

Seeking Advice?

There are times when we are unsure as to which option is best, what to do next or where the Lord would have us go. We feel a little stressed as we consider the serious consequences of a possible mistake. Is it time to seek advice? But finding good advice is not easy. Some advisors are self-centered. Some simply hate anything new or risky. Some have hidden agendas. Some are manipulative, even controlling. Can't the Lord lead His children directly without the use of biased human advisors? One of king Solomon's proverbs reads: "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure" (Proverbs 11:14). Clearly good advice is very useful. "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning." (Ecclesiastes 4:13). He who does not seek advice is arrogant or simple-minded. In 1 Kings 12-14 we find 3 important "don't"s in the process of seeking and receiving advice.

1 Kings 12 - DON'T under-value experience

When king Solomon died, his son Rehoboam, aged 41, inherited the kingdom of Israel. On his first day in office, he faced the standard dilemma of all governments: should he raise or reduce taxes. Being the son of wise Solomon, Rehoboam must have been pretty bright himself, and, to his credit, he followed his father's proverb and sought advice. First he "consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime" (v.6). These recommended he lower taxes. Then he "consulted the young men who had grown up with him" (v.8). These recommended he increase taxes. Rehoboam chose to increase taxes, a decision which led to the death of the chief tax collector and the division of the kingdom (vv. 18, 19).

What can we learn from Rehoboam's unwise choice? Is it simply a matter of choosing the advice of older people over that of younger people? No. It has to do with valuing what has been learnt from experience. Solomon and his advisors had built up the nation of Israel. It had become the admiration of the neighbouring nations. What backed the advice of these older men? The evident consequences of a series of wise choices. What lay behind the advice of the younger men? At best a set of ideas and theories. At worst, hunger for power and personal benefit. Be careful where you seek your advice. If you would like some good advice on marriage or on bringing up your children, look for it among happy Christian families. Looking for advice on study or career choices, seek the council of Christians whose life shows a healthy balance between work, family and Christian service. It is much easier to talk, write and create impressive websites about God's truth than to live by it. As we seek advice, we must listen carefully with our eyes wide open.

1 Kings 13 - DON'T over-rate the spirituality of others

As the kingdom divided, Rehoboam remained king of the southern two tribes, and Jeroboam, a man of talent and standing, became king of the northern 10 tribes. Both kings promoted idolatry and greatly displeased the Lord. As Jeroboam began to deviate, the Lord called a “man of God” from the southern kingdom to rebuke Jeroboam. He bravely did so. He then returned on a different route without eating and drinking, as the Lord had instructed him. An “old prophet” who lived in the northern kingdom heard what had been done, caught up with the man of God and encouraged him to return. The old man stated his spiritual credentials: “I too am a prophet, as you are.” Then the old prophet lied to the man of God saying: “An angel said to me by the word of the Lord: ‘Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.’” (v.18). The man of God followed the old prophet’s advice and returned with him. In doing so, he disobeyed the Lord. A few hours later, as he resumed his journey home, he was killed by a lion (v. 24).

Why was the man of God punished for acting on the words of an old prophet? What can we learn from this sad event? Let’s take a closer look. What strong feelings could have motivated an experienced old prophet to lie to the younger prophet? Curiosity? – He wanted to know more about the prophesy? Bitterness? – He considered the northern kingdom his “ministerial area” and was hurt that a southern prophet was used without him being consulted? Jealousy? – Did the old prophet feel displaced by the new generation of godly men? What is very clear is that the man of God over-rated the spiritual condition of the old prophet. This is easily done. In every Christian community there is a mental model of what a spiritual person should look like. For some, spiritual men are those who wear suits, preach loud, travel a lot or write books. For others, spiritual people are those who don’t laugh, don’t like sports, or don’t have a TV. For some others, the spiritual are those who always talk about the Tabernacle, who weep when they sing, or fall to the ground in prayer meetings. Don’t be misled. We can all appear “closer to God” than what we really are. We strongly recommend seeking advice from godly men and godly women. The Lord can, and frequently does, use such advice. But don’t let an “old prophet” decide for you. Present their advice together with other evidence before the Lord and ask Him to lead you (Psalm 73:23, 24). Remember that the lion killed the younger prophet and not the old prophet. You must decide, since the Lord holds you responsible for your decisions.

1 Kings 14 - DON'T hide relevant facts

King Jeroboam ignored the prophecy, the miraculous healing of his hand (13:4-6), the circumstances surrounding the death of the man of God, and continued his decadent behavior. But, as is fairly common with us humans, a moment of crisis made him think about God again. His young son Abijah became seriously ill. Would he recover? Jeroboam was clearly concerned and decided to make contact with Ahijah, the prophet who had earlier prophesied that he would become king (11:28-31). He decided not to go himself but to send his wife. Furthermore, he told his wife “Go, disguise yourself, so that you won’t be recognised as the wife of Jeroboam” (v.2). Deep inside Jeroboam knew that his lifestyle was offensive to the God of the prophet. If the request for information was associated with his name, he thought it would reduce the likelihood of “good news”. The strategy did not work. The Lord alerted the prophet of the disguised visitor, and the boy died (v. 17).

Sometimes we seek advice, not because we want it, but because we seek justification for our preferred course of action. We can select and restrict the information we provide in order to “direct” the advice in our desired direction. Don’t waste time and effort. For advice to have any value at all, you must supply all the relevant facts. The Lord only leads those who really want to be taught (Psalm 143:10). To “choose to do God’s will” (before we know it) is a prerequisite to divine revelation (John 7:17). We can easily deceive men. We can make ourselves look good and spiritual. But, why bother? The goal in Christian living is not to impress men but to please God (1 Thes. 4:1).

Conclusion

It is good to seek advice from experienced and godly men and women. It is a resource given by God for our benefit. Good advice helps us think through the implications of our proposed actions. Good advice may provide some relevant information we had not yet considered. Good advice shines the light of Scripture on the options available. Yet never delegate to others your need to decide. You and I shall give account of our life to the Lord and we cannot hide behind others - however “wise” and “spiritual” they may seem to us. King Solomon’s 3000 year old proverb still holds: “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.” Proverbs 19:20.

Philip Nunn
Armenia, Colombia
September 2005

Source: www.philipnunn.com