

Many Advisers Makes Success

Executive Director of the Federation of Fire Chaplains, Edward M. “Ed” Stauffer shared with me a very valuable passage of scripture for you and for me -- Proverbs 15:22. At the beginning of the year 2015, Ed said he was led to read the 15th chapter of Proverbs during his daily devotions. As he read the chapter, his eyes focused on verse 22 which says, **“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”**

These few words from scripture should be imprinted onto our minds. We, as fire chaplains, are ministering servants of the Most High God. We must keep this passage in mind as we do the functions of the chaplaincy. We must ever remember that we are servants but not masters. We must keep our eyes on the goal that the Most High God has called us to. We need to keep ourselves humble and be reminded every day of our lives that we are servants-- first, last, and always servants, and that we should be willing to be open to counsel.

A very talented, intelligent, caring, personable and valuable fire chaplain can fall on stony ground and crumble like sand without the counsel of God and those predecessors in the chaplaincy that have gone before him. A chaplaincy can fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers a chaplaincy can make a valuable difference in many people’s lives.

The scriptures teach us that we should “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering others better than ourselves. Each of us should look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others. Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”¹

Jesus considered of vast importance the choosing and training of those who would be entrusted to do his work. It is noted that it took him about a year and a half to make his wise choice; then He mentored them by his example for another two years before he knew they were ready to be sent out. Notice, those chosen did not go off on their own – freelancing. They were committed to the Master and followed his direction. They were under the commander-in-chief, learning to become members in the priestly office of Christ. They were not “called” to be sent out wherever they wanted to go, doing whatever they wanted to do. They were commissioned by the Master to go to a specific place and do a specific job.²

It is interesting too, that he gave them some interesting advice before he authorized them and sent them out. He told them “to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”³ What does this combination mean? The wise serpent is cunning, lurking, waiting to strike unexpectedly. The dove is harmless, weak, the most harmless animals around. But the combination of the two characteristics would save them from unnecessary danger while giving themselves completely to others. The dove was the only bird that could be sacrificed, usually by the poor. This passage reminds me of what C. S. Lewis was credited to have said of humility: “True humility is not

¹ Philippians 2:3-5

² Matthew 10:1, 5-8

³ Matthew 10:16

thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”⁴ The idea is to keep humility in check. Watch out for the selfish ambition of the serpent while giving the sacrificial service of a dove to those who are hurting.

Paul reminded Timothy “Do not be hasty in the laying on hands, and do not share in the sins of others.”⁵ This is traditionally connected to ordination -- setting aside a candidate for ordination so the candidate proves his dedication and character before being ordained. This should apply to other church officers also, including a fire chaplain. We do not ordain chaplains; that is the responsibility of the chaplain’s church. However, the church does have a tremendous responsibility in the process of sending out a chaplain. The church is responsible to set aside a chaplain candidate to see if he/she has proven dedication and character to be endorsed as a fire chaplain. The fire chief relies heavily upon the church’s endorsement before the fire chief officially appoints the fire chaplain.

Paul says the importance of the “not hasty” move is so that the church, the fire chief, other fire chaplains and the Federation do not share in the sins of others. In a quasi-fire organization, the chaplain needs be willing to undergo a complete background check as well.

I know there are some who get bent-out-of-shape with the guideline regarding being five years in the chaplaincy before receiving an Advanced Chaplain Certificate in the Federation of Fire Chaplains, even if they have the 130+ hours of training. These guidelines are following the guideline of Paul in scripture. A person who is to follow a calling of the Most High God must be willing to follow the guidelines. And one who is to follow the call of the Most High God must be willing to be mentored, to be taught, and to follow the example of those who have been in the chaplaincy and have experienced the ups and downs of the ministry. A fire chaplain is a servant, following the priestly office of Christ, willingly serving the Most High God in humility.

There is no place in the fire chaplaincy for a haughty spirit, one who is heady and high-minded, overly full of ambition, never willing to receive counsel or advice, and one who always thinks first of him/herself. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ...teach and admonish one another with all wisdom... do it all in the name of the Lord...”⁶

The successful fire chaplain is willing to seek advice and counsel and keeps thinking more of others and thinking less of him/herself. When you consider Proverbs 15:22, it will be unto you – success or failure. It’s up to you.

A fellow servant,
Chaplain Jim Burns

⁴ C. S. Lewis, credited from Merely Christianity

⁵ 1 Timothy 5:22

⁶ Colossians 3:12ff NIV