According to a news story from the fall of 2011, at 8:30 A.M. on the north end of the Great Salt Lake near the bird refuge, a duck hunter and his dog were drifting in a canoe-type boat. When the man stepped into the marsh to set up some decoys, he left his 12-guage shotgun resting across the bow of the boat.

According to Kevin Potter, a sheriff’s deputy, that’s when the dog "did something to make the gun discharge." Apparently the excited dog jumped on the boat's bow and stepped on the gun. The gun went off, shooting the man in the "buttocks" with 27 pellets of birdshot.

Deputy Potter wouldn’t speculate about the dog's motives for the shooting. Although he would say, "(The dog) did something to make the gun discharge. I don't know if the safety device was on. It's [possible] the dog could have taken it off safety."

Police called the incident an "accident." No charges have been filed and the dog still isn't talking.1

When you pick a friend you feel like you could trust behind your back, a dog seems like a good choice. Dogs are man’s best friend, right? So when your dog shoots you in the rump, you’re having a pretty bad day ... because everybody needs a friend—a friend who has your back, a friend you can trust, a friend who will tell you the truth, a faithful friend, a good friend, a wise friend.

As we continue our summer series, Front Porch Wisdom, I invite you to open your Bible to Proverbs 13:20. The wisdom literature in the Bible has much to say about friendship.

- Proverbs 17:17 — A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

- Proverbs 22:24 — Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

• Job 6:14 — He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.

• Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 — Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

• Proverbs 27:5-6 — Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

These are just a small sample of the Bible’s efforts to help followers of Jesus be wise in the way they choose their friends. And not just wise in choosing friends but being wise enough to choose wise friends. Hear the word of the Lord in Proverbs 13:20 ...

> Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

I

Have you ever been the companion of fools? I have. And you probably have too.

Two teenagers driving around one autumn night with nothing to do: “Hey, did you see the size of that giant pumpkin on that porch?”

“Never seen one so big.”

“Let’s take it!”

“I don’t know.”

“Ah, come on. It’s only a pumpkin. Let’s take it and break it in the middle of the four-way-stop downtown.”

“I’m in. Let’s do it.”
We got away with it. But the following spring, my little brother was with a group of guys who took a “Skunk Crossing” sign from the same house. The cops caught them, made them tell their parents, and made them take the “Skunk Crossing” sign back to the lady they stole it from and apologize. And when they did, the lady chewed them out but good and was still fussing about her giant pumpkin being stolen in the fall. They all got grounded by their parents. “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”

A group of young people on the lake get an “I dare you” deal going about jumping off a 15-foot cliff. One jumps. But the water is too shallow, and he breaks his leg. Had he dived, he would have broken his neck. “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”

A group of college students figure out a clever way to cheat on exams. Getting away with it a couple of times only emboldens them. But the third time they get caught and booted out of school. “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”

A group of employees concoct a way to fudge their time cards. They get away with it for a month or two. But the company gets wise to them, catches them, and fires them on the spot. “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”

And it gets even more serious than this. “Yeah, we’ve had too much to drink, but I think we’re sober enough to drive.” A wreck. Injuries. Jail time. “The companion of fools will suffer harm”—and sometimes harm others too.

Oh, and watch how in a company of fools, every fool tends to look out only for himself or herself. A company of fools will leave any one of their companions to suffer alone. They won’t have your back. They won’t come to your rescue. They won’t share the blame or the pain. They will leave any one of their company holding the bag while they make a mad dash for safety and for hiding. You’ve heard the saying, “There’s no honor among thieves.” There’s usually no honor in a company of fools either. Wise Solomon knows what he’s talking about here: “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”

But if you want to run with foolish friends, you’ve got lots of people to choose from in this sinful, foolish world. And most every newspaper and news broadcast features at least one story every day about the harm caused and suffered by a gaggle of foolish friends.
So picture yourself sitting on the front porch with Solomon, and listen to the wisdom he imparts as he leans in, draws you close, and says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. Choose wise friends.”

• Wise friends know how to have a great time without doing idiotic things that can get you in trouble.

• Wise friends have your back when you don’t act so wisely and get yourself in hot water.

• Wise friends are there for you when you need them.

• Wise friends speak truth to you even when it’s hard to hear.

• Wise friends don’t give up on you.

• Wise friends give you wise counsel.

• Wise friends help wise you up.

You have any friends like that? I’ve got a few friends in this church like that. And I’ve got a friend like that named George who’s been my friend for more than thirty years. George is nine years older than I am. He was a school teacher and bi-vocational minister who served on staff with me a couple of times during my days at Greenwood. He eventually became a full-time minister as a chaplain and now a pastor. I’ve always tended to be somewhat guarded in my friendships. George doesn’t let me get away with that. I can tell him anything and he hears me without judgment. I can ask his counsel and he provides it without fear of whether I will like what he has to say. He reads my sermons most every week and gives me good feedback when something strikes him. He helps me think about things more broadly. He challenges my perspectives sometimes, and we certainly don’t agree on every issue theologically or politically. Even though we live 400 miles apart, he keeps up with me, has been to visit Dayna and me several times, even drove down for Kristen’s wedding, and continues to be the glue that holds us and another mutual friend together. I am a wiser person because I have a friend like

III

But could I commend to you the wisest friend I know? His name is Jesus. That’s right, I called Him my friend. Don’t think me presumptuous here or a name-dropper. Jesus called me friend first. Listen to what He said in John 15 ...

Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you.

“No longer do I call you servants,” says Jesus, “but I have called you friends.” And what a friend Jesus is!

Jesus is a friend that chooses me. Ever been on a playground or in gym class when the coach picked two captains and told them to choose up teams? (I can see some of you wincing already.) There are always two or three kids who neither captain wants to pick. The kids left over have no athletic ability. They’re scrawny or they’re slow or they’re weak or they’re wall-flowers, and when it comes down to those last two or three kids, the captains look at each other and look at the coach as if to ask, “Do I have to pick one of these losers?” And the only reason they get picked at all is because the coach says they have to be. That experience has left painful scars in the hearts and minds of a lot of kids over the years.

So, how about some good news? Jesus chooses you. Jesus picks you. And nobody makes Him either. He doesn’t care if you can’t swing a bat, make a shot, catch a ball, or walk and chew gum at the same time. He wants you on His team. He wants you to be His friend. And when the game is over He’s taking you home for supper. He does this not because He feels sorry for you, and not to boost your self-esteem. He chooses you because He chooses you. It’s His sovereign decision to choose whom He wants to choose. It’s not really about you; it’s about Him—our great and sovereign Lord who takes the initiative and calls us to be His friends. I don’t understand it. I can’t fully
explain it. But I sure appreciate it. Jesus is a friend that chooses me ... and chooses you.

Jesus is a friend that saves me. We just heard Jesus’ words: “Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for His friends.” Jesus did that. He laid down His life for us—to save us. Jesus is the friend who saves us. All of us need saving now and then—someone to bail us out, someone to cover for us in a pinch, someone to pick us up when we’ve crashed and burned. Sometimes we need even more serious saving than that. I’ve told you before about the time I needed that kind of saving. I was a little kid. It was the last day of school and the first day the public pool was open. A lot of us went pretty much straight from school to the pool. We hadn’t been in the pool since the summer before and we were ready to dive in. And that’s exactly what I did. Before I even got in and waded around, I went straight to the diving board and jumped in. And I don’t know why, but I panicked. Maybe it was the cold water. Maybe I just freaked out or something, but I couldn’t swim. I flailed away fighting to keep my head above water, and I wasn’t getting it done. I remember thinking that I was going to die when suddenly a strong hand grabbed me and pulled me to safety. His name is David Gould—a teenager at the time and lifeguard at the pool. He lives in Hot Springs now. I knew of him back then, but he was so much older than I was that I wouldn’t have called him a friend. But he was a friend on that day for sure. He saved my life when I needed saving. Of course, there were a lot of people at the pool that day that could have saved me. But David was the one who did.

Jesus saved me too—not from the deep waters of a pool, but from my sin. And it’s a good thing He did, because He’s the only one who can do that kind of saving. Like you, I have a bent toward sin. The only way I could be saved from that sin is if somebody took my place—somebody who had no sin of his own to stand in the way, somebody who could take my sin and its punishment on himself. That’s exactly what Jesus did when in love He laid down His life on the cross for me—for His friend John.

He saved me. It was like I was drowning in my sin—flailing away, helpless to do anything for myself. So I cried out for forgiveness and help, and suddenly a strong hand grabbed me and pulled me to safety and life. I saw that hand; it had nail-scars in it. It was the hand of Jesus—the friend who saves me, the friend who can save you too. What a friend Jesus is!
And He’s a wise friend too. Long before Jesus came to earth, Solomon described friendship in the Bible’s wisdom literature. And in doing so, he described the wise friendship of Jesus.

- Jesus is the friend that sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24).
- Jesus is the friend that loves at all times, the brother born for adversity (Prov. 17:17).
- Jesus is the friend who lifts us when we fall (Eccl. 4:10).
- Jesus is the friend who provides us with “earnest counsel” (Prov. 27:9).
- Jesus is the friend who wounds us in ways that make us better and stronger and wiser and more like Him (Prov. 27:6).
- Jesus is the friend who is trustworthy in all things (Prov. 11:13).

Jesus is the wisest friend I know. And He’s just as real as my friend George. I can talk with Jesus every day and any time. I can tell Him anything and know that He will keep my secrets. Even when I’m too confused to put my thoughts together, He understands me completely. I can trust Him to get me on the right path when I’m going on the wrong path. I can depend on Him to tell me the truth even when I don’t really want to hear it. I am a better person because He is my friend. He is constantly working to make me holy, to make me more like Him. And I know that even when I screw up big time, He will never leave me or forsake me; He is the friend who walks in when everyone else walks out. Jesus has chosen me to be His friend, and He will never break off the friendship.

I’m not sure Jesus chose so wisely when He chose me for a friend. I’m not always the greatest friend to Him. Jesus’ friends seek to obey Him and love others and bear fruit for Him. I don’t always do that so well. So when it comes to choosing friends, Jesus could do better and has done better than me. Someone might question Jesus’ choice of me, but who would ever question my choice of Jesus. He is the best friend, the wisest friend, I know.

IV
Most of us along the way have received this sage advice: “It’s not what you know but who you know that counts most.” Do you know Jesus? Knowing about Jesus won’t get you anywhere. Knowing Jesus as your Savior, your Lord, your friend will get you wisely through the ups and downs of this life and all the way into heaven when this life is done. If you sense He is tapping on your shoulder in this crowd and choosing you to be His friend, you’d be a fool to turn away. You forfeit your only way to salvation. You miss the uncountable blessings of His friendship. And you set yourself up to suffer harm for eternity. Receive Jesus’ friendship today because, as a little front porch wisdom suggests ...

*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.*

Preached: June 14, 2015  
First Baptist Church, Hot Springs, AR  
John Scott McCallum II