

Lifelines

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Fickle as a Pickle © 2025 by Ed Jordan

Humans are incredibly fickle, aren't they? There are many illustrations of this fickleness. Not long ago, many people were delighted and enamored by a Tesla car, now not so much. Politicians and celebrities can be black-listed overnight by a single social media misstep. So why are people so fickle? Well, it's not a new phenomenon.

This week I read in Robert J. Morgan's book *On This Day in Christian History* about Jerome Savonarola, who was a priest in Florence, Italy, in the 1490's. He was the city manager, and a very capable and popular person, who brought many improvements to the city. But after a squabble with the Pope, he was required to undergo an Ordeal of Fire, in which he would have to walk for sixty feet through two walls of oil-soaked burning logs. If he survived, he was cleared of all charges. People came to watch the ordeal, but he postponed it, then canceled it. The town rioted, he was arrested, tortured, and then executed in the town square. He went from the most popular man in Florence to the least popular within a few days.

Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the shouts of Hosanna for the Blessed One of the Lord! But thanks to false charges leveled by the leaders of the Jews, He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

How could He go from Messianic kingly-popularity, to being crucified as a criminal, in under three days? How could those who witnessed His forgiveness, healings, and miracles, change from praising Him to mocking and killing Him within three days' time?

People are as fickle as a pickle. What makes dill pickles tart and tangy enough to make your mouth pucker and your face cringe? Why are sweet pickles sweet? Pickles become what they are soaked and seasoned in. The cucumbers could come from the same plant, but if one is soaked in tart, bitter herbs and vinegar, it becomes a dill pickle. On the other hand, it could be soaked and cured in sweetened vinegar and become deliciously sweet. The pickle absorbs the flavors of what it is immersed in.

At the heart of fickleness is a lack of strong moral values, and then like an empty sponge, they quickly absorb the values of the people or ideas around them. If the person is not saturated by strong, moral values of love, they can change their composition to become immoral and bitter. People who are consistently saturated with values related to goodness, and are committed to doing what is right, are rarely swayed to participate in violent evil's destructiveness. Kindness begets kindness, and hatred begets hatred. Proverbs 10:12 (NLT): "Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love makes up for all offenses."

People who have been taught that there is no right or wrong have no internal boundaries to guide their decision making. Without values to differentiate what is "right" and what is "wrong," people use other values or guidelines, mostly suggested by others. If decisions are based upon feelings or popular trends, instead of what is right and honorable, then such people are more prone to join mindless crowds, and to act without thinking or good judgement.

Fickleness is like the weathervane that is directed by the movement of force. The weathervane is pushed around by the wind. Similarly, humans can be turned or directed by other forces, such as

peer pressure, popularity, a fashionable movement, or other destructive forces that influence those without a strong moral compass.

But the reason people are often carried along by the crowd in doing what they normally wouldn't do, is that their external environment is exerting a stronger force on them than their internal moral values. For many such people, the group think becomes their moral compass, and thus they have given up their individuality and uniqueness, along with the desire to do what is right, in order to be seen as a part of the larger group. Group identity has become more important to them than individual identity, and thus the group's values become their moral compass, or immoral compass as the case may be.

This is why God teaches us in Proverbs 13:20 (NIV): "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." And in 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (NLT), God's advice is: "Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love."

Be careful whose values you immerse yourself and your life in. Unlike a pickle, you can choose to be sweet rather than bitter. Choose wisely; saturate your life with God's values!

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