

(T) Welcome to Discipleship training On The Air. Today's teaching is: TRAINING CHRISTIANS TO GIVE ADVICE AND TO MAKE DECISIONS. People ask questions. They seek answers and they need to make decisions. We will learn how to give advice and how to help people make decisions. We will also learn how the elders or leaders should make decisions in the body of elders.

(S) **POINT 1. LEARN TO ASK ADVICE FOR YOUR OWN DECISIONS**

Before a Christian can give advice to others, he should learn to ask advice and accept advice himself from others. The book of Proverbs contains many truths about *wisdom*. The following are three wise truths about the great influence asking and accepting good advice may have on you:

First. Asking and accepting good advice will keep you out of trouble.

Proverbs 28:14 says, "Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble." It takes humility to ask and receive advice. A person, who hardens his heart against advice, will certainly fall into trouble. God resists the proud and pride comes before the fall. Therefore, a Christian should keep his heart soft, be teachable and fear the Lord.

Second. Asking and accepting advice will help you to make good plans.

Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." All people make plans, choices and decisions. But not everybody makes good plans, good choices and good decisions, because they make them without counselling others. They think that they know everything and that they do not need others in life. God warns that the plans of such people will certainly fail! Every Christian should realise that he is part of the Body of Christ and that he needs the other members of the Body to function at his best. Therefore, a Christian should counsel many advisers when he makes plans, choices or decisions.

Third. Asking and accepting advice will make you wise.

Proverbs 19:20-21 says, "Listen to advice and accept instruction and in the end you will be wise. Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." A person who does not ask advice or refuses to accept advice is a fool. Listening to the advice other Christians give to you and accepting their instruction will help you to make plans in agreement with God's purposes as revealed in the Bible. Therefore, a Christian should listen to advice and accept instruction.

(T) **POINT 2. LEARN TO GATHER INFORMATION BEFORE HELPING OTHERS TO MAKE A DECISION.**

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 information, 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:

First. Learn to observe people.

Proverbs 24:30-34 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." A Christian should learn to observe how other people live in order to learn a lesson from what he sees. For example, by observing the life of a lazy person, you can learn why he becomes poor.

(T) **Second. Learn to listen to people.**

Proverbs 13:15 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 serious, understand him and accept him.

Proverbs 18:13,15 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." Therefore, a Christian should not talk or give advice before he has listened. First listen to what the other person says, discern the issues at stake and gain insight into his life.

Proverbs 18:17 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. A Christian should listen to the case of both persons, before he gives advice.

Proverbs 14:15 says, “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps”. When there is a conflict, people often gossip. It is foolish to accept something by hearsay or observation only. It is also foolish to form an opinion of another person’s motives on the basis of only a few known facts. A Christian should listen, observe and ask questions, so that he knows as many facts as possible, before he gives advice.

(S) Third. Learn to ask questions.

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 which will help the other person to share what is on his heart.

Proverbs 25:2 says, “To search out a matter is the glory of kings.” A Christian should keep on asking questions until all the important facts and factors are known and understood.

In 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 question. A Christian should learn not to answer questions when he still does not know or understand all the relevant information. Then a Christian should answer a question with a question.

In 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 discover the answer for himself! Jesus challenged other people to discover the answer for themselves from the Bible. He challenged them to use the Bible, to think for themselves and to find answers for themselves from the Bible. God’s Word is always more convincing than your personal advice. Therefore a Christian should learn to ask questions and help people to discover the answers for themselves from the Bible.

(T) POINT 3. LEARN TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DIFFERENT KINDS OF DECISIONS

The Bible distinguishes between four different kinds of decisions. These different kinds of decisions are based on the three different ways God has revealed his will to us. There are decisions based on God’s specific teachings, commands and prohibitions. There are decisions based on God’s wisdom. And there are decisions based on God’s sovereign control of the circumstances of life. Finally there are organisational decisions, which are decisions which should be taken by a group instead of one individual.

First. Decisions based on God’s specific teachings, commands and prohibitions.

Where there is a command, prohibition or specific teaching in the Bible, a Christian *should decide to obey*. The first rule for a Christian is that he should never seek God’s guidance concerning an act that has been commanded in the Bible. For example, in Luke 17:3, Christ commands that a Christian must rebuke his brother when he sins and forgive him when he repents. Therefore, a Christian must give up his anger and forgive a brother, who repents. The second rule for a Christian is that he should never seek God’s guidance concerning an act that is forbidden in the Bible. For example, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, God has forbidden that a Christian be yoked together with unbelievers. Therefore, a Christian may not even consider marrying an unbeliever!

(S) Second. Decisions based on God’s wisdom.

Where there is no specific command, prohibition or teaching, a Christian *should decide to make wise decisions*, based on the general principles of the Bible.

One. God has given a Christian freedom to choose. An important truth in the Bible is that in the majority of decisions, which we have to make in our daily lives on earth, God has expressed no choice. God has given Christians a great amount of freedom to make choices and decisions. On the surface it appears to be more spiritual when a Christian seeks God’s guidance before he does anything. However, except for the things which are expressly commanded or forbidden, it is God’s will that Christians be free to exercise their own intelligent choice. For example, the shepherd will lead the sheep to green pastures, but he does not wish to decide which tuft of grass every sheep should nibble each moment of each day. And if God has given you a watch to use, would you honour him more by asking him for the time of the day or by consulting your watch?

God’s choice for us may not be one, but any one of a score of possible choices. The Christian who has surrendered his daily life to Christ cannot and will not make a wrong choice. Any choice would be the right choice.

The following are examples of choices which would be equally pleasing to God: Romans 14:1-5 teaches that a Christian is free to choose the food he wants to eat and the days he wants to celebrate. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 teaches that a Christian is free to choose to remain single or to marry. 1 Corinthians 7:39 teaches that a Christian is free to choose

whom he wants to marry as long as the person is a Christian. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 teaches that a Christian is free to decide how much money he wants to give to God's work.

A Christian who remains in Christ does not have to fear that he would make a choice against God's sovereign will. Philippians 2:13 and Acts 16:6-10 teach that God will sovereignly guide his human will and his circumstances according to his good purpose.

(T) **Two. God has given a Christian wisdom to choose.** Sometimes a Christian is faced with an important decision. He cannot discover any clear instruction from the Bible and yet he is forced to choose between two possible courses. In such a situation, God has promised the Christian that he will guide the Christian in the right way. In Isaiah 48:17, God promises, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go." And in James 1:5-8, the Bible urges us to pray and ask God for his wisdom. What proof is there in the Bible that God uses wisdom to guide Christians? God gives wisdom to Christians through the Bible (Psalm 119:97-100), through prayer (James 1:5), through counsellors (Proverbs 11:14) and through research (Nehemiah 2). But God requires of Christians who love him that they use wisdom to make choices and decisions. God wants Christians to use their minds to weigh the evidence: For example, 1 Corinthians 10:23 says that for a Christian, all things not forbidden in the Bible are *permissible*. However, a Christian should determine which of these permissible things are really *beneficial* and *constructive*! 1 Corinthians 7:1,9, says that for a Christian all things not forbidden in the Bible may be *good*. However, a Christian should determine which things are really *better* than just *good*! 1 Corinthians 7:28,40 teaches that a Christian should determine what causes *troubles* and what causes *happiness*! And 1 Corinthians 16:4 and 2 Corinthians 9:5 teaches that a Christian should determine what is *advisable* to do and what is really *necessary* to do! Therefore, a Christian should always use God's wisdom to make responsible decisions and the best choices. Godly wisdom often narrows the options down to one. When it does, then only one choice is pleasing to God. When more than one option is equally wise, each is equally acceptable to God. God's sovereignty will sort out the rest (Proverbs 16:33, Ruth 2). God will not permit his children to go in the wrong way.

(S) **Three. God has more than one plan for Christians who repent.** The Lord commanded Jonah to preach his word to a very large city, called Nineveh (1:2). The prophet Jonah was afraid and chose to flee to a place, where he thought the Lord would not reach him. But the Lord used a whale to bring Jonah to repentance. When Jonah had repented, the Lord commanded Jonah *a second time* to preach his word to Nineveh (3:1-2). This shows that God does not have only one plan for every Christian. *God has a second plan that is as good as the first plan!* When a Christian has repented from disobeying God's first plan, God will have compassion and forgive him and mercifully give him his second plan. God even has a third and fourth and fifth plan for his children and they are all equally good, because God is perfect in his forgiveness and love and has determined that nobody and nothing will be able to hinder him from accomplishing his purposes with his children!

(T) **Third. Decisions based on God's sovereign control of the circumstances of life.** Isaiah 58:8-11 teaches that God's unrevealed (secret) will is only known by God himself. However, Romans 8:28 teaches that God's unrevealed will is nevertheless *perfect* for his children. For example, God did not reveal to us *why* we were born in this particular family and place and time. He did not reveal to us *how* many years we would live. He did not reveal to us *why* he permits us to go through particular difficult circumstances. But God has revealed to us that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Therefore, a Christian *should decide to surrender* to God and *to trust* that God is working out the very best plan for his life in these particular circumstances.

(S) **Fourth. Organisational decisions.**
The following are the responsibilities of churches and Christian organisations:

One. The leaders, their tasks and their authority. The church should appoint elders and leaders only on the basis of the qualifications required in the Bible. They should limit the tasks and authority of these elders and leaders to the things taught in the Bible. Christians should respect and obey these elders wholeheartedly (Heb 13:17). However, *the authority of all elders is limited* to the tasks described in the Bible. They are forbidden to lord it over the Christians under their care (1 Pet 5:3). Christians are never under the obligation to obey leaders who make decisions that violate the principles of the Bible (Act 5:29). Christians should rebuke leaders who disobey God (1 Tim 5:20) and discharge leaders who continue to disobey God (1 Cor 5:12-13).

Two. The rules and the decision making process. The church should limit the rules in the church only to those things clearly required in the Bible. The elders and leaders may not take Christian freedom and responsibility away from the Christians, because it would make the Christians *legalistic* and it would make the leaders *authoritarian*. The elders and leaders should make all their important decisions together with all the Christians in the church. 1 Timothy 4:14 teaches that every local church should be governed by *a body of elders* and not by one leader. 1 Peter 5:3 teaches that the elders or leaders may not lord it over the Christians entrusted to them. Acts 1:15-26 and 6:1-7 show that all the Christians were

involved together in making the most important decisions in the church. Church decisions in the Bible were never made by voting democratically, but always by the general agreement of all the members of the church.

(T) **POINT 4. LEARN TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS**

First. Giving advice is your responsibility, but making a decision is the inquirer's responsibility.

It is always a temptation to tell other people what to do instead of helping them to make their own decisions. Therefore, teach a new Christian the difference between *advice* and *decision*. Advice may never be more than helping him to discover all the factors involved in his decision and to think through the consequences of his decision. The decision what he will do should always be *his* decision, so that *he* will always remain responsible for his own decision. When a Christian tells another person what to do, he may later turn around and blame him for the mistakes he makes! The Christian counsellor may never stand between God and the inquirer. In

2 Corinthians 1:24, the apostle Paul says, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm."

(S) **Second. Setting an example is your responsibility, but following your example is the inquirer's responsibility.** It is better not to tell the inquirer what you did in similar circumstances, because he may see your example as the only possible way for him as well or he may see it as God's will for him too. Rather motivate him with biblical principles than with your personal example. Motivate him to make his own application of the truth and to make his own decision. Help him to understand that he only is responsible for the consequences of his own decision.

(T) **Third. Judging another counsellor's advice or the inquirer's decision is not your responsibility.**

Be careful not to criticise another counsellor's advice, unless it is clearly against God's teaching in the Bible. Also be careful not to judge the inquirer's final decision, unless it is clearly against God's will. The inquirer is ultimately responsible and accountable only to God. Never accuse the inquirer of a lack of faith. God does not give the same kind of faith to everyone (1 Cor 12:9). Moreover, whatever the inquirer does without faith would anyhow be sin in God's eyes (Rom 14:23). Therefore, help him to make his own decisions and to take responsibility for the consequences of his decision or choice.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about training Christians to give advice and to make decisions. Encourage every Christian to take responsibility for the advice they give and for the decisions they make.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".