people – that God is faithful, and there are Shadrachs, Meshaks and Abednegos among them to emulate and befriend.

Shadrach, Meshak and Abednego – friends that brought out the best in each one of them!

- No negativism here.
- No mediocrity here.
- No smallness here.

Instead;

- Integrity!
- Honor!
- Vision!
- Hope!

Child of God, choose wisely; The company you keep!

Amen.