

GUIDANCE

1. MAKING A CHOICE TO OBEY

The question we usually ask is; “What is God’s will for my life?” This is the wrong question. The right question is; “What is God’s will?” Our focus is usually on “my life”. His focus is on His Kingdom and His will. We will never know his will for our lives until we first know his will, that is to say, his purposes and his agenda and his goals and his means to accomplish those goals for humanity. There is no point in asking for God’s divine guidance until we actually desire God’s rule and reign in our lives. Our motivation has to be at least more than 50% for the Kingdom of God. A man I once knew was visiting a friend of his in Houston who worked at NASA. He took him to see the rockets. They stopped to look at a huge rocket that was waiting to be launched and the man from NASA told him about the guidance system. He said, “It doesn’t start to function until the rocket is 200 miles up in space!” My associate said, “Why does it wait for so long before it starts to direct the rocket?” The man answered with some impatience; “Well it doesn’t need guidance sitting on the launch pad does it?” The wheels of a car are very hard to turn when the car is sitting still but when it is moving even very slowly, it is easy to turn. God doesn’t waste guidance on people who have no intention of obeying what he gives. Those who have begun to obey what little they already know to do will receive more.

When we seek to hear God’s guidance the first thing to attend to is letting go of our desires and fears – these are the things that run our lives – our unmet “needs” and our deepest fears. When we have faced these things and identified them we can give them to God and ask for freedom from them so that we can truly desire and seek His will. What enables us to do this is understanding and experiencing His love. *

Mat. 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

* Mat.6:31-34 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Rom 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rom. 12:9-13 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

John 20:21 As the father has sent me I am sending you.

Mat. 10:24 A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

2. KNOW THE BIBLE

There are only two ways that God reveals his guidance and will to us, naturally and supernaturally. The natural means are those ways by which we can apply the natural gifts that God has given us to discover His will and guidance. He has given us minds that reason and he expects us to use them. In physiological terms we are talking about the left side of the human brain, the part of the brain that uses logic and reason to navigate the terrain of this physical world we live in. By the use of our left brain we can study God's written word and find out all we need to know about his general will, agenda, plans, priorities, goals and means for human life. Studying the Bible and beginning to obey the general commands of God are what gets the Rocket off the launch pad. The other great gain in studying God's word is that we begin to see him as he truly is we see His great love for us. It is knowing His love that gives us the security to let go of our clamoring desires and fears.

Long before Paul began to move in supernatural power and guidance he was serving in the local church as a teacher of the Scriptures. Stephen is the first person after the Disciples in the New Testament Church to have a supernatural ministry of miracles and Signs and Wonders. This did not occur until well after he had been serving by waiting on tables in the local food outreach. He began by obeying the general will of God and once the "car was moving" God added the supernatural. This is the Biblical pattern of how God directs our lives. Know the Bible and you are 80% there!

Prov. 6:20-23 My child, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life,

Psalms 119:105-106 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.

Psalms 119:129-136 Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your custom toward those who love your name. Keep my steps steady according to your promise, and never let iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes. My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept.

2 Tim. 3:16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

3. SOUND JUDGEMENT, COMMON SENSE & CLEAR THINKING

Once we know the General will of God from knowing His word we are in a position to use the left side of our brains to apply His truth to the circumstances of our lives. Each of us is

wonderfully unique. We are a unique package of personality type, temperament, natural talents, skills, training, life experiences, spiritual gifts, faith experiences and spiritual maturity. We have the ability to look at ourselves with sober judgment and look at the circumstances we are in and the opportunities available to us and make a logical decision.

a. In light of our gifts, abilities, temperaments, passions & energies

It is highly unlikely that it is God's will for the first violinist from the Dallas symphony orchestra to decide to start a Bible study specifically for the football players from the Dallas Cowboys. A young man with severe allergies to plants should not plan on being a missionary in the Amazon jungle. An introvert who loves to be alone reading theology should not put his hopes on being a great Christian politician. These things are only possible by way of supernatural intervention which is always possible but usually God takes our gifts, abilities, temperaments, passions and energies into account when he designs ministry for us. **We are to use logic when and until he decides to override it with something beyond our logic.** Using our minds well is not a lack of faith. The bible is full of people doing what seemed right and wise according to their best reasoning.

Exodus 18:13-27 The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." ***So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.*** Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country.

Acts 6:1-4 Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word."

Rom. 12:3-8 For by the grace given to me *I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.* For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. *We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy*, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

b. In light of our circumstances

Our circumstances often allow or prevent certain ministries that we may be involved in. When I was the pastor of a church I was able to study and prepare a message every week. I loved this aspect of the work. Now I am doing a very different job and I don't get to preach like I used to. This does not mean that I am missing out on God's will for me. Now I have different responsibilities and so different spiritual gifts have been re-awakened in me [prophecy]. It is very exciting because it means I am growing. Our circumstances are in the control of God. He is able to "open doors" but he can also "close doors". We are not to be governed by our circumstances as Christians but we are to look at them with good human reason to see if God is using them to guide us.

Acts 2:8-17 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. **[here Peter is looking at what is happening right before his eyes and he is remembering the scriptures [because he has studied them] and he is interpreting the circumstances logically in light of what he knows of God's promises and will].**

Acts 9:23 After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. **[the logical thing to do is get Paul out of the city and save his life. I don't think they stopped to pray and ask God if they should help to save Paul]**

Acts 16:5-9 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia--for I intend to pass through Macedonia-- and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, *for a wide door for effective work has opened to me*, and there are many adversaries.

2 Cor.1:15-17 Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; ***I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea.***

4. QUALITY COUNSEL

One of the biggest problems in determining the will of God for our own lives is that we cannot be objective about our own situations. When we are head over heels in infatuation with someone we are not in an easy position to assess whether or not this person will make a good life partner **[these are the clamoring desires acting up again]**. When we are not enjoying our present job an offer to go work at a Mission looks like God's answer to our unhappiness, but it rarely is. I have said that God has given us brains so that we can apply reason to help determine His will. The problem is that our brains do not just reason they also "feel". The sad thing is that in the lives of many Christians I know their feelings win out over their reason most of the time. This usually leads not only to not knowing God's will but also to stupid disastrous decisions. How many times have you made a correct decision to do something that you knew was God's will and then later failed to follow through and do it because you, "just didn't feel like it"?

Prov. 11:14 Where there is no guidance, a nation falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Prov.12:15 Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice.

Prov. 24:6 for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.

5. WHAT ARE THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART?

When our general disposition is toward the Lord, that is to say seeking to know him and follow him, the desires of our heart are often him, conversely when we are turning a way from the Lord the desires of our heart cannot be trusted.

Phil. 2:13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Psalms 37:4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

1Cor. 7:7 *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.*

6. SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

Everything that I have said about guidance so far has to do with using the reasoning power of our brains, specifically the left side of our brains. What I am going to talk about now is what happens on the other side of our brains, the right side. This side of the brain is the part of us that is active when we listen to music, look at art appreciate beauty and feel emotions. It is also the part of our

brains that receives supernatural revelation. Brain scientists have measured the brain activity of Christians while they speak in tongues. Speech is a left brain activity but speaking in tongues involves the right brain. It is the right side of the brain that is active when inspiration and ideas just come to us “out of the blue” and not as a result of “thinking a thing through”. Things like prophecy, words of knowledge, times of travailing prayer, experiences of God’s love, dreams and visions involve the right side of the brain. Why am I telling you this? I want you to see that God created both sides of the brain and that he expects both of them to be active in our relationship with him. Very interestingly, denominations and Christian movements tend to favor one side of the brain or the other. Evangelicals want to live on the left side and Charismatics want to live on the right. Both groups are trying to play golf with only half the clubs in their bag.

There is no question that prophetic words, dreams and visions, and “inner witness” are ways that God uses to lead us. The Bible is full of them. The trouble is that those of us who desire most to be guided this way are often those of us who are most lazy about knowing God’s word. Such people are not safe to receive supernatural guidance because they lack the Bible knowledge to properly interpret the dream or vision. Even things as clear as prophetic words must be judged by those who receive them. On the other hand those of us who are highly left brained do not like to give up the security of logic and human reason to trust something that “came to us out of the blue”. We feel more secure coming up with some questionable theology to say that dreams and visions and prophecy are not for today. Such people tend to live very reasonable religious lives without power or real effect. They also tend to be emotionally stunted Christians. Both positions are wrong because both are incomplete.

Supernatural guidance is Biblical and it is for today. We should expect to receive these experiences from time to time and we should take them seriously but they are safe only when they are an addition to or an occasional over-riding of our normal means of determining God’s will, which is to know His word. The problem with revelatory guidance is that the experiences are subjective, they happen within us. Also they are of the same type of experiences as our feelings, wishes, imaginations, etc. They are also similar to counterfeit spiritual experiences caused by demonic forces. All this means that unless we have some way of judging the experience, dream, vision, inner prompting, etc. we are dealing with something that could be God, could be our own subconscious needs or fears or could be misinformation from the enemy. The only way to sort this out is to judge these experiences against something that does not have its source in us. Something that does not change with our feelings and moods, something that is completely true – God’s word!

The reason that supernatural guidance comes after all of the forgoing ways of knowing God’s will is because all of the above should be used to judge our supernatural spiritual experiences. The wise counsel of others is very valuable when dealing with how to apply a dream to our lives. Knowing our own strengths and weaknesses, spiritual gifts, temperament, and maturity help us to assess not only the accuracy of a dream, vision or prophecy but it’s timing as well. When we are seeking guidance for a group decision it is essential to submit whatever supernatural guidance we receive to the leadership of the group for discernment. Often we will see all of the above means of guidance operating within the leadership group. One will have a dream, another a word of scripture, another a logical piece of wise reasoning, another a sense of timing, another a second dream that seems to confirm the first, another a prophecy that gives more light to the group. In fact I would say that no decision should be made until several of the foregoing means of guidance have been operating in the decision making process. God is more than capable of confirming His will through several means and we should look for that sense of confirmation.

Acts 8:26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)

Acts 10:9-16 About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Acts 15:24-29 Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. *For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us* to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." [note here the interaction between good human reasoning and supernatural revelation]

Acts 16:6-10 They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. *When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them;* so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. *During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. [Here we see the normal pattern being used; Paul decides to minister in Bithynia, which is probably a logical decision given that they are right next door and it is "on the way". He is obeying what he knows to be God's will and that is that he "go into all the world and make disciples". In the logical course of doing this the H.S. over-rides his logic and says, "no". That night the H.S. gives Paul a vision and sends them in a new direction].

Rev. 1:9-11 I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. *I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet* saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

Gal. 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

7. PRAYER AND FASTING

Why did I put this one at the end when it should be at the beginning? Because every one of the above will be more effective when combined with prayer and fasting. We pray for a knowledge of the Bible, we pray for a will to hear and obey, we pray for a sound mind to reason with, we pray for all of the above to be operating in our lives and we pray fervently when we have a major decision to make. Why? Prayer and fasting focus our attention on God and his purposes, which frees us from the loud noise produced by the world around us. We say “no” to the loud voice of our own physical comfort so that we can better hear the [often-subtle] voice of God. Prayer and fasting also says “no” to our fears and unmet needs and desires. It is a way that we put our personal needs and fears and desires on the shelf for a little while to focus on His will and His Kingdom. It is the model that Jesus gave us. It was the means that he used to rise above his humanness. If it was necessary for him to pray and fast how much more is it necessary for us to do so.

Luke 6:12-13 Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: