



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: I am not a professional counselor, but I seem to have a lot of people who come to me for advice. How can I give wise counsel to them?

If you frequently find people coming to you for advice about life's problems, you are probably blessed with some important qualities. People usually go to someone they admire, who demonstrates sound judgment, and who is a good listener and will not judge them harshly. In addition, they will seek out someone they feel can be trusted with confidential issues. These are important God-given qualities needed in a counselor. We should always be grateful for professional Christian counselors, but there is also a place for non-professionals who can effectively help people with day-to-day struggles. However, you may want to take advantage of available training opportunities that might enhance your natural abilities as a counselor.

To be a good counselor, you should begin by being a good listener. A biblical proverb says: "He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13). Instead of thinking ahead about how to respond to what is being said, keep your focus on understanding the one who is speaking. Repeat back what you understand is being said until the intended meaning is confirmed. Allow the one who is seeking help to lead the conversation, and avoid any temptation to change the subject. Your friend will finally stop when he/she believes that you understand.

After listening carefully, take your time before answering. "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil," said the wise man (Proverbs 15:28). Ask your friend to allow you time to think and pray about the matter. Even if you are confident about how to respond, your friend should appreciate the fact that you take the matter seriously and do not rush to some overly simplistic solution. The person with whom you are talking may also be more receptive to your advice after additional time for thought.

As you consider how to advise your friend, search for biblical teachings and principles that may apply. The psalmist said: "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 18:30); and the apostle Paul stated: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's

wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:25). Since God created us, he certainly knows what we need far better than we. Any advice that is contrary to the word of God is not wise counsel.

Finally, be prepared to refer your friend to a professional counselor or a person who may be better equipped to advise on some specific issue. All wisdom does not live or die with any one of us. Don’t let pride get in the way of helping a friend find the help he/she really needs. “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

[Send questions or comments or request for a copy to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071, phone 270-753-1881 or email richardy@murray-ky.net] 2011/01/28