

From Section 7: God Is Faithful to Furnish Wisdom

"I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me." –Psalm 16:7, NIV

Some Counsel on Giving and Receiving Counsel

We are constantly in need of counsel. Everyone. It's all over life. In our life in this world, from birth to death, from babies to the grave. There's always something we don't know. There's always something we need to learn and there is no continuing Ed course you can take to cram it all in the weekend. It is a constant, gradual thing. We need to learn more as we go.

What is true for this world, is true with our lives in God. We are constantly in need of more of his counsel. He has redeemed us. He has put us and keeps us on the path of life. He makes it known to us. But it's not very often like the drive along Interstate-10 the goes with Florida all across at least the Texas where you can see miles and miles and miles ahead of you all the way to the horizon and your destination at the end. If the alignment in your car is good, you could almost fall asleep at the wheel and be just fine.

But most of the time, there are bends in the road and bends in your life and you can see little but what's right in front of you and you better tuck into some Red Bull if you start to doze off. When I'm on the road, I usually use an app like Waze. It's sort of travellers, road map and GPS all in one. I get reports from other travelers, telling me what's ahead. I get step by step directions for how to get to my destination, and through GPS, I'm constantly in communication with updates and trip statue and help.

But if only there was a Waze to give us directions for life, let alone ministry life! Well, there is. And David, living thousands of years before apps and phones and satellites, is telling us about it right here in this psalm: "I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me; I will keep my eyes always on the Lord." Yes, God counsels us. He instructs us. He makes known the path of life. He can do that because he made the road. He put the lines on the middle-of-the-road and the lines on the side of the road and he gives us eyes to see that there is a path that he is directing us along.

But notice those verbs. There are "s"es on the end of them. They feel not very "one and done" but continual, progressive. That we are made to be daily, regularly dependent upon his instruction. This means surely we can depend upon him to give us the counsel, the wisdom we need to walk that path of life that he has set out for us, but in the way He chooses to get it to us.

And God has His Waze equivalents to counsel us. They are the same, three spiritual food groups we thought about in our meditations on Psalm 16:2.

They are:

- Fellowship with God by His Spirit, our GPS
- The Word of God, our step-by-step directions
- And God's people, our fellow travellers

Three food groups, but one God at work in them all

There may be some promises in God's word I have a hard time holding onto, but one I have so much confidence in like taking a check to the bank and getting a cash, is James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." I have seen God answer this prayer in the most remarkable ways.

Sometimes, He gives wisdom through just one of the three food groups, such as when I'm praying. But most of the time, God counsels me through all three working together: time with the Lord, time in His Word, and time with God's people, all bouncing off of each other. It would seem that God seems to love to use His people to give counsel to each other. And, that we should expect God's people to be a very important part how God makes known his path of life to us. And, for us to be an important part of how God makes known His path to them. And perhaps most surprising of all, that God would choose to use NOT just our counsel to help each other, but to also use the very process of us counselling each other to grow us and make us more like his Son. These are all very good reasons to make sure you have friends who know you and your husband and can counsel you.

Back in our meditations on Psalm 16:2, I went into a lot of depth about how God uses all three of these to help us seek Him and grow in godliness. I'm not going to rehash that here, but feel free to go back and listen if you want to know more.

In this section, I'd like to share with you some of the things Mark and I have learned over the years. First, I'd like to give you some of my best counsel on giving and receiving counsel. Then, I'd like to share with you a walk through seasons in our forty years in ministry and share some of the most important things we've learned.

So, first of all, here goes. My counsel on counsel.

1. Ears to Hear, Heart to Change

But the funny thing about counsel is that it's not just enough to have good advice. Just look at Proverbs! It's filled with all sorts of examples of counsel and two kinds of people. The fool and the wise man. Circumstance after circumstance about what they do with that wisdom that is presented to them. And here are some adjectives that describe that wise man. And, that will help you immensely as you seek to receive counsel from the Lord, especially through God's people. Be teachable. Be humble. Be needy. Realize you are always a learner. Expect to be receiving counsel for somebody else. Be gracious in the counsel that you receive. Don't be surprised that others are stupid at something or other that there up to. Be encouraging.

2. Confirmation for Callings

Callings often start with the desire and conviction but are borne out in the concrete. You may feel called to do this or that. Your husband may feel called to do this and that this or that. That may be a very true calling. But where the concrete comes into is making sense of the timing. You may be called to do something but that doesn't mean you might be called to do it next month. There may be things that you as a couple or the husband as a pastor, or your family or other circumstances that help provide the timing of that road. So, you might know you're supposed to be going to dinner but there may be a blizzard right now that the people around you can tell you about that they see that you need to be prepared for. And to go now even with the calling, would be foolishness.

It doesn't have to mean you have no confidence in God because you choosing to wait to be better equipped to do this thing in front of you. That's one of the reasons why when a man feels like he's called

into the ministry, here at CHBC, they provide many opportunities for these men to preach and teach. This includes everything from a kids' Sunday School class to a Sunday sermon. The pastoral staff takes time to provide constructive feedback that helps to grow in their gifts and confirm (or not) their calling to the ministry.

Our journey to CHBC started when Mark came on his own up simply to preach one Sunday. The church had lost its pastor months earlier and was frequently in need of someone to fill its pulpit. Mark had already been told by the pastor search committee that he was too young and inexperienced to be considered for the senior pastor job. But they were happy to have him preach once. That preaching changed the committee's mind about Mark. It led to a question and answer session and further conversation that day. They wanted to further consider him for the job.

Mark left DC feeling like God was calling us to DC. But when he came home to me, he didn't say that. He told me he wanted me to go and see what life would be like for us here. It wasn't enough for him just to FEEL called. If this was what God really calling him to Capitol Hill Baptist Church, there would be concrete confirmation that this was a good fit for our family. I didn't have to come away from DC as giddy as a trip to Disneyland. It would be helpful to see the potential difficulties as well as So yes, there was God's Word. There was prayer. There was Mark's sense of calling. But there was practical confirmation, too.

Even just the "calling" to take on more ministry opportunities at church helped by practical confirmation. I remember one man who was a super-star teacher. He gladly took on more and more teaching opportunities at church. However, his wife was exhausted from tending to their family of small children on her own because he was either prepping for teaching more or gone, teaching. It wasn't until someone pointed out that his family was not flourishing from all of his hours away from them nourishing the church, that he could see things needed to change. Once more, the feelings of calling do best when confirmed with the concrete.

Welcome the input of wise counsel around you to confirm callings either you or your husband feel. It may save you a lot of hardship and heartache. We are all people with blindspots!

3. Gift Inventories and Serving Your Church

Some churches put a lot of emphasis on gift inventories. The idea that God has gifted each of His people with skills and passion to do certain things well. You should figure out what those special gifts are and make those what you do for the church.

There is no doubt that God gifts His people and wants His people to use these gifts for the good of the church and the glory of His name. But sometimes, too much emphasis on gifts and passion keeps people from the humble service in tasks that are desperately needed. Cleaning out the dirty church refrigerators or taking a lonely, older lady out to lunch, but both are of benefit to the church.

I would encourage you to look at what needs to be done rather than your special gifting subset. Many times, God has planned for you to use those special gifts in His service. But perhaps there will be even more times when what your church needs doesn't require those special gifts. And when you are willing to do those, often humble tasks, I've found that God uses not just your service but your humility to encourage the church.

Be mindful of your gifts; use your gifts; but don't let them be the constraint on your service to the church. This is good counsel for you, and it's great counsel to encourage others.

4. Other's Counsel: Take Some, Leave Some

People love to give advice. Sometimes, it's helpful. Sometimes, it's not. Often, it's a mixture of both. Listen with humility to what others have to say, but use your discernment filter as you decide what to do with their counsel. I find "take some, leave some" has been the most helpful approach.

Take some, leave some for ME

There are some real words of wisdom mixed in with some unhelpful advice. I can thank them for that wisdom and humbly act on it. Or, their words to me aren't really on target and they hurt. But I can grow in responding in love and kindness to them.

Take some, leave some for THEM

Their counsel isn't really what I need, but listening to their perspective teaches me something about THEM.

So, every time somebody counsels us, there something for us to learn. It just might not be what they thought they would be teaching, or what we thought we might be learning!

5. Counsel with Encouragement

80% encouragement 20% correction. This was what Mark says is a great balance in friendship and discipleship. Elizabeth Elliott also uses this "80/20 rule," as she calls it, for what to look for in a good husband. Someone who's 100% would be great, but impossible. If you can get someone who's 80% great and 20% not quite what you would like, you've got yourself a great man!

I like to combine both of these thoughts into one, especially with my husband. I know I have at least an 80/20 guy. He tries so hard to do what's best for everyone, but especially me. What a privilege it has been to have him as my husband-leader-friend! I'd give him closer to a 90/10!

I relish Mark's 90, but think carefully about how to help him with the 10. I find there are two categories that fall in his 10: those that we've not brought up before and those that we have.

For those that have not been brought up before, it's time for a humble, winsome, but put-all-cards-on-the-table conversation. These conversations go best when I start out with that 80% encouragement of all I appreciate in him and his leadership. But then, comes the humble, winsome difficulty-sharing part. No fun, but the encouragement helps him and me a lot.

But at this point in our lives, there are very few of those never-been-brought-up-before conversations. Usually, it's a version of an old struggle. I find I don't need to bring up the whole big issue again. That feels like kicking the dog that's down already. I know he's trying and wants to get it all right. Encouragement is even more important in these cases, with my husband, otherwise he gets so discouraged. I encourage him with even the smallest thread of goodness that I can see in what he's doing. I pick it up and make it into a stitch of appreciation.

I've also found it helpful to not be "stingy" with my encouragement, only encouraging him when he's gets a 100% on something he's struggling with. Instead, I try to cheer him on with any good effort I notice. Both of these approaches encourage him that I see his efforts and they help him want to try to improve even more.

6. Your Husband's Counsel

Be slow to disregard your husband's counsel. I am not saying your husband will have it all right. My husband doesn't. But I DO know that God has woven their leadership into our lives. Be his helper as he leads you and your family. He's not meant to lead alone. Pray for him. Encourage and be gracious to him. Accept his leadership and thank him for it. Be easy for him to lead. Appreciate who God has made him to be. Remember: he may make many mistakes of learner in his leadership, but rarely, or more likely never, will malice be behind your husband's counsel to you.

Forgive him when he gets something wrong. Help foster his relationship with good advisor-friends. Don't be a silent partner in his leadership. Most of the time, you will be making decisions jointly, anyway. But even if it's something that he must decide on his own, there are many ways you knowledge of a situation (especially with kids). You help fill out their understanding that will lead to them making better decisions.

7. Friend Counselors for Your Husband

Some issues are easier for your husband to hear from guy friends rather than you. Or, you two discuss an issue together, but his guy friends give him great practical advice on what to do. Make time for your husband to have time with godly friends! They will undoubtedly bless your family's life as well as his.

8. Counseling with Your Life

Counseling usually starts with your mouth, but it usually includes a lot else. True for your husband, this is true for you, too. First Timothy 3 lists qualifications for men who aspire to be pastors. As I've said elsewhere, these qualifications can be categorized as: Nourish the church, Flourish the family, and Furnish godly leadership and example. Mouth may be involved in all three of those, but they are often the backdrop for the display of God's truth (and good counsel) in your life!

9. Humble Counselor

You are always a learner in something. God is the only one who needs has no learning curve. He is the only one who has nothing to learn. Be teachable. Be humble.

10. Counsel from our Weaknesses

We usually think about counseling from our strengths and our victories. But I've found, when I'm humble enough to share our struggles and defeats, God uses them powerfully to counsel others. We are weak, but He is strong! Who isn't encouraged when they hear of stories of God's strength in our time of trouble!

11. Counsel that Cuts Down?

Men can counsel each other by joking and cutting each other down, but women should not do that with their husbands or other men. Men see women's jabs differently than men's jabs. Perhaps it is their love language with each other, but it's not our love language to them. Men hear and learn best by our encouragement or humble, winsome correction. Leave the joking to the boys.

12. Counselling Mindfully

One person's easy is another person's hard. Just because somebody is struggling with someone always something that you can do rather easily when it comes to how God wants us to live, never the playing field is never level. There are so many different factors that go into why something like music for us, something might be hard for someone else. We are told in Scripture to encourage the weak and the downhearted and discouraged. not beat them up more.

13. Helping Our Husbands as They Counsel

The family is one of the best training grounds a man has for being a pastor. God has put us in a position to help them in so many ways! We help them understand what it means to be a godly man, a godly husband, a godly father to kids, as they “test drive” their leadership on us. The experience they gain in our families, will only help them counsel others better. others.

God never wastes anything, even our sin. When we do not react favorably to their leadership, God even uses that to prepare them to respond with patience and love for others in the church who might not welcome their leadership. (May God grant us respect for our husbands that gives them very little practice of this nature!)

We help our husbands know themselves better –their weaknesses and strengths—and can pray for them. We help them in their counseling by counseling women who need long-term help. We help them by improving their counselling skills with certain groups of members, particularly women, simply by what they’ve learned in living with us.

14. Child Rearing and Conversion Counsel: Avoid the Cake Recipe

It can be so tempting to look at someone else’s well-behaved, even converted kids, to think if you copy everything they did that your kids will come out the same way. Kids don’t work like the chocolate cake recipe you get from a friend. You know, 2 cups of Bible teaching, plus, 1 hour of prayer, etc and out pop converted, well behaved kids.

Remember: all kids only come out of the womb the same way in one way: they are sinners who need to be saved. Each one will have their own temperament with its weaknesses and strengths. Each have their own story that God is written for them. Each one will need love, discipline, and to be discipled in ways best suited for them.

There is so much we can glean from other families that will help us as we raise our kids. Learn from others! You won’t regret it. But don’t expect by doing the same things other families do, that it’s going to have the very same turnout in your family.

I would tell you to not just learn from the parents with well-behaved kids. Learn from good parents who had/have really difficult kids. They can teach you so much. It is also very helpful

15. Counselling Your Kids with Your Life

The words we use with our kids are displayed on the canvas of our lives. We are their 24/7 reality program. They see in our lives the gospel: do we strive to obey God as our Father and Creator? Do we see our sin and our need for a Savior? Do we see God’s goodnesses to us each day and thank Him for them? Do we depend upon God for wisdom and everything else we need?

Hopefully, God will use both your words and your lives to draw your kids to Himself. But be encouraged: even if they do not become believers, even as adults, that God can still be teaching them through your life. Keep living for Him and be amazed at what He can use that to do!

16. Counselling Kids: Under Construction

Even with kids who mean to be Christians, kids are a work-in-progress. Typically, they give their heart when they are little. Then, a bit later like ages 7-10, they develop a greater ability to engage their minds with the truths they are learning. Then, even later, when they are preteens and teenagers, especially,

their will really begins to challenge what they've learned in their hearts and know in their minds know. This is typically when kids begin to really tend to feel the tug of the world, and make a decision to repent and obey, or reject and go their own way, much more like an adult would.

So, don't be surprised that your little child who honestly seems to desire to follow the Lord has problems living it out. I would caution you against accidentally shaming your eager-hearted little one with Bible verses that show their behavior isn't lining up with it. I would be very slow to say, "I don't think you're Christian because you did this, and we know Christians don't do that. You say you're a Christian, so why are you doing that?" as if simply knowing is enough. We know that even in us, as believers, it takes the slow, deliberate work of the Holy Spirit for us to change many times.

Hear me out... I'm not saying that isn't doesn't matter how our kids live. What I am saying is, don't hit them over the head with the Bible to pressure them into a certain character trait. Look at your own life: did/does the fruit of the Spirit magically appear just because you became a Christian? And on the other hand, aren't there non-Christians you know who may even do a better job than you do at certain traits of character?

Scripture is wisdom. Scripture is powerful. But except for justification through Christ (repent and believe and you will be saved), God rarely uses His Word like prescription medicine in the hands of a doctor: "Take two Bible verses now, and it will clear up your problem." Typically, believers grow gradually in their maturity in Christ (sanctification). Two steps forward, one step back is not unusual at all. Keep praying with them and keep pointing them to Jesus and the gospel. Keep encouraging them and teaching them what it means to be a disciple.

We often know what God would have us do before we are able to put it in practice. After all, what does putting it into practice imply, but PRACTICE. "In practice" usually goes on for a really long time. I would even say goes our whole lives. So, don't beat up your kids with Scripture. Point them to the promises of our faithful Savior. Teach them to ask God to help them grow in knowing Him and obeying Him. And pray, pray, pray for them that the seeds planted in them as children would grow into full maturity as a godly believer in time.

17. The Surprising Spectrum of Counselling

Think of counsel as a continuum or spectrum. Usually, when I think of someone giving me counsel, it comes in the form of conversation in the hall or over coffee. Maybe a text or an email. But the truth is, counsel starts far before that conversation ever happens. And it continues long after that conversation ends. Here are different ways we receive and give counsel.

On any particular subject we might need counsel, here are ways God might use to give it to us:

- We regularly seek a growing relationship with the Lord, which does many times, including keeping our hearts tender towards His counsel.
- We pray specifically for wisdom on a specific matter.
- We read (God's Word and other resources) to get wisdom.
- We listen to others speaking to others about similar circumstances.
- We look at others' examples, positive or negative.
- We remember others' examples, positive or negative.
- We foster an open relationship with other so they can observe what we do and be able to counsel well.
- We ask others to share what they do in similar circumstances.
- We carry out the best counsel we have, then learn and reassess.

- We try again.
- We pray again.
- And we do it all, over and over again.

See how it starts way before, and continues long after? There are some people who are still counselling me through things they said or things they did decades ago. Many times, those people do not even know the impact they are still having upon me! Some of the counsel I treasure now are things I disregarded at the time and only later found to be true. Isn't that amazing! Perhaps that will be the case with some of the things you've learned in these sessions.

Some Questions for You

1. While some of the best counsel you received? How did you receive that counsel? Through word through observation, etc.
2. How do you learn from others?
3. How have you walked the line between nagging and giving corrective counsel to your husband?
4. Who has been most helpful in counseling your husband both as he trained to be a pastor and in the ways you just a godly man and husband and father?
5. What is something you are looking for counsel about now?