

## **INTRODUCTION**

Writer Trey Reckling relates what is just a revealing story. A man was running late for his plane in Atlanta and didn't have time to eat as a result. So he quickly bought a pack of his favorite cookies at the airport – Otis Spunkmeyer chocolate chip – and stuck them under his arm. He was relieved to make it to his plane just in time and put the cookies and his briefcase under his seat when he did.

His relief was short-lived though when he realized he was seated next to a mother and her toddler, who was in the midst of throwing a fit. Soon, to quiet her child, the mother reached under the seat and brought out the pack of Otis Spunkmeyer chocolate chip cookies. She opened it and gave one to her child and then took one for herself, smiling at the man as she did. He was stunned. Here she was not only eating his lunch but also rubbing it in his face by smiling at him. After finishing their first cookies, her child and she took another. Fuming with anger, the man immediately took the remaining cookies out of the pack for himself, whereupon the mother turned and smiled at him again.

After the plane finally landed, the mother and her child filed past the man as he sat in his seat. *"Have a nice day,"* she sincerely said to him as they did. *"Yeah,"* he rudely replied, still upset about the cookies. At which point, he reached under the seat for his briefcase and found something else as well – his unopened pack of cookies. The implication of it then suddenly dawned on him. The mother and her child hadn't eaten his cookies. He had eaten theirs.

That man did something that all of us have done many times before and without effort, will do many times again. He jumped to a conclusion and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Turn to Proverbs 18:3, 17, and 18. The Book of Proverbs is different in nature than the other books in the Bible. With exceptions here and

there, it is essentially a series of disconnected sayings. The 24 verses that make up chapter 18, for instance, address 20 unrelated topics.

One of those is found in verses 2, 13, and 17. Verse 2 reveals a foolish person who habitually expresses opinions about things that he doesn't understand. Verse 13 pictures a person who speaks prematurely about something, before having all of the facts he needs. And finally, verse 17 portrays a person who believes something that someone says. But when another scrutinizes that something, the person finds out it isn't so. Those three verses, each in its own way, address an issue that is relevant and critical to us all – jumping to conclusions.

Let's discuss that today beginning with what conclusions are. They're nothing more than suppositions we have about reality. They're things we believe to be so.

Several years ago, someone called me and asked why I snubbed her. *"I didn't,"* I said, *"Why do you think that?"* So, she told me. The evening before, she saw me walking at the mall. She said "Hi" of course as I approached her, expecting me to stop and talk. But I didn't. I walked right on by instead, not acknowledging her at all as I did. At that point, she "read my mind" as relational experts say it. She conjectured what I was thinking and feeling and supposed that I snubbed her.

That illustrates what conclusions are. They're suppositions we have about reality. They're things we believe to be so.

Now, the issue with regard to them is this. Are the conclusions that we draw true or false? Is reality as we suppose it to be? Are the things that we believe to be so actually so?

Going back to verses 2, 13, and 17, the persons they mention drew false conclusions. It's just like that man on the plane and the woman at the mall. Reality was not as they supposed it to be. What they believed to be so wasn't so. The mother and child weren't eating his cookies and I didn't snub her. That illustrates two things that we desperately need to grasp. Number 1, it's easy to draw false conclusions. And number 2, most of us draw far more false conclusions than we realize!

## JUMPING

Verses 2, 13, and 17 reveal why we do. It's because we jump to them. That's the idiom we use to describe it. We talk about others and us "jumping to conclusions" and I want to explain what that means.

All of our conclusions are based on facts we get from one source or another. To draw true conclusions, those facts we get have to be accurate and sufficient. Accurate means that they're correct. Sufficient means that there are enough of them.

Now, sometimes, we draw conclusions hastily or prematurely, before getting accurate and sufficient facts. We suppose or believe something without having the correct facts or enough of them. That's what the man on the plane and the woman at the Mall did. They jumped to conclusions, in other words, and so do we.

According to relational specialists, there are many ways of doing that. Those ways include reading into situations, filling in the blanks, generalizing, reading people's minds, labeling, speculating about the future, thinking the worst, hearing only one side of the story, and so on.

Take filling in the blanks, for instance. I was in an Administrative Council Meeting years ago at Barberton Friends Church. Someone at one end of the table, Person A, was making a serious point and someone at the opposite end, Person B, laughed as she did. She was making a serious statement. He laughed as she did. The blank is the connection between the statement and the laugh. Person A filled it in this way, "ridicule." "Person B is ridiculing me." She was quite upset about that all week long, so much so that she finally called him up to resolve it. She found out that he hadn't laughed at what she said but at what the person sitting next to him just happened to say simultaneously, not related to her. She jumped to a conclusion by hastily filling in the blank.

However we do it, most of us do it. We draw conclusions hastily or prematurely, before getting accurate and sufficient facts. We suppose or believe something without having the correct facts or enough of them. We jump to conclusions in other words.

## HAVE A GREAT FALL

But we shouldn't and verse 13 reveals why. Notice what jumping to conclusions is to us. It's *"folly and shame."* I wrote a little note in my Bible beside those words. It says, *"Jump to conclusions and you'll have a great fall,"* the words "great fall" alluding to Humpty Dumpty of course. Jumping to conclusions is a harmful thing in other words.

A free-lance writer named Annette Bridges authored an article about jumping to conclusions and in the course of it articulated the damage it can do. Listen carefully to her words: *"Often we don't spend the needed time to reason things through and consider all the facts. The result is that we hurt the feelings of innocent people, fabricate unnecessary stress, waste time, bring about misunderstandings, make wrong decisions, create obstacles that don't actually exist and cause others to miss out on opportunities."* That's quite a list of consequences isn't it.

It shows that jumping to conclusions harms the jumper. Take fabricating unnecessary stress for instance. Going back to Person A at the Council meeting, that was the effect of jumping on her. Remember what I said about that. She was upset all week long.

Bridges' list also shows that jumping to conclusions harms others. Take hurting people's feelings. Going back to the man on the plane, that was the effect of he jumping, on the mother and child. He totally misunderstood the situation and treated them rudely because he did.

As instructive as Bridges' list is, we need to understand that it isn't an all-encompassing one. There many other negative consequences to which jumping to conclusions can lead us. It really is true. Jump to conclusions and you'll have a great fall.

## DON'T JUMP

So, don't jump! That's our call today in verses 2, 13, and 17. Don't jump! Ever! That's our call and answering it is a three-step process.

First, acknowledge that our conclusion is an assumption, when it

is. Many of our conclusions are nothing more than assumptions. We jump when we interpret those assumptions to be facts. That's what the man on the plane did. When the woman took the cookies from under the seat, he assumed they were his. *They may be mine*. But he interpreted his assumption as a fact – *they are mine*. Person A at the Council meeting did the same thing. When Person B laughed, she assumed he was ridiculing her. *He may be ridiculing me*. But she interpreted her assumption as a fact. *He is ridiculing me*.

Not jumping, as I've already told you, is a three-step process. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> steps are steps of verification. Assumptions need verified. Facts don't. Consequently, if interpret our assumption as a fact, we won't ever get to those 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> steps. And if we don't get to them, then we'll jump to conclusions just like that man and woman did.

So, that's the first step in the process of not jumping to conclusions. Acknowledge that our conclusion is an assumption, when it is.

The second step is to get informed. Collect all of the relevant and reliable facts we can. Acknowledging that our conclusion is an assumption, we know that it needs verified and that the only way to verify it is to collect all of the relevant and reliable facts we can. If the man on the plane acknowledged that his conclusion was an assumption, he would have looked under his seat to verify it. If Person A acknowledged that her conclusion was an assumption, she would have asked Person B a question to verify it. **Were you laughing at me?** Getting informed, collecting all the relevant and reliable facts that we can, will either confirm or discredit our conclusions.

There's a third step in the process of not jumping to conclusions. Reason well. Having collected all the relevant and reliable facts that we could, we now connect them rightly together – not only with each other but with our worldview as well. Seeing the cookies by my briefcase under the seat, I know the mother and her child aren't eating mine. Hearing Person B's answer to my question, I know that I wasn't being ridiculed by him. We need to reason well.

Those then are the three steps and I illustrate them again by applying them to the woman at the Mall who concluded I snubbed her.

First, she should have acknowledged that her conclusion was an assumption, not a fact. Second, knowing that assumptions need verified, she should have gotten informed by asking me a question - not *"Why did you snub me?"* but *"Why didn't you acknowledge me?"* That's a factual question that gathers further facts, which I gave her. During the winter, I frequently go to the Mall on Saturday nights and walk around to go over my sermon in my head. I go through it word for word as those who get the manuscript read it. Doing that requires so much concentration that I don't even notice the people walking by me. Those are the facts. Third, she should have reasoned well. With all the facts in hand, one of two things is true. Either he's lying and purposely snubbed me or he's telling the truth and didn't notice me. But part of my worldview, in 1 Corinthians 13:7, is that I should give people the benefit of the doubt until I know otherwise. So my conclusion isn't that he snubbed me. It's that he didn't notice me.

That illustrates what we should do. First, acknowledge our conclusion as an assumption, when it is. Second, get informed by collecting all of the relevant and reliable facts that we can. And third, reason well by connecting those facts rightly together – with each other and our worldview as well. Do those three things. You won't jump to conclusions if you do.

## **CONCLUSION**

But why is it so important that we don't? The verse at the top of our bulletin explains why? According to Ephesians 4:1, we need to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, that is, our calling as disciples of Jesus. Our discipleship extends to every detail of our lives including this one. So like Jesus, never jump to conclusions. Just determine instead, *"Are those my cookies?"*