

GODLY COUNSEL

BERNARD JAMES

According to the KJV dictionary, Godly counsel is defined as, “advice, opinion, or instruction given upon request or otherwise, for directing the judgment or conduct of another”.

Godly counsel lines up with the truth of God’s word. It is not carnal, nor selfish, nor deceitful. This type of counsel appeals to our spirit rather than our flesh. When seeking guidance and direction for our spiritual lives we cannot rely on the counsel, or the opinions of men. We need true biblically-based wisdom. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”*(James 3:17, NKJV).

The first step in decision making for believers should be bringing our cares and concerns to the Lord in humble submission; seeking the Father’s counsel on issues through prayer and spending time in His Word. Let us not find ourselves in the same position as the children of Israel who took counsel other than the Lord’s. *“Woe to the rebellious children,” says the Lord, ‘who take counsel, but not of me, and who devise plans but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who walk to go down to Egypt, and have not asked my advice, to strengthen themselves*

in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt” (Isaiah 30:1-2, NKJV)!

Sometimes we make decisions on our own without involving the Lord. That is why I love the Word of God so much because it reminds me of our obligations to set the Lord always before us. That is what David declared in Psalm 16:8, NKJV, *“I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.”* We ought to involve Jesus, The Great Counselor, in our entire decision-making. Years before the Messiah came, Isaiah saw the vision that Christ would come as our Counselor. Isaiah 9:6, NKJV, says, *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* We should esteem no other counselor greater than the One who is called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, for it is He who gives wisdom to man.

Throughout the course of our lives, we are constantly faced with the process of decision-making. Some of these decisions seem minor and unimportant, while others may have a broader range

of consequences. Whatever decisions we make, however big or small, will have an effect on us and the people around us. They can ultimately change the course of our lives. We have all been faced with situations where we have had to seek advice before making certain decisions. Who do we go to? Some may go to friends, family members, church leaders, or even counselors.

If we listen to God's instructions we have His promise that He will give us the direction of where to go and who to go to. *"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:6, NKJV). We must carefully and prayerfully weigh all advice by the Word of God. His Word is always right. As followers of Christ, we should be cautious about the kinds of counsel we seek. Proverbs 1:5, NKJV, says, *"A wise man will hear and increase learning and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel."* Listen to counsel; receive instructions so that you may be wise. God has provided godly men and women among us who we can go to for counsel. As shepherds of the flock, we sometimes have to give counsel even when the flock does not ask for it. In Exodus 18:13-27, NKJV, we see where Moses' father-in-law Jethro saw that Moses was taking on all the responsibilities for himself of leading the children of Israel, so he decided to offer him some good advice and in verse 14 we read, *"So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, 'What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?' And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to enquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.' So Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover, you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will also go to their place in peace.' So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he said."* Praise God! Moses did not refuse the counsel that was given to him by his father-in-law, neither did he grumble or fret, but he humbled himself and heeded. When we heed godly counsel our lives become easier and better.

In Revelation, Jesus gave counsel to the lukewarm church at Laodicea. Let us look at chapter 3:18, where we read, *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eyesalve, that you may see"* (NKJV). Our blessed Lord, the great Counselor, always gives the best advice, which is

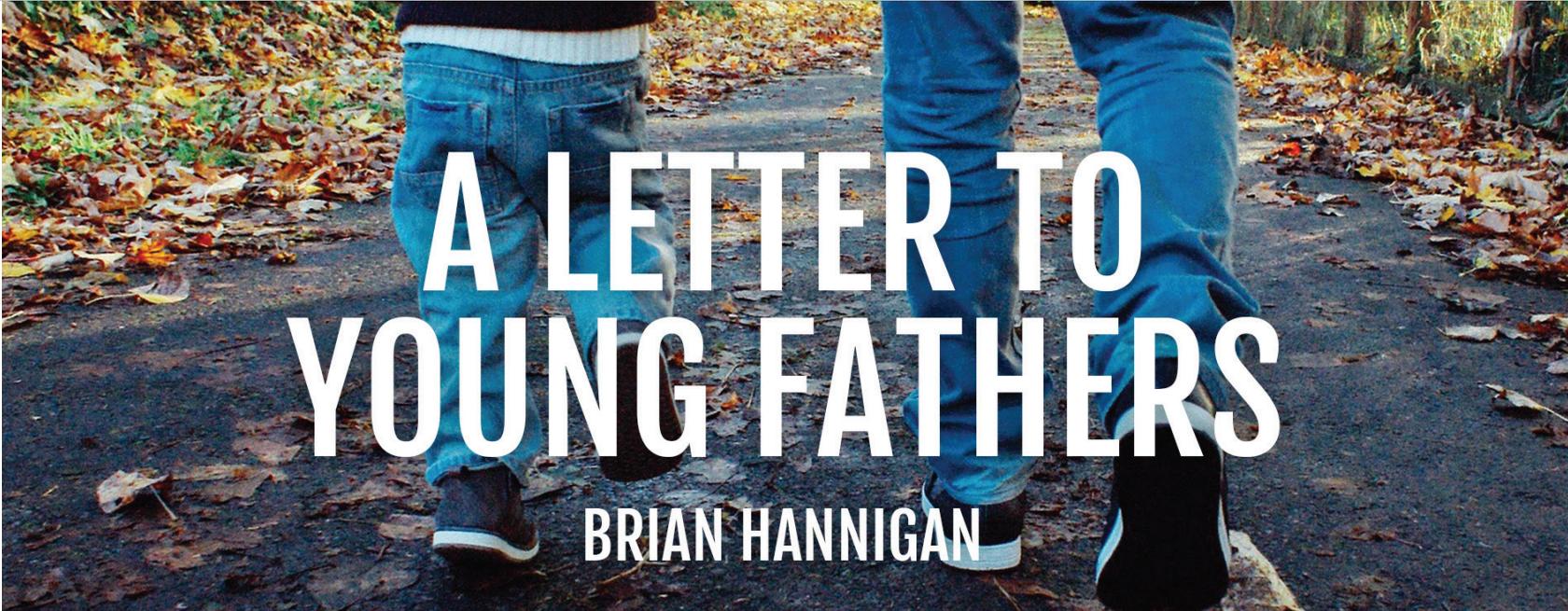
most suitable in all circumstances. Just as He instructed the Laodiceans to be pure and rich in Him, He is giving us the same instructions today. He is calling on us to come and buy of Him eye salve that we might see, and to give up our own wisdom and reasoning which are but blindness in the things of God. This is the wise and good counsel Christ gives to all who accept Him.

As members of the body of Christ, we should not despise the counsel of God which is given to us through the Apostolic Ministries. God has placed them in the Church for the equipping of the saints. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (NKJV).

God has also placed older men and women in the church who can counsel and admonish the younger ones. *"But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine; That the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given too much wine, teachers of good things, That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, To love their children, To be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, Sound speech that cannot be condemned, that the one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you"* (Titus 2:1-8, NKJV).

We cannot rely on the ungodly to give us spiritual counsel. The ungodly will call evil good and good evil. They will put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20). *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful"* (Psalm 1:1, NKJV). As God's people, we ought not to delight in such counsel. *"The Lord brings the counsel of nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the people of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever; the plans of His heart to all generations"* (Psalm 33:10-11, NKJV).

We must first learn to trust the Lord in whatever we are about to undertake. We should seek His counsel, seek His wisdom, and His guidance. Then, and only then, will we have His blessings in the decisions we will be making. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJV). We must reach the stage where we understand that we cannot be completely successful without the Lord's directions. As we heed God's counsel we gain wisdom. Let us look at Proverbs 19:20-21, *"Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days. There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel - that will stand"* (NKJV). †



A LETTER TO YOUNG FATHERS

BRIAN HANNIGAN

I write today to young fathers believing that they want to be the best dads possible for their children.

Looking back at my own record I readily admit that I rarely knew what I was doing. Sure, I drew on what I learned from my own father and what I observed in other homes. Still, I was often frustrated with my boys when their behaviour was beneath what I hoped for. A large part of that was the bruising of my pride that I was failing as a dad. If only they would do what I said, then I would feel successful.

I have no doubt that you, as fathers, want to create the kind of spiritual atmosphere in your homes that will give your children the best possible opportunity to serve the Lord. God wants the very same thing. Remember, dads, Jesus loves our homes; He loves our families. Your home is part of His kingdom. The Lord will fight for you.

Here are a few thoughts that I hope will encourage you as you raise your children:

1. I can hear the booming voice of Brother York reminding us, "Don't try to do the work of the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit do the Holy Spirit's work!" That knowledge takes a lot of pressure off us when we have the tendency to micromanage. Fear will cause us to be too involved. Rest in the magnificence of the Holy Spirit's desire to lead your children.

We as parents have one primary recourse; praying our hearts out for our sons and daughters.

2. Perhaps all Christian young people leave their Christian homes with enough wounds and bruises that they will need the Lord when they depart. As much as we dads desire to 'pave the way' for our children, and make straight the path, God will see to it that our children will need to cry out to Him for help, despite our best efforts.

3. I wanted my boys to follow the same path I did, to see them make the good choices I made, and avoid the wrong choices I made. I expected them to be "Little Brians." I could understand them better if they would just think and act as I did, but they were totally different human beings from me. If there is one super mistake I made, it was trying to force them to be in my image. They refused, en masse! It created a lot of conflicts - rather, I created a lot of conflicts. Instead, I wish I had celebrated their uniqueness more, and trusted the Lord to shape them in His image. Dads, discover who each child is, enjoy each one.

I'm thankful for the moderating influence my wife had on me. Occasionally she had to remind me that I was spoiling the atmosphere of my home with my critical attitude.

4. The Holy Umbrella - Fathers, I knew I was to be a spiritual covering to my wife and children by the command of God. Yet, when I looked at the many flaws and holes in my character, I felt VERY inadequate as a covering. Then it came to me like a vision. If I kept my holy umbrella under God's holy umbrella, it wouldn't matter how tattered my covering was, my family would be safe.

There were times when I saw the enemy attacking my family in ways he had no right to do. I realized I had walked out from under God's covering in my own weakness in thought or deed, and they were bearing the brunt. I would repent and get back in line with the Lord. He would restore order and peace again.

5. For this cause, a man shall leave his father. It is built into a young man to pull away from his dad. God ordained that. Dad is no longer the hero to his teenage son that he was five or six years before. For one thing, his brain is being ravaged by hormonal tsunamis. Plus, he is no longer a boy, but a young man.

God can give you the wisdom to pull back from parenting him like he is still a child. Give your teen some space. You might even have a discussion with him. Let him know that you see him now as a young man and that you want to respect his need for more autonomy. Ask him for feedback and input. This is a bit of a scary move since he can oscillate between being such a brilliant young man and being dangerously stupid. However, if you feel you can give more latitude, more respect, accompanied by more responsibility, hopefully it can build a closeness between you that he really wants and needs, and that you would welcome. Notice his maturity and give him positive feedback. Ask God to open your eyes to ways you can demonstrate your love AND approval.

I've often considered and admired the Jewish tradition that a son or daughter is welcomed into adulthood at the age of 13. The family and community celebrate the transition. The fathers and mothers bless these new teenagers. The young man and young lady are ascribed responsibility, honour, and respect.

6. Don't have to be right all the time. We can use our position of authority to make our children feel bad. We may be correcting almost everything.

I remember going nuts, it felt, with a son who balked at seemingly every directive. I was seriously overlooking that he attended our family worship, prayer meeting, church services and loved being at camp. Often, as we prayerfully sought God, we discovered it was dad who needed God's help.

I went for counseling with a godly father in the church. He said, "Don't be right all the time." You see, I was busy correcting every fault and making both our lives miserable. I drew back and bit my lip. It gave me more time to pray. Fortunately, desperate prayers work, too. The counseling didn't change the behavior of the son, but it changed mine.

7. Pray with your wife. This is the clincher! Have that partnership in prayer with your wife. God's promises are true and amen. He sees our heart's desire for our children to walk in His ways. If we can unite in prayer and make use of the godly wisdom from our wives, we give God more room to move. It's the 'five loaves and two fishes' principle. We bring our little contribution to Jesus and let Him meet the need abundantly.

I close with this. My sons have occasionally brought us heartrending disappointment, but mostly unbelievable joy. We are thankful to the Lord for each of our sons. All are under the blood of Jesus. We continually claim 'a Lamb for a household' in faith believing, according to the scripture of the Passover in Egypt. We claim the prophecies that were given over each one of them and over us as a family. We pray for the constant infilling of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and ours.

If you commit your family to the Lord, this Scripture tells you that HE will keep YOUR commitment.

*"I know whom I have believed,
And I am persuaded, that
HE (is the one)
Who keeps
What I commit
To Him
Against that day"* (2 Timothy 1:12). ✚

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