

GUIDANCE ON GUIDANCE

**4 Edited Articles from The Weekly Reflections
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to help and encourage Christ's faithful sheep**

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TWR 136 Guidance on Guidance - Part 1

As we pass along through life we take literally thousands of decisions - some great, some small, but all significant in their way, for they reveal over time who we really are, and what our lives are really about. How important it is for us to seek, know and follow the Lord's guidance in our decision-making, but that can sometimes be easier said than done. So over the next few Reflections we will take a fresh look at the whole question of guidance (and make them into a pdf booklet when complete for free downloading from the website).

The first thing to realise is that the decisions we take are always to be **OUR decisions!**

No matter how much we have sought the Lord's guidance, when all is said and done, the decision has to be taken - by us. In taking it, we accept responsibility and we live with any consequences. Should I apply for that job? Should I ask that girl to marry me? Is the Lord telling me to take the Gospel to the Amazon jungle? Should I buy lottery tickets? Should we go on that world cruise? Decisions, decisions: OUR decisions, taken under the Lord.

We know how easy it can be, when faced with a major decision, to do nothing at all, while waiting and waiting for the Lord to tell us what to do - when what He wants us to do is already clear as day! We can think for example of a man considering an "iffy" investment that offers tremendous financial returns but in ways that are clearly not quite "of the Lord". He should take responsibility for his decision, and walk away from the deal, but he dithers and wriggles, waiting till he can convince himself that the Lord Himself is telling him to go ahead - a classic case of "passing the buck".

While some of us delay too long over decision-making, others of us go to the other extreme - the "bull-at-a-gate" approach! "I know best, it's obvious what should be done, mind out of my way - I'm deciding on Course X!". Here we have overridden the possibility of the Holy Spirit speaking quietly to us concerning a possibly complex situation. We have crashed ahead with a high risk of getting things wrong, and have not actually sought the Lord's guidance at all.

The second thing to emphasise over God's guidance is that any decision we take will always involve **a dose of faith.**

Noah had to act in faith over building that ark. He had to trust that he had indeed heard the Lord correctly as he kept at his task, while everyone else, over the decades, was hooting with laughter at him. Abram "upped sticks" by faith -

believing he had heard the Lord aright. Later on the prophets had to trust, as they frequently entered into danger, that they had heard the Lord's instructions correctly. Then we see John the Baptist deciding what the Lord God was calling him to do, and then stepping out in faith and doing it, believing throughout that he had truly heard the Lord. The Lord Himself decided on twelve close companions, by faith. On numerous occasions Paul had to decide, by faith, where he should go, with whom, and what he should say on each occasion. Every one of these figures, chosen from the many more examples in Scripture, waited on the Lord God for His guidance, then decided for themselves, then held on in faith, trusting that they were truly on the Lord's path.

So in this Reflection we have started to consider God's guidance with just two key points: first, the decisions we take are to be our decisions, under the Lord, for which we are to take responsibility as spiritual adults; and second, the decisions we take will always involve us in an act of faith, for we do indeed, at this stage, still walk by faith and not by sight (II Corinthians 5.7).

Next time God willing, we will tackle some very practical guidelines concerning guidance. But for now, you might care to review your own decision-making under the Lord: too dithery? too bull-at-a-gate? too me-centred?

When we get things wrong, as we do, we go back to God the Father in repentance and confession; we receive afresh His forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ; and then on we go - hopefully slightly older and wiser when it comes to God's guidance!

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Now we come on to practical steps we can take to become more consistent in our understanding the Lord's guidance over the many situations and decisions we face in life, be they great or small. When we consider all our decisions together, they are an accurate indicator of what our lives are really all about. Truly, knowing the Lord's guidance, whatever the level of our decision-making, is crucial. So here are the first four guidance-suggestions from a list currently standing at fourteen!

1 We need to be ABIDERS!

We are far, far more likely to hear the Lord's guidance aright if we are already walking steadily with Him (eg John 15.1-11). C S Lewis likens this to a game of tennis between a top professional and a total novice: the novice might just win the occasional point with a tremendous shot, but he is far more likely to do well if he is already "in the groove" as a tennis player. Just so with guidance: How is my "spiritual walk" with the Lord? How is my prayer life, my time spent with Him in His Word, my involvement in the local "body of Christ", my lifestyle, my relationships, and so on? If I just "drop by" with the Lord once in a while asking Him for a quick dose of guidance over something, my chances of hearing Him aright are pretty small.

2 We come to Him with a RIGHT ATTITUDE.

Our need to know the Lord's guidance is actually far more about seeking His interests rather than our own interests! We are in His service, rather than He in ours; we orbit around Him rather than He around us. This keeps us humble before Him, courteous, patient, grateful. Let there be no hint of our "summoning the waiter" when we are seeking the Lord's guidance.

3 Having said that, we can come to Him as GRATEFUL EXPECTERS!

The Lord wants us to know Him, His thoughts and His ways. "Ask, seek, knock", He tells us (Matthew 7.7); He is waiting to bless us with His guidance, for it is far better for Him, and for us, when His children are following Him truly.

4 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH HIS WORD:

"In this question I am facing, what has the Lord already given us in His Word?". This is where the "P-Rs" play their part.

We begin by **PRaising** the Lord for all He is, and then **PRaying** for His guidance in His written Word, through Christ the Living Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in this particular matter.

As we turn to the Bible, to set our own concern in its proper context we first ponder His overall **PRogramme** concerning His creation and all that is within it.

Then we look for relevant **PRecedents** / **PRomises** / **PRinciples**; perhaps also for **PRophecies** or **PRoverbs**.

All this will help us understand **the Lord's PRompting** of us, and we can turn to Him again in **PRaise**.

By taking care with these P-Rs we are obliged to be thorough in the Word, and it will soon be no surprise to see how often the Lord speaks all too clearly through His Word regarding the most contemporary of issues today. Lack of space here prevents any detailed scriptural example of the P-Rs "in action", but you can apply them yourself right now in your own situation, or explore some of these topical examples: wealth / ambition / Facebook and Twitter / cohabitation / rest / non-Christian Faiths / immigration / old age.

Meanwhile, thanks be to God, Psalm 119.105 is as true as ever!

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On we go -

5 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH OUR PRAYERS:

We "wait on the Lord", asking Him to lead us, to "make His way plain before our face" (Psalm 5.8).

It can be helpful in our prayers to try to look at things from the Lord's side, as much as we are able: "Lord, what do you SEE as you survey this situation? What do you KNOW and THINK about any characters or issues involved here? What do you actually WANT in all this? So Lord, please, what are you SAYING to me in all this?".

Our listening in such times is far more important than our speaking! Patience, stillness, honesty, faith, humility, perseverance - the old keys to a strong prayer relationship with the Lord - all have their place.

6 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH EACH OTHER:

How precious it is to have close Christian companions, with whom we can go through things quietly and prayerfully, under the old adage of "two minds are better than one".

In particular we should value the counsel and prayers of wise old Christians - those saints now filled with decades of rugged spiritual experience, whose very humility means they will not be forthcoming with their wisdom unless they are sought out.

Our fellow Christians do not take our decisions for us - that responsibility is still ours - but they do make such a difference along the way.

7 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH PROFESSIONALS:

Where appropriate, the Lord's guidance may well come in part through professional advice, perhaps over matters of health or finances. We must ensure that any such advice we are given sits comfortably in the light of God's Word.

8 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH A PROPHECY:

Prophecy has always been controversial! - just think of the many clashes in

Scripture between true and false prophets, and the wide-ranging reactions to true prophecy. By its very nature prophecy also offers the speaker instant attention and status, so there is no guarantee that any claimed prophecy is truly of the Lord.

A prophecy can also become a wrong obsession for the one who thinks these words were for him or her. We once knew a single Christian girl whose life was now dominated by a prophecy from some years before which she thought was for her - that she would be married one day. Frankly, she was now self-obsessed, far from pleasant, ready to blame the Lord and others for her woes, and making little effort to find a good Christian husband for herself - a sad and stark example of the misuse of a prophecy.

So we do well to tread carefully in this area, checking with Scripture and other Christians over any prophecy we feel the Lord may have given us. If it is strongly clashing with other guidance-pointers, that is a sure sign that it is not "of the Lord".

9 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH A FLEECE:

Gideon is the main "fleece man" in Scripture (Judges 6.36-40), and sometimes it may be appropriate for us "to put out a fleece" before the Lord: we humbly ask Him to arrange things in a certain way by a certain date, which we will take as His confirmation that we are hearing His guidance aright. A fleece may have a place, but needs to be used sparingly and never as the main or sole form of guidance.

For now we can be encouraged as always, that we are precious to the Lord, that He wants us to get things right, and is ever-ready to enable us to do so.

"Then watch how carefully you walk, not as unwise, but as wise ones, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Because of this do not be foolish, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5.15-17, Literal).

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TWR 139 Guidance on Guidance - Part 4

This time we continue and complete this series on guidance.

10 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH "TIPPING HIM OFF":

Assume for example you are facing a significant choice involving one or more decisions; this might be over a job, or a relationship, or a moral or ethical dilemma, or a large financial commitment. As you seek the Lord's will for you in this matter, which may well take time, gradually things become clearer, you begin to "see the wood from the trees", and you start moving towards Decision Time.

It can be very helpful as this process unfolds for you to "tip the Lord off" as to which way you are thinking - even though He knows already! This gives Him warning, and time.

Trying to see things from the Lord's point of view in all this can also be useful. If He sees one of His children going steadily towards the wrong decision, what can He do, what might He do, to head off the mistake? Or if possible, even try to imagine that you yourself were the Lord! What could or would you do to stop a wrong decision being taken?

Then if, being back as yourself once again, none of those possible interventions from the Lord occurs, then you know that He has had every chance to say "I don't think so! ..." - but has chosen not to make use of that chance.

11 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH ANY OBSTACLES:

The previous point about our giving the Lord time to steer us away from mistaken decisions brings us on to how we should react to any obstacles that may crop up in the path when we are seeking the Lord's guidance.

Imagine you have become convinced the Lord is calling you to go to serve in His name amongst a remote tribe in South America for three years; things are falling into place, and your Signing-Up Decision Day is drawing close. But then you hear that your visa application has been turned down! Is this the Lord kindly "heading you off" from a bad mistake? Or is this the devil messing about, trying to block the Lord's will and work and your part in it? Or is it just a silly mix-up in the visas

office? It can be very hard to tell - and becomes a new matter for the Lord's guidance demanding on your part patience, thoroughness, and faith!

If the visa remains refused, there is your answer, and presumably from the Lord; if it is granted after some delays, then you must check things through again under the Lord - "Lord are you happy with this decision I am about to take?" - and then decide, acting in faith.

12 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH INNER PEACE:

The final stage in the task of seeking and finding the Lord's guidance is the presence, or absence, of "inner peace". This is a calmness, a settledness, which, in the face of all the "ifs and buts" surrounding a decision, remains quietly present within your being, as a comfort and reassurance. Equally its absence is significant - calling for a thorough re-think while there is still time.

So finally, with a deep breath and a prayer, we take our decisions, acting in faith and committing all things to the Lord. If it turns out with hindsight we have made a mistake in spite of all our careful efforts to get things right, the Lord can cope! - for "we know that to the ones loving God all things work together for good, to those being called according to His purpose" (Romans 8.28, Literal). We return to God our Father in penitence and with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving His fresh forgiveness and a new start.

The Lord wants us to get things right, and in His mercy He has provided many ways in which we can seek and find what He wants us to do.

So for His sake, for our sake, for everyone's sake, may our desire always be, "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness make thy way straight before my face!" (Psalm 5.8).

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Guidance - A Summary

Remember:

The decisions are OUR decisions, taken under the Lord and acting IN FAITH.

1 Be an ABIDER in the Lord

2 Come to Him with a RIGHT ATTITUDE

3 Be a GRATEFUL EXPECTER

4 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH HIS WORD, perhaps using the P-Rs as a guide:

PRaise the Lord / PRay for His guidance in His written Word, through Christ the Living Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in this particular matter

First ponder His overall PROgramme concerning His creation and all within it

Then we look for relevant PRecedents / PRomises / PRinciples /

Perhaps also PROphesies / Perhaps also PROverbs.

Bringing us to the Lord's PRompting of us / and we turn to Him again in PRaise.

5 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH OUR PRAYERS

6 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH EACH OTHER

7 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH PROFESSIONALS

8 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH A PROPHECY

9 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH A FLEECE

10 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE PERHAPS THROUGH "TIPPING HIM OFF"

11 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH ANY OBSTACLES

12 WE SEEK THE LORD'S GUIDANCE THROUGH INNER PEACE

So finally and prayerfully, we take our decisions and the responsibility for them, acting humbly in faith and gratefully under the Lord.

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