

## Christian Growth Course - Unit 15

### Following God's Guidance

Introduction: A true Christian is dedicated to doing God's will. This is what he/she lives for. If we call Jesus Lord, we agree that he has the right to direct our lives. In every decision, the first question is, "What is right? What does God want me to do? What will please him?"

It is in our own best interest to discover and follow God's will. While we were in darkness, blinded and deceived by Satan, we thought sinful things were good for us. But as we come into the light and Christ's truth makes us free, we know more and more that life and blessing only come by obeying God in faith.

We are responsible for discerning good and evil and choosing good - Hebrews 5:14. But whenever we face an important decision, there may be many conflicting appeals and influences that pull us in different directions--self-interest, worldly benefit, pleasure, peer-pressure, tradition, family influences, conscience, God's teaching, etc. There may be counterfeit guidance that claims to be from God but is not. Our own fallen, sinful minds can easily deceive us - Jeremiah 17:9. It is hard to be objective about God's will when there are other things that we strongly want. We are not able to guide ourselves; we need God's help - Jeremiah 10:23.

God knows how hard it is for us to distinguish his voice from our own desires or the deceiving appeal of the world. He has promised to help and guide every person who really loves righteousness and wants to do God's will. It is possible to know God's will if we really want to.

1. God has promised to guide those who sincerely want to obey him - Proverbs 3:5,6; Isaiah 42:16; James 1:5; Philippians 3:15; Matthew 5:6; John 7:17; Isaiah 30:21.
  
2. Things that help God's guidance in your life:
  - A. Knowledge of the scriptures; time spent in prayerful study and meditation - Psalm 1:2; 119:11.
  - B. Humility and a spirit of submission to authority - James 4:6; Psalm 25:9.
  - C. Obedience to the light you already have; taking steps you already know to take - Joshua 3:8, 13-17
  - D. Love of truth and righteousness - Matthew 5:6; John 7:17
  - E. Willingness to obey the truth even if it costs or hurts - Psalm 15:4b; Daniel 1:8-20; 3:1-18; 6:1-10; Acts 4:3,18-20; 5:28,29
  - F. Knowing the Shepherd - John 10:1-5
  - G. Becoming more like Christ so that we by nature choose the right way - 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Galatians 5:22, 23
  - H. Understanding God's basic purposes so that we can act accordingly - Ephesians 1:11; 5:17. God's purposes, listed by Yvonne Simms in Discovering God's Will:
    - 1) To give us fellowship with him - 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20; 1 John 1:3
    - 2) To teach us more about himself and about ourselves - John 17:3; Colossians

1:10; Philippians 3:15b

- 3) To make us more like himself - 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 1:4
- 4) To bring others to know him - John 17:3

I. Understanding basic principles of God's revealed will so that we can apply the principles to specific questions of life. Some examples:

- 1) We are to do all to the glory of God - 1 Corinthians 10:31.
- 2) We are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind (the first and greatest commandment) - Matthew 22:37, 38.
- 3) Seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, and trust God for earthly needs - Matthew 6:33.
- 4) Love your neighbor as yourself (Do to others what you would have them do to you) - Matthew 22:39, 40; 7:12.
- 5) Do no harm to others - Romans 13:8-10.
- 6) Avoid all that causes yourself or others to stumble or be weakened - Matthew 18:6-9
- 7) Repair damaged relationships immediately - Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15-17; Ephesians 4:26

J. Asking for wisdom and guidance - James 1:5

K. Trust - James 1:6-8; Proverbs 3:5, 6

3. Things that hinder God's guidance in your life:

- A. Less than total commitment to obedience - (a divided heart) - James 4:4, 8; Numbers 22 through 24: 31:7, 8
- B. Love of evil; impurity of heart - Psalm 66:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Romans 1:21-28
- C. Unbelief, lack of trust - James 1:5-8
- D. Running ahead of God; inability to be still and wait for his will - Genesis 15:2-5; 16:1-4

4. Scriptural background on guidance:

A. Some ways in which God guided his servants in the Bible:

- 1) Through the scriptures - Daniel 9:2; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
- 2) By dreams - Genesis 41:1-7, 15-32; Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 22
- 3) By visions - Acts 16:9, 10

- 4) By "urim and thummim" - Exodus 28:30; 1 Samuel 28:6
  - 5) By prophets - Acts 11:27-30
  - 6) By word from the Spirit - Acts 8:29
  - 7) By angels - Acts 8:26
  - 8) By signs - Judges 6:15-22, 36-40
  - 9) By events - Judges 7:9-15
  - 10) By casting lots - Acts 1:23-26; Jonah 1:7
  - 11) By prayerful discussion - Acts 15:6-20
- B. Tests to determine true and false prophecy (1 John 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:21):
- A prophecy is false if:
- 1) The prophet urges you to do wrong - Deuteronomy 13:1-3.
  - 2) The prophet's predictions do not come true - Deuteronomy 18:21, 22.
  - 3) The fruit of the prophet's life and the lives of his disciples is bad - Matthew 7:15-20.
  - 4) The prophet says, "Jesus be cursed" - 1 Corinthians 12:3.
  - 5) The prophet preaches a different gospel than that preached by Christ and the apostles - Galatians 1:8, 9.
  - 6) The prophet denies some fundamental truth of the faith - 1 John 4:2, 3; 2 John 7, 9.
  - 7) The prophecy contradicts the clear teaching of the scriptures - Acts 17:11.
  - 8) The prophecy is manipulative - 2 Corinthians 3:17.
5. Some methods by which we may receive God's guidance:
- A. The Holy Scriptures - 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10.
- 1) The scriptures are inspired by God's Spirit; they are God's word and therefore different from all other books. They contain every truth needed to guide our decisions.
  - 2) The scriptures are God's objective revelation, God's "public truth" to all people. All human advice, all religious teachings, all purported prophecy, and all other supposed guidance must be tested by the standard of the scriptures - Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Galatians 1:8, 9; Jude 3.

- B. The authorities whom God has placed over us - Ephesians 6:1-3; 5:22-24; Hebrews 13:17; Romans 13:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Ephesians 6:5.
- C. Our conscience - Romans 14:23; 2:15; James 4:17. (Warning: your conscience must be enlightened by God's word to be a safe guide - Proverbs 14:12).
- D. Counsel from the fellowship of believers in the body of Christ, particularly people who know and love God and his word - Proverbs 15:22.
  - 1) It is often helpful to share and pray together.
  - 2) When emotion clouds your own reasoning ability, it may help to depend for a time on the clearer reasoning of another person.
- E. The fruit of the Spirit (the nature and mind of Jesus in us) - Galatians 5:22, 23; Philippians 2:5-8.
- F. Providential guidance through events and circumstances. Examples:
  - 1) Calls and opportunities
  - 2) Opened and closed doors
  - 3) Supply of necessary funds or lack of them
  - 4) Events which work together to show that God is leading
- G. Deep impressions, insights and inner convictions
  - 1) Be careful. It is possible to confuse your own ideas or even Satan's influence for God's inner guidance. *Subject every idea to the light of scripture.*
  - 2) Satan's suggestions can be distinguished from God's. Ways listed by Simms:
    - a. God's commands are simple; Satan's are subtle.
    - b. Satan plays on our sinful desires; God appeals to our pure motives.
    - c. Satan is in a hurry; God has time.
- H. Nudges of remembrance; flashes of insight or wisdom in a situation.
  - 1) Warning: these must also agree with scripture.
  - 2) Your subjective insights may be valid for you personally but are not authoritative for others.
  - 3) Some people do not believe God guides in this way, but we acknowledge that he does, by the fact that we pray for God to help a preacher in preaching his sermon, or ask God to help us in a difficult discussion or in an exam at school or on our job. We do not mean that a person is "inspired" like an apostle, but just that God does help people.
- I. Confirmation - Acts 9; 11, 12; Judges 6:36-40.

- 1) God refuses signs to the insincere - Mark 8:11, 12.
- 2) But he is kind to strengthen the faith of those who submit, by giving them confirmation of his guidance.
- 3) Even Jeremiah, an inspired prophet, sometimes needed confirmation before he was sure something was from God - Jeremiah 32:6-8.

J. Casting lots after prayer - Acts 1:23-26; Jonah 1:7; Proverbs 16:33.

- 1) This should be used, if at all, only as a last resort in cases where everything else has been done and the right choice is still not clear.
- 2) Notice that the apostles did a lot of narrowing down by other means of guidance before they cast lots.
- 3) This should never be used as a short-cut to avoid Bible study, prayer, consultation, and meditation and Christian growth.
- 4) If a person prayerfully uses this method, he must be prepared to follow through in trust that God has guided.
- 5) There is no indication that God will honor such a method where other sincere efforts have not been made. "If you can't be bothered to seek God's face, why do you want his guidance?" -- Simms

6. What do you do when you still can't see the way?

- A. Sometimes God allows us to go through periods of "darkness" and trial in order to mature our faith and character and increase our longing for him - James 1:2,3,12; Romans 5:3-5; Job.
- B. Take advantage of such times to learn how to quiet your soul and trustingly wait on God.
- C. Take any steps of obedience you already know to take but have not taken.
- D. Try to discover and eliminate any areas of insubmission which might be hindering God's guidance. (Prolonged "darkness" may not necessarily infer this).
- E. God may be showing you that he expects you to use your own intelligence.
- F. If you reach a point where a decision absolutely must be made, and you have tried every other means of finding God's will, you may either:
  - 1) Decide on the basis of what little evidence you do have, even though it seems too little, and entrust the consequences to God (He has promised to guide and keep his children), or
  - 2) After every other means has been tried, pray and cast lots or something similar. Be willing to accept the results and follow through.
  - 3) rely on the decision of someone whose faith and judgment you trust. (But guard

against the danger of later resenting the person should his/her decision lead you through difficulties).

7. Some general principles concerning guidance:

- A. All counsel, wisdom or supposed guidance must be tested by the scriptures - 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. No real guidance from God will contradict his own word in the Bible.
- B. God has given us our intelligence, knowledge, experience and reasoning ability to help us choose our way. He has also given us every necessary principle of truth through the Bible. We are free agents, made in God's image and able to make choices. If God dictated every move to us mechanically instead of letting us make value judgments for ourselves, he would violate our personhood and reduce us to machines. He would also deprive us of the growth that comes from searching, learning and making our own choices. Enlightened by God's word, possessing Christlike desires born in us through the Spirit, we are expected to make decisions. Demanding a sign can be a cop-out to avoid acting and taking responsibility as God intended when he made us.
- C. Seeking guidance by "letting the Bible drop open" or placing our finger on a verse at random is little more than superstition and reduces the Bible to a mechanical device rather than a cohesive message from God. This, too, is often a substitute for really searching for God's will in the right way.
- D. We are sternly forbidden to turn to the occult for guidance - Isaiah 8:19, 20; Deuteronomy 18:10, 11.
- E. Matters that are not directly mentioned in the Bible are covered by the moral and spiritual principles taught in scripture.
- F. Following God's guidance is an ability that grows.
- G. When you deliberately choose to do something that is not God's will, you lose your peace.
- H. Some people are afraid that they might be fatally deceived by counterfeit guidance from Satan - 2 Corinthians 11:14, 15. However God has promised that Satan's counterfeits can never deceive a sincere lover of truth for long - 1 Corinthians 10:13; John 7:17; Matthew 7:15; compare Exodus 7:1-8:19.

Conclusion: God loves his children more than any earthly parent can. He is more anxious than any earthly parent for us to go the right way. He has made us free (so we can be like him), but he gives us the help we need to do right. The prayer of every Christian should be,

"Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God;  
may your good Spirit  
lead me on level ground." (Psalm 143:10).

This concludes our Christian Growth course. It is the writer's prayer that God will use these things to glorify

himself and to help people. As far as these things have been according to God's truth, may he preserve them and use them in those who have studied; if anything has not been of God, may the Lord "blow it away like chaff."

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Additional handout on guidance: