

FOLLOWING GOD'S GUIDANCE

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INTRODUCTION

If relationship to God is interpersonal, then it is not all us (he would be a zero factor) or all him (we would be a thing used). Choice and thinking and other personal acts are occurring on both sides of the relationship.

Goal: to understand following God's guidance as a SENSE OF ASSISTANCE
+
a SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

I. PROCEDURE

A. Study the scripture.

1. God's general will for all men is the beginning of his specific will for us.
 - a. Purpose of God
not assuming we already know.
 - b. Basic morality
2. Absorb an attitude toward (as well as information about) God's will for people's lives.
3. Scripture helps not only with choices between good and bad, but between good and better.

B. Pray.

1. Prayer changes the situation from a choosing situation into an answered-prayer situation.
 - a. God can now add his resources to ours should he so desire; he is now invited to express his preference.
 - b. Prayer expresses the attitude "*if the Lord will*" (James 4:13-15; cp. Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:1; Romans 1:10; 15:32; 1 Peter 3:17).
 - c. AVOID SETTING THE OPTIONS AND ASKING GOD TO DECIDE WHICH ONE.
2. Prayer is a way of gaining objectivity, self-transcendence, right motives.

C. Evaluate (think as well as feel or follow impulses of the heart alone?).

1. What needs are there?

Do not try to market something as Christian ministry just because you like to do it.

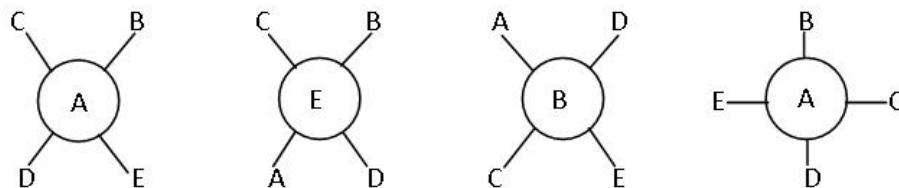
2. What abilities do we have?

Do not try to enter fields of service for which you do not have appropriate talents.

3. What interests do we have?

Do not enter the preaching ministry, for example, if we do not like to read or study.

In case of multiple interests, which can we organize the others around?



4. What opportunities are available?

What do these options entail about educational preparation, cultural expectancy, typical problems, special skills?

5. What yields the greatest influence?

Paul in Athens

D. Discuss.

What do other people advise? This is important because we get more objective input.

Our self-perception may be too high.

too low.

based on too little life experience.

based on being too young or too old.

E. Do.

1. Start where you are and be faithful in a few things.

a. Do not expect to start at the top. The problem of being entrusted with responsibility before experience has been gained. We can be found capable, responsible, and trustworthy in less crucial matters where failure would not be catastrophic. The assumption in such a procedure is that a characteristic like trustworthiness manifests itself anywhere it applies. The problem is solved by a degree approach (Parable of the Talents and the Pounds: Matthew **25**:14-30; Luke **19**:11-27).

b. Those called higher are already trying to do God's will (Timothy: Acts **16**:1ff.). Faithful in little usually means faithful in much (Luke **16**:10).

c. Do not get caught up in waiting that can go with sign-seeking. God can lead without your knowing it or giving you signs. Besides, special leading may not be necessary.

Being faithful in less develops us for being faithful in more.

2. Develop.

a. To get called up higher, we must develop the skills and capacities we already have.

b. Be flexible.

As you age and mature, your interests and abilities, opportunities and needs change; and by development you become better suited for some tasks and perhaps less suited for others.

3. Persevere.

a. Too much changing from job to job loses momentum and fosters inconsistency.

We must not be quitters or ladder climbers. Such behaviors communicate self-interest more than concern for accomplishing the Lord's work.

b. *"Whatever your hand finds to do—do it with your strength"*
(Ecclesiastes **9**:10a).

II. APPLICATION OF PROCEDURE

A. Long-range goals and life choices

The five procedures above are not steps in a sequence so much as elements in a process.

B. Day-by-day responses to life

1. What does it mean to be sensitive to God's guidance?

How should we regard impulses of the heart? Are our impulses . . .

the result of the Holy Spirit's work?

the result of attitudes developed in response to scripture, other Christians, awareness of God's presence?

We can always go ahead and follow an impulse if it harmonizes with God's Word, BUT we should distinguish *data to be considered* and *signs to be followed*.

We should not view impulses in a way that implies disobedience (hence guilt) if we do not follow them for appropriate reasons.

What we cannot be sure of, we cannot be held responsible for.

Part of the problem is keeping life from becoming so full that there is no time, emotional energy, or funds left for doing the good that we might be able to do.

2. Gideon's Fleece (Judges 6:34-40) is a special case. Gideon, who was being called, was trying to make sure that was what was happening. The procedure is similar to Paul's question on the road to Damascus. "*Who are you, sir*" was a safeguard against being misled by someone not from God (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15).

III. Alternative Procedure: doing all of the above, but assuming that God has a specific will we need to find (instead of supposing he may not have a specific will for each of us)

The alternative procedure starts with the assumption that, like an employer, (1) God has a specific plan for each of us, which he then expects us to fulfill. (2) God specially—and often knowably—leads us into that job or tells us what it is. (3) God supernaturally gifts each person for the task. That approach supernaturalizes the Christian experience.

Super-spirituality goes beyond the characteristics of personal relationships. It takes something good and makes it bad by pushing it to an absolute, which is not natural for social circumstances. Such a design would mean collapsing the process into one side of the relationship; the human person becomes a zero factor in self-determination and God becomes the only one acting. The interpersonal connection with divine guidance is that the characteristics of society set the necessary minimum and ultimate framework. It does not deny specific things beyond that—like miracle, positive commandment, special promise. It simply makes them unrequired by the nature of the case.

We note the following weaknesses of assuming direct guidance for each person at each point.

A. It is not specifically taught in scripture.

The idea is hard to disprove from scripture even aside from the apostolic-age distinction. The burden of proof falls on the affirmative, which means that the one that makes a claim has the responsibility to show that it is true. It is not the job of the hearer to disprove the claim or accept it. The point about the apostolic age is that in the initial stages of the church's operation there was a greater need for special divine involvement as proof that the movement came from God.

1 Corinthians **12:7**: There is a job each person in the body can do, but that is a different thing from saying that God has chosen a specific task for each person in the body.

1 Corinthians **12:3b**: we cannot say Jesus is Lord but with the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians **12:31**: love is a better way.

Any person that receives a supernatural manifestation receives it for the profit of the body.

Natural "gifts" become gifts of the Spirit when used for his benefit and work. The "spiritual gifts" that the New Testament talks about are not necessarily supernatural deposits; they may be natural talents or slots of service.

B. It creates false expectations.

We do not need a call to do what we already have a general command to do; we do not need a call to do a command.

C. It encourages waiting.

The desire for specific guidance may not be so much what scripture clearly teaches, but a reflection of our own personalities: not wanting to shoulder responsibility, fear of failure, lack of appropriate self-confidence, preference for not making decisions, overdemand for reassurance that God is there and is involved in our life (a manifestation of insecurity).

If nothing happens, we may be tempted to re-identify our present experience somehow as special guidance. We may "hype" natural experience into supernatural guidance.

D. It confuses impulses with revelation, especially the Holy Spirit's work.

Unless we can distinguish "special" experiences from our normal human experience, we should not call them revelation or special guidance (even though they might be).

1. Believers can lapse into a thinking pattern that says, *"Now that I am a Christian and have the Holy Spirit, the ideas that come to my mind are planted there by him."*

2. Others seem to equate the Holy Spirit with feelings.

E. It transforms data into signs and the unusual into miracle. We imagine a supernatural explanation unnecessarily.

F. It fosters self-justification.

Other people's cautions and attempts at correction go unheeded.

If nothing is happening, or if we become convinced that our present experience is not guidance . . . ,

G. It raises doubt . . .

1. about the reality and validity of our Christian experience.
2. about the reality and validity of the Christian faith itself.

IV. PROBLEMS SOMETIMES RAISED

- A. Throwing out the fleece (see above)
- B. Becoming presumptuous (running ahead of God): TO AVOID THAT PROBLEM IN OUR MODEL

1. Pray.
2. Wait to be called up higher.

Other people are often in a better position to evaluate our usefulness in ministry.

We need to do what we already have to do as a way of being given more. We do now what our hand finds to do.

3. We should take the opportunities available as a way to obtain higher ones, opportunities with wider influence.

4. We take the "*if the Lord will*" attitude: (James 4:13-17; Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7; Hebrews 6:3; cp. Romans 1:10; 15:22; 1 Peter 3:17)

- C. Being self-centered

Pushing the idea that God has a special plan for each person may be nothing more than (1) the old self-centeredness showing up in religious garb. (2) It may be a form of laziness because we do not want to be responsibility for choosing. Completely yielding ourselves to God does not mean completely turning over to him the choices we need to be making.

Ours is a personal relationship with God; consequently, both of us operate personally, which means choosing, thinking, and other personal acts are happening on both sides of the association. God treats us like persons, not things. We are his friends, not his slaves.

V. EXPLANATIONS FOR NOT RECEIVING SIGNS (Is God not leading?)

- A. God can be leading without our knowing it.
- B. God may not want to lead us at the specific level we desire. He does not necessarily want to make decisions for us at this level.
- C. Perhaps we are not, in fact, one of God's servants.
- D. Perhaps we have a besetting sin: disobedience or not acting toward other people the way we expect God to operate toward us.

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