

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 3: Moving Into a Ministry Lifestyle
Week 2 – Staying On Course: Principles of Spiritual Guidance

Introduction

A famous evangelistic booklet begins by saying, “God loves you, and he has a wonderful plan for your life.” We have learned that God’s plan revolves around receiving his love and giving his love away to others. Tonight, we want to consider how we can discern God’s specific plan/will for our lives.

Three Foundational Considerations

1. God is willing and able to guide you. Many, many passages teach this.

- God is our Shepherd (Ps. 23) and Jesus is the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10). And we are like sheep, stupid and prone to wander, so we need his regular guidance.
- God explicitly states many times that he will guide his people (e.g., Ps. 31:3; 32:8; Isa. 58:11; Prov. 3:6).

QUALIFICATION: Avoid the extreme positions that Christians often take on this issue.

“Christian Deism”

“Super-spirituality”

2. God’s will for your life has two primary focii:

- Moral/ sanctification

(Rom. 12:2*) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Rom. 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

(1 Thess. 4:3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.

- Ministry purpose

(Eph. 2:10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

(Rom. 12:2a,3-8) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is . . . (3) For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (4) For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy. . . (7) if service. . . , or he who teaches. . . (8) or he who exhorts . . . , he who gives . . . , he who leads. . . , he who shows mercy. . .

3. Sometimes God reveals his will specifically, but not always.

In Acts 8:26-40, an angel of the Lord directs Philip to “go to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Once there, the Spirit tells Philip to “go up and join this chariot.”

In Acts 10, God reveals his will to Cornelius and Peter.

In Acts 16:9ff, Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia saying “come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul concluded that God had called him to “preach the gospel to them.”

On the other hand, Paul can speak of being “perplexed” as one of the sufferings of Christ that Christians commonly experience (2 Cor. 4:7).¹

Practical Guidelines for Discovering God's Will

¹ The great missionary, Hudson Taylor, said: “In my younger days, things used to come so clearly, so quickly to me. But now as I have gone on, and God has used me more and more, I seem often to be like a man going along in a fog. I do not know what to do.” Quoted by Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 113.

1. Key Principles of Guidance

A. *Scripture*—the primary means of guidance.

(Ps. 119:105) Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- *Soak yourself scripture through reading, memorizing, and meditating on it.*

(Psalm 1:1-3) 1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

B. *Prayer*—Pray regularly for God's guidance and for the heart to follow his will.

- Many passages teach us to ask God for guidance (e.g., Ps. 25:4,5; 27:10; 143:8,10) and warn us of the danger of not doing this (e.g., Josh. 7,9). Not praying for God's guidance may betray a self-willed attitude.
- Many passages teach us to pray for God to give us the heart (e.g., desire, willingness, strength) to follow his will (e.g., Ps. 86:11; 119:35,36; 141:3,4). Jesus prayed in this way in the Garden of Gethsemane, and urged his disciples to do the same thing (Matt. 26:36-41). Not praying for this may reveal a self-confident attitude, like Peter in Matt. 26:33-35.

C. *Acting*—Act on God's moral will that you already know about.

(James 1:22-25) – 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves . . . 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

(Heb. 3:7-11) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS . . . THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART . . . (THEREFORE) THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”

(Matt. 13:12*) “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”

D. Willingness—Be willing to do God's will *before* you know it.

(John 7:17*) "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself."

(James 1:5ff, 6-8) But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (6) But let him ask in faith without any doubting , . . (7) For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Conclusion: If these principles of guidance are core convictions and habits in your Christian life, you can rest assured that God will give you the personal guidance you need and that he will get you where you need to go.

2. “Road Signs”

“Road signs” are *additional factors that are helpful in discerning God’s will*. But remember, the principles of guidance and foundational considerations listed above must come first. These road signs are listed in general order of importance.

A. *Spiritual Expedience*: This is a synonym for biblical wisdom, “sanctified common sense” which asks: “What decision will most glorify God based on biblical principles and priorities?” The Bible’s strong emphasis on wisdom (e.g., Proverbs; James), plus numerous biblical examples of this as the basis of decision-making,² indicate its central importance.

(Prov. 3:5,6) Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

(Titus 1:8) . . . but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled . . .

Use a “Pro’s and Con’s” list, but be sure to prioritize the "pro's" and "con's" in the light of scripture.

B. *Spiritual counsel*: Wise counsel can give you additional light on Scripture, spiritual expedience, and possible implications of a decision.

Proverbs says that spiritual counsel is a key part of biblical wisdom:

(Prov. 11:14; 24:6) "In the abundance of counselors is victory."

(Prov. 12:15; 13:10,18) "The wise man listens to advice."

(Prov. 15:22) "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."

(Prov. 19:20) "Listen to advice."

(Prov. 20:5) "A plan in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding draws it out."

² See many examples of this kind of decision-making in Paul’s ministry: why he decided to go certain places (Rom. 15:18-24; 1 Cor. 16:5-9; 2 Cor. 2:12,13); how he chose church leaders (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1; Acts 15:22; 16:1).

(Prov. 20:18) "Plans are established by counsel."

QUALIFICATION: Seek mature counsel (grounded in the Word and committed to God), preferably from people who know you well.

REMEMBER: The advisor is not responsible for the decision—you are.

C. *Personal desires:* In general, consider personal desires *more* in major life decisions (e.g., marriage; major ministry commitment) and *less* in the responsibilities associated with major life decisions (e.g., aspects of marriage or parts of a major ministry commitment that you don't enjoy).

Avoid the extremes of *asceticism* (“Whatever I want, the opposite is God's will”) and *selfishness* (“If I want it this badly, it must be God's will”). Which do you tend towards? Lean the other way!

Strong desire for and enjoyment of an area of ministry often indicates gifting or burden (see below).

D. *Gifts/ministry burdens:* Since God gives us spiritual gifts to play a special role in ministry, the faithful exercise of our gifts should be an important factor in our decision-making.

See Week 3 for more on identifying your spiritual gifts.

E. *Intuition*

This includes leadings, prompting, impressions spontaneously emerging in our mind, especially during prayer and biblical meditation.

If intuitions are from God, they will be consistent with:

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The more you are in the Word, understand your ministry role, and are committed to servanthood, the more this area will come into play.

F. *Inner peace:* This is a certain kind of intuition—a deep seated calmness from God about a direction you've chosen to take.

QUALIFICATIONS:

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G. *Delegated authorities:* This includes parents, husband, state, employer, church leaders. Within their legitimate sphere of authority, it is God's will for us to follow their directives.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- We do outgrow authority or change them at times.
- We may have to disobey them if they contradict what God commands or forbids in his Word.

Please note: there are more papers on this subject on the web and it is covered thoroughly in Servanthood class.

H. *Circumstances:* Circumstances play a relatively minor role in making major complex decisions.

“Fleecing” (Gideon, Judges 6)

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Open or closed doors do not necessarily mean "YES" or "NO" (compare 2 Cor. 2:12,13 and 1 Cor. 16:8,9).
- Avoid reading too much into circumstances or the timing of circumstances.

I. Results: We can often learn valuable lessons from the outcome of our decisions by asking these questions:

- What kind of results occurred—biblical or carnal?
- Why did the decision lead to good/bad results?

QUALIFICATION: Results don't in themselves confirm or deny the wisdom of the decision (pragmatics are not the only considerations).

- Biblically correct decisions may not yield immediate or external results.
- Results which followed past decisions do not guarantee the same results from similar decisions now.

Concluding Advice

- *God does not lead mechanically.*

(Francis Schaeffer) ““Thus we face a balance--by living in a personal relationship to God, and by not living as if God were not there. But this does not mean that I must find God's leading in a mechanical and legalistic way, and perfectly in every case, or God will cast me off. I personally could not live for twenty-four hours

Rom. 12:2* God's will for our life revolves around our sanctification and his ministry role for us.

Jn. 7:17* Learning God's will is predicated upon our being willing to do his will even before knowing what it is.

Matt. 13:12* As we are responsive to God's will in our lives, he will continue to unfold his will in the other areas. The reverse is also true.

Assignment

Study these passages on spiritual gifts: 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Pet. 4:10,11. In your own words, answer the following questions:

- What are spiritual gifts?
 - To whom are they given?
 - Why are they given?
 - How should they be exercised?
- What spiritual gift(s) might you have?