

Spiritual Disciplines: A Man and Counsel

Editor's Note: This article is excerpted and adapted from Moody Press' *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*.

Early in the 2001 NASCAR season, Steve Park had everything going for him. He was driving for Dale Earnhardt, Inc. (DEI) and a big corporate sponsor, Penzoil. He even drove the big number "1" car.

Park was racing in the Sprint Cup (then Winston Cup) Series—the top league in stock cars, the “brass ring.” Yet, like a lot of other guys, Park wanted to drive in other leagues as well.

He admitted that he was begging DEI to let him drive a Nationwide Series (then Busch Series) car, part of a less prestigious stock car league than Nextel. But his employers along with representatives from Penzoil said, “No. We don't want you risking your career on a Busch race.”

Finally, because he kept insisting, they relented and let him run. Park said, “Then their worst fear was realized. Exactly what they told me over and over they were afraid would happen, did happen.”

In September of 2001, Park's career took a significant downward turn when he crashed at the “Lady in Black,” Darlington Raceway in South Carolina. Park was driving under a caution flag, readying for a restart, when he was involved in an accident.

His car came to rest against the inside wall, and he stayed pinned in the vehicle for 20 minutes, waiting to be extricated from the wreckage. Rescue workers finally had to cut away the car roof to get him out.

Park suffered a concussion, and he had to sit out the rest of the 2001 season and the beginning of the 2002 season. In 2001 he had been a title contender. In 2002 he was ranked 38th. He was released after the 2003 season, no longer needed.

Steve Park's story is our story. We may choose a course of action without taking counsel, without considering God's plans and desires. We're not really looking for His will, because we've already decided what we want to do.

Like Park pleading with his owners and sponsor, we beg and beg—of people and sometimes God—to get what we want. Even when wise and experienced people give good counsel to go in a different direction, we choose to go our own way. And the price of going our own way is getting our own way. Perhaps the secret of contentment is not getting what we want, but wanting what we get.

Bible Truths about Counsel

Verses throughout the book of Proverbs underscore this truth.

- “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice” (Proverbs 12:15).
- “A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise” (Proverbs 15:12).
- “Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance” (Proverbs 20:18).
- “For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers” (Proverbs 24:6).
- “He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe” (Proverbs 28:26).

Pursuing Wise Counsel

Let's focus on a decision you're facing right now. You don't know whether to go left or right. You don't know whether you should stop or go backwards. I want to give eight practical suggestions to help you seek godly counsel.

1. Understand that decisions fall into two categories. Every decision you make will be either a moral or priority decision. Moral choices are choices between right and wrong. When a man asks any of the following questions, he is about to make a moral decision:

“Is it really that bad to fib a little when I calculate my taxes?”

“Can I enter into a relationship with someone other than my wife without getting caught?”

“Who will get hurt if I fudge on my résumé?”

Priority choices are decisions between right and right. Here are two examples:

“Should I invest in this stock, or in that stock?”

“Which car should I buy?”

If you need counsel on a moral issue, go to someone with moral authority and knowledge. Seek counsel from people who know the Scriptures. That doesn't necessarily apply if you're making a priority decision. If you want to buy a good used car, you won't seek advice from a pastor or Bible study leader—unless, of course, they are really smart about cars.

2. Ask yourself, “Am I decided or undecided?” If you've already decided what you want to do, you'll seek counsel differently than if you really haven't made up your mind. You might be tentative about your decision, so you seek confirmation. Or you might really not know how to proceed. If you have already decided, I'd suggest you still should open yourself up to counsel, and be willing to listen.

3. Distinguish between human ingenuity and God's wisdom. God's wisdom is found in the Scriptures, and it is administered through the Holy Spirit. You must decide whether you're getting is human ingenuity or godly wisdom.

I am an idea person. I make ideas like popcorn machines make popcorn. The problem is, most of these ideas are terrible. Over the years, I've realized that most of my ideas are born out of human ingenuity, not godly wisdom.

So I don't rush into the office on Tuesdays for team meetings and say, "We need to do this or we need to do that." I say, "Here are the ideas I've been thinking about this week. Which ones do you think might be worth pursuing?" We talk about it; we counsel. I don't say, "We're going to do this," because I've learned better.

4. Choose your counselor based on your need for reason or passion. Figure out whether you need to hear from the voice of reason or the voice of passion. If you are facing a moral decision, and you already know the right thing to do, you don't need the voice of reason. You need the voice of passion. You need someone to encourage and inspire and motivate you to do the right thing. You need someone to say, "You can do this. You can make it happen."

If you're muddled and confused, and don't know which way to go, you need the voice of reason. Analyze your situation, so you know what kind of person to choose as your adviser.

5. Beware of the counselor with the quick answer. Suppose you've been wrestling with an excruciating problem for many months. You go to someone seeking advice. You get out about three or four sentences. You unburden your heart a bit. And the counselor jumps in and says, "Let me tell you what to do."

Some counselors are quick to tell you what they would do, but they don't get to know enough about your issue to help you understand what you ought to do. Find someone who's willing to listen—someone who asks questions and tries to draw you out instead of telling you immediately what you should do.

6. Remember that some people have agendas. Employees have agendas. Salesmen have agendas. When you seek advice from

someone, it's probably good to know if that person has a heart for you, or if he is seeking a particular outcome. For instance, it's stupid to expect objective advice from somebody who will gain financially if you say yes and lose financially if you say no. That doesn't necessarily mean their advice is bad. In fact, it probably will be good. So go ahead and talk to that person. Get all the available information. But then go to someone who is for you and get additional counsel.

7. Don't explode, don't pout, and don't put down. What is the best way to get bad advice? Repeatedly chase away good advice. In the Old Testament, King Ahab's counselors gave horrible advice, because every time an advisor said something the king didn't like, he'd slash off his head or put the counselor in jail. Don't chafe at advice—even if you didn't seek it.

If you want honest, thoughtful advice, welcome any input, even the negative. Express gratitude—not judgment or frustration—with all advice you receive.

8. Peace is the umpire.

You've sought counsel, and it feels emotionally right. It makes sense. It reasons well. You feel peace. I believe that, as godly wisdom exposes itself, you'll know your answer when you come to that place of peace.

Whatever decision you are facing, I encourage you to seek wise counsel. I encourage you to find some trustworthy Christian brothers. Be honest with one another; open up. Seek counsel. Remember Proverbs 15:22: *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."*

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