

## Be Wise

### What are we trying to achieve?

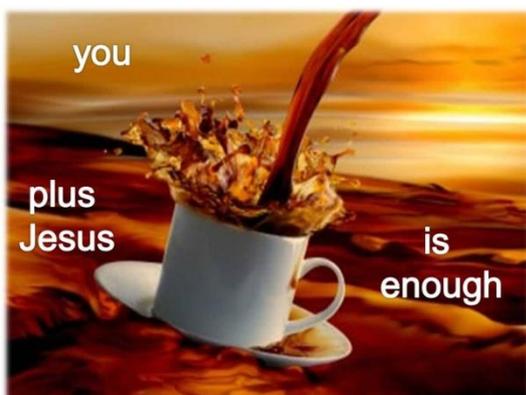
A change of direction – that will lead to wholeness. What does wholeness look like? ‘Shalom’ means salvation, peace, well-being – and above all, being ‘joined up on the inside’. It will show itself in the ability of the person to make his own good decisions and to use all that God has given him to his fullest ability.

### The process starts with me

Am I walking with God – and with his people? Am I open to change and growth? Do I take God’s Word into my heart? I cannot take anyone beyond where I am willing to go. If I know my own heart then I will see clearly into the hearts of others (Matthew 7:3-5).

If I don’t know my own heart, when someone opens their heart to me, what has not been dealt with in me will ‘echo around’ and be a distraction.

If I know my own heart then I will be able to respond objectively to the person I am trying to help. I will recognise what is being said and why, and will not react personally.



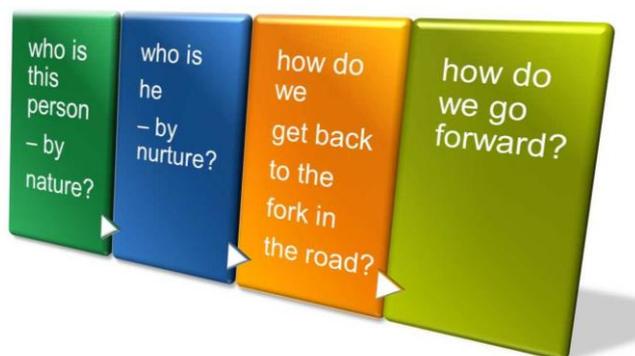
Helping another person is not about techniques but about giving ourselves away. As Christians we have within us the One who is called, ‘Wonderful Counsellor’ (Isaiah 9:6). When we realise that the way God made us is fine, that Jesus within us brings to life all that we are, that we have the gifts and leading of the ‘Spirit of Truth’ (John 14:17), then when we give ourselves away we are giving the very best that we can to the person we are helping. After all, are we not trying to help them understand that who they are is enough in Christ?

### How are we going to achieve wholeness?

There are four key questions to ask:

1. **Who is this person by nature?** What temperament mix does he have? This gives an understanding of who you are interacting with and of their potential. We are going back to the blueprints.
2. **Who is he by nurture?** What has happened to who he is? How has his upbringing shaped who he is today? What are the patterns in his life that help to explain the issues with which he is struggling? How have his choices shaped who he is? What are the decisions that have contributed to his present situation and struggles?

- 3. How do we get back to the fork in the road?** Who is this person meant to be? When did it all start to head off in the wrong direction? Can we describe that point at which it all went so wrong – a point at which the child was missed – or a poor decision was made?



- 4. How do we go forward?** What needs to change? How can we take the 'real person' forward, make right decisions in the present situation, put right what needs to be put right, put the Lord at the centre?

**With these questions in mind, what do we do?**

- 1. Listen** – let him tell you his story. Only ask questions if he needs help to keep going or you need to know information to help you answer those four key questions. You don't have to keep putting in 'little replies' in order to show sympathy or support. Listen to what he is really saying. We all have two stories – the one in which we simply report the facts of our lives and the one in which we share the story of our hearts.
- 2. Feel** – get the feel of this person and his situation. You have to be in there with him if you are going to take him by the hand and walk with him to a better place. You cannot respond until you can sense where he is at and how he feels. He will know whether or not you really understand.
- 3. Respond** – Begin to reflect back to him what you have picked up. You may well find yourself putting into words things he has felt but not been able to express. As you interact with him your response will begin to contain some, or all, of the answers to the four questions you will have in the back of your mind. As you reflect back to him, he can correct any misunderstanding.

**Principles to remember:**

- 1. You cannot live someone else's life for them.** If you make yourself personally responsible for what other people do then you will soon be overburdened. You can love someone deeply and that love can make it very painful if you see good advice ignored but you must not make yourself responsible for another person's decisions.
- 2. Teach them to take responsibility.** It is essential that the whole thrust of what you are trying to achieve is in the direction of helping people to be objective and strong enough to stand tall and make their own good choices. If you always make their decisions for them you teach them to become dependent. If you help them to make good choices for themselves you set them up for the rest of their lives.

**3. Point in the right direction.** People come for help because they cannot see where they should be going. Provided you walk with them through their thoughts and feelings it is not wrong to make suggestions as to appropriate action – all the time recognizing that they alone can choose to take that path.

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**4. Help them work through issues.** Don't do the person's thinking for him! Part of your task will be to separate issues out so that the individual 'strands' become clear but remember you are equipping the person with the tools to reach their own healthy conclusions. Give prods and pointers but always engage the other person's thoughts and feelings rather than simply delivering answers.

**5. They must decide.** If you have given advice then you can expect a specific response to that advice. They may struggle to do what you have suggested, and it is appropriate to support them in their struggles, but if there is clearly no intention of acting on the advice given then there is little to be gained by further discussion on the matters raised.

**6. Don't be vulnerable.** Whilst it is essential to be vulnerable for your own personal growth and development, it is important to be extremely careful with any self-disclosure that you may choose to make with the person being helped. The reasons are as follows:

- a. If the person doesn't want to take your advice, he can use what you have shared against you as justification for his failure to take your advice.
- b. A person whose heart has just been exposed can try and turn the tables on you and put you on the spot with a choice question. You don't have to answer those questions. You are not there for that.



c. Don't counsel a member of the opposite sex on your own and be aware that, in certain situations, it is wise to have someone with you anyway so that there can be a witness to the truth of what is said. Ensure that your own relationships are healthy and open so that you 'guard your heart' when you are placed in situations in which other people make themselves vulnerable to you.

Don't make yourself vulnerable by virtue of the location in which you are working. For example, don't sit in the car with a member of the opposite sex.

**7. Don't take confidences.** Being a person with integrity you will not misuse anything that is shared with you. It is a reasonable assumption that information given to you is not for public consumption. Sometimes a person will simply state that what they are sharing is to go no

further than the four walls. There are times, however, when someone tries to tie you into agreeing to take a confidence and it is appropriate then to say something like, 'You will have to trust me to do what is in your best interests with what you share with me.' Very occasionally you may have to pass on information in order to protect others from harm – and to protect the person from themselves!

- 8. Don't believe everything you are told.** It may not be a case of someone deliberately deceiving you – they are simply sharing their perspective on what happened. For example, you may well be given a view on family life that says more about which parent the person identified with than objective reality. Take care not to come to a conclusion too quickly when one partner tells you how awful the other one is! It may be that they are awful – and possibly worse than you are being told – but the point is that you have to reach your own conclusions. Apply this principle in all disputes.

Don't believe everything you are told 'spiritually'. Just because someone says, 'The Lord told me to do this' doesn't mean that he did. Don't be intimidated by those statements – be prepared to challenge them. A large part of your task is to help the person distinguish between his own emotional impulses and the impulses of the Spirit of God. Watch out too for the 'spiritualisation' that is really only another way of avoiding painful reality. It is far more spiritual to help the person realise that, because they are secure in Christ, there is nothing they cannot face because the Lord is with them.

#### Final Thoughts:

- 1. Limit the length of the sessions.** It is tempting to think you have to solve everything then and there. Dividing the time up allows the person to think and hear the Lord for himself. It also allows you space to gain a clearer perspective. Be prepared to make adjustments as you go along - you are on a journey with the person you are helping. It is entirely appropriate to say, 'I have been thinking about what we spoke about last time and ....'
- 2. It is not failure for you to seek support and advice.** You are on a journey and effective help for others requires that you have your own support and opportunity to understand and grow. You will also need prayer support as you help others.
- 3. Don't be discouraged.** Not everyone will take your advice. Be there for those who will. For those who do listen, it can still be a long process. Absorbing the truth takes place over time and is determined by our desire for the truth and the way in which our perspective changes. You may have to say the same thing many times – it doesn't necessarily mean that you are being ignored.
- 4. Remember – this is God's work.** We cannot engineer situations – nor should we try to. You will become aware that you are simply being given the privilege of involvement in something that God is already doing. Walk with him, listen to him and obey him in all that you do. Go into each situation with Psalm 48:14 in your heart.

