

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 10

[CHURCH BUILDING MINISTRY] GATHERING FACTS IN ORDER TO GIVE ADVICE

Introduce. Before a Christian can give advice to others, he should learn to observe, to listen and to ask questions. Only after he has gained sufficient facts, will he be able to give good advice and help people to make a good decision. The book of Proverbs contains the following wise truths concerning observing, listening and asking questions:

1. Learn to observe people.

Discover and discuss. How can the things that you observe help you to gather facts and to give advice?

(1) Observe the life-style and behaviour of people.

Read Proverbs 24:30-34. It says, "I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgement; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." You should learn to *observe how other people live* in order to learn a lesson from what you see. For example, by observing the life of a lazy person, you can learn why he becomes poor.

(2) Observe the wellbeing (condition) of people.

Read Proverbs 27:23. It says, "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds." You should continually observe the physical, emotional, social and spiritual conditions of the Christians who are entrusted to your care. You should ask yourself questions like:

- "How does continual sickness affect the other Christian and his family?"
- "Why did that person get an emotional breakdown (burnout)?"
- "Why is it so difficult for people to relate to him?"
- "Why does he stay away from the meetings of the congregation?"

By observing the condition of the Christians entrusted to your care, you are better able to give them counsel and help them.

(3) Observe the non-verbal communication of people.

Read Mark 3:4-5.

Non-verbal communication means communicating feelings and attitudes without saying anything.

- Note the expressions on a person's face. Often people show different expressions on their face at different happenings. It could show anger, hatred, obstinacy, opposition, fear, anxiety, shock, worry, insecurity, depression, stress, disagreement, amazement, joy, etc.
- Note the movement of the hands, shoulders and feet.
- How does he sit, stand or walk?
- How does he act or react in different circumstances?
- Note the tone of his voice. It expresses different feelings, emotion and attitudes.
- Maybe he turns his eyes to the ground, or move them from left to right.
- Shoulders can express indifference or ignorance
- Hands can express nervousness or intensity.
- Sometimes it looks as if his body is hanging on a clothe hanger.
- Sometimes you can smell the sweat caused by fear, anxiety or nervousness.
- His behaviour can express indifference, carelessness, recklessness, unwillingness or worry
- His deeds or lack of deeds can communicate acceptance or rejection,

The purpose of observing non-verbal communication. Remember that you may never use non-verbal communication to judge the other person. *Your conclusion about his non-verbal communication should not be regarded as necessarily the right conclusion.* Your conclusion should only serve to help you to ask the appropriate questions and check out whether certain feelings or attitudes are present.

The purpose of using non-verbal communication. Take care that your non-verbal communication does not confuse the other person or make him insecure. It should on the contrary help and encourage him to talk freely to you. The hundreds of muscles in your face can express pride, prejudice, rejection, disapproval, etc. Therefore you should never use non-verbal communication for your own ends.

2. Learn to listen to people.

Discover and discuss. How can the things that you hear help you to gather facts and to give advice?

(1) Listen in order to understand.

Read Proverbs 13:15; 27:25. It says, “Good understanding wins favour.” The more you listen, the more you will understand. The more you listen, the more you will give the other person the feeling that you want to hear everything he wants to say. The more you listen, the more you show the other person that you take him seriously, understand him and accept him.

There is a difference between hearing what someone is saying and *understanding* what he is saying or noticing a possible underlying problem. A person may camouflage his words in order to hide his basic problem, because he is fearful or because there is a hidden motive. Your purpose of listening is to build some kind of understanding of the other person’s situation or problem.

(2) Listen before you speak.

Read Proverbs 18:13,15. It says, “He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame. The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.” You should not talk or give advice before you have first listened. First listen to what the other person says, discern the issues at stake and gain insight into his life. You must listen before you speak!

(3) Listen to both sides of an argument.

Read Proverbs 18:17. It says, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” When there is a conflict between two people, then it is foolish only to listen to the story of one person. His story might not be true or it may be distorted and exaggerated. The way he presents his story would then be quite unfair towards the other person involved in the dispute. When you listen to the other party’s case, you will gain more facts, you will bring issues into perspective and you will be fairer in your counsel. You should listen to the case of both parties, before you give advice.

(4) Listen, but never believe everything you hear.

Read Proverbs 14:15. It says, “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps”.

When there is a conflict, other people often gossip. It is foolish to accept something as true by hearsay or observation only. You should never listen to any gossip at all, but listen and talk to the people that are involved in the conflict and find out what really is the problem.

It is also foolish to form an opinion of another person’s motives on the basis of only a few known facts. You should listen much, observe much and ask enough questions, so that you know as many facts as possible, before you give advice.

3. Learn to ask questions.

Introduce. Sometimes, people find it very difficult to share their thoughts, motives and hurtful experiences. Then it is very important for a Christian to learn how to ask good questions that will help the other person to share what is on his heart.

Discover and discuss. How can your questions help you to gather facts and to give advice?

Notes.

(1) Ask questions to gain more facts.

Read Proverbs 25:2. It says, “To search out a matter is the glory of kings.” You should keep on asking questions until you know and understand enough facts and factors in order to give responsible advice.

(2) Ask counter questions to expose insincerity.

Read Matthew 21:24. Jesus says, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you ...”. Sometimes the best approach is to answer another person’s question with a counter question. Jesus answered the question of the Pharisees with a counter question, because they intended to catch him in his words. He knew what was in their hearts and in order to avoid their trap, he let them walk into their own trap. He forced them to give an answer that would have exposed their insincerity. You should also learn to ask counter questions.

(3) Ask questions to help people think.

Read Luke 10:26-28. Jesus says, “What is written in the Bible? How do you read it?” It is always a temptation to give your own answer instead of helping the other person to think for himself! Jesus challenged other people to discover the truth or answer from the Bible for themselves. He challenged them to use the Bible, to think for themselves and to find answers for themselves from the Bible and to develop their own convictions. God’s Word is always more convincing than your personal advice.

Therefore you should learn to ask questions and help people to discover the truth or answers from the Bible for themselves. A self-discovered truth is a truth better understood and better remembered!

4. Learn to gain wisdom by reading and studying the Bible.

Teach. What does the Bible teach about God’s sovereignty and the revelation of God’s will?

A Christian believes that God is sovereign in his creation and that God has a plan for his creation, its people and its events. However, God has not revealed to mankind his whole plan with the universe and the history of mankind. Isaiah 55:9 says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your

thoughts.” There are many things that God has not revealed and will not reveal to us. In general, God does not reveal to us what will happen in the future of our personal lives. However, we do not need to fear the unknown, because in all the things that happen in the lives of those who love God, God works for their good (Romans 8:28). God is sovereign in his power and sovereign in his love!

Everything that God regards as essential for all people to know, to be and to do on earth he has already revealed through the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ and the New Testament apostles. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of the law.” God’s revealed will consists of specific teachings and general teachings.

5. Learn to give advice.

Teach. Giving advice means helping the other person to gain more facts that would help him to make his own decision.

Help the other person to understand the truth and principles in the Bible concerning the matter under discussion. Help the other person to understand which issues are involved in this decision. Help the other person to think through the consequences of two opposite possible decisions: “If you choose to do A, what would be the possible consequences?” “And if you choose to do B, what would then be the possible consequences?”

Giving advice does not mean that you reveal what *you* would do in similar circumstances. Never say, “I would do this or that in these circumstances.” Never tell him what your choice or decision would be! Because you are a leader, he would tend to follow your choice or decision. But your choice may not be God’s choice for him! And your decision may not be the decision God would want him to make! The other person must take one hundred percent responsibility for making his own choices and own decisions and for the consequences of his choices and decisions. Otherwise, when things go wrong, he may blame *you* for giving him the “wrong” advice!

Giving advice means that you accept that the other person is fully responsible for what he decides to do and that you accept that God has the final authority in how he guides the other person. To give good advice and to help him to think through the facts and consequences is your responsibility, but making a choice or decision is completely his responsibility. Even when he makes a different choice or decision than what you would do, you must continue to accept him as a brother under God’s authority.