

DISCERNING BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE GUIDANCE

False Guidance

Anyone who has been involved in ministry for any length of time would have come across some bizarre examples of how some Christians seek “guidance.”

As I have been involved in missions for over 30 years, I regularly have been confronted with some very strange concepts of guidance.

Self Serving Fleeces

One mission worker boldly told me that his fiancée had “*laid a fleece*” before the Lord as to whether he should continue in missions. The “fleece” was that if she won a competition (the prize was a new car) then they would know that God wanted him to continue in missionary work!

Such self serving “fleeces” are not that uncommon. One man approached a good missionary friend of ours and declared to him: “God has revealed to me that He wants to give you a better car. You need to give me your car and then the Lord will provide you with a better car.”

This missionary immediately responded: “I am very happy with the old car that I have. May the Lord give you the better car!”

Taking God’s Name in Vain

Numerous people that I know have been approached by someone telling them: “God told me to marry you!”

The best answer that I have heard to that is: “Well, He didn’t tell me!”

On several occasions individuals have approached me declaring that God told them that I would provide them with a certain sum of money. To this I could respond: “How strange, when I was talking to the Lord earlier today, He never mentioned that!”

Presumption is not Faith

We have frequently had individuals arrive on our doorstep announcing: “God told me to join your mission!” Amazingly, the same people don’t seem to last very long, deserting at the first sign of stress and difficulty.

Clearly all too many of those who brazenly assert that God led them and “God told me...” are taking the Lord’s Name in vain.

Guided to Disobey Scripture?

We recently heard of a high profile tele-evangelist and self styled “revivalist” who claimed that an angel told him to tattoo his body. Well, there is no need to debate the subject of whether it was one of God’s angels or a fallen angel that guided him. The Scriptures are crystal clear on the issue: **“Do not cut your bodies... or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.”** Leviticus 19:28

Beware of Deception

There is no way that God would guide anyone to violate His Law and go against the clear teaching of Scripture. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that we are to be careful that no one deceives us. He warned of false prophets, false teachers and false shepherds. Religious deception is a very real, clear and present danger. So, some of the false guidance include: following our **Feelings/emotions**; **Following the crowd/trends/fashions**; laying self serving **Fleeces**; following unscriptural **Formulas**; and **Fancy claims** that God, or an angel, told me...

Fooling Counsellors

Another false method of guidance involves **Fixing the counsellor**. This includes trying out different counsellors and feeding them with incomplete, selective and misleading information so as to elicit the desired response. On one occasion when I was ministering at a mission station in Africa, a young man came to me afterwards and requested my counsel. He had not gone very far when I had to interrupt and ask: "Have you spoken to one of the mission leaders here?"

Yes, in fact he had. Well, what had they counselled him? He was very evasive and tried to avoid answering the question. It transpired that he had sought the counsel of a wide variety of excellent missionaries, both at this mission station and at a nearby one. And all of them had clearly told him, on the authority of Scripture, that he must reconcile with his wife. However, he wanted to divorce his wife and marry the person he was involved in an adulterous relationship with. What this man was doing was seeking as many counsellors as possible and providing incomplete and selective information in order to elicit the desired response: which was that he could ditch his wife and marry the new attraction in his life!

It is incredible how many people try to manipulate ministers to rubber stamp their rebellion and approve of their abomination.

One pastor described the situation to me in this way: What many people seeking counsel want could be summarised in these words: "Pastor, I have a problem, how can you help me to be blessed and in the centre of God's Will, without having to repent of my sin or obey the Bible!"

They may not put it that way, but that is really what many people are seeking when they ask for your counsel.

Otherwise, if what the person really wanted was to know what the Bible says on this matter, counselling would not take very long. You would point out the relevant Scriptures, the counselee would say Thank You and head out to put into practice what the Bible commands.

True Guidance

"The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His Covenant and His testimonies."

Psalm 25:9-10

Most people, when they think of the will of God, are thinking in terms of who is the best person for me to marry, what is the best career for me to go into, and where should I move to. However, the will of God is concerned with far more than marriage and career guidance.

God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him. Vocation and location become clear when we are studying God's Word and following His instructions. The will of God will never lead us where the grace the God cannot keep us. Where God guides, He provides.

However, the question is: am I humble and teachable?

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

God guides us first and foremost through His Word. The best way to know the will of God is to study the Word of God. We need to know the Word of God and the God of the Word. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is to know God and to make Him known. His Great Commission must be my supreme ambition.

"But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33

When we get our priorities straight, first things first, everything tends to follow from that.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

It is our priority to ensure that we are not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, then we will be able to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.” Psalm 27:23-24

To be guided by the Lord, we need to be following Him. Have you turned away from this world in order to follow Christ? Have you repented of your sins, taken up your cross and embarked upon this adventure of discipleship, following the teachings and examples of Christ alone?

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

The best way to know what God’s will is, is to study His Word, to have our mind renewed by the Word of God. It is when we are taught, rebuked, corrected and trained in righteousness through the Word of God that we become thoroughly equipped for every good work. Then we are able to test and discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and Hymns and in spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:16-17

The will of God is no mystery for us to discover. He has made His will abundantly clear in the Bible.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality...for God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.” 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7

Those people who say they want to know what God’s will is, this is God’s will: ***“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

It is God’s will that you be joyful, prayerful and thankful.

And it is God’s will that you be wholehearted: ***“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”*** Colossians 3:23

“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” Psalm 37:4-5

When we are Bible-based and Christ-centred, we will find that we are Spirit led. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart.

“However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all Truth.”

John 16:13

“I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them and not forsake them.” Isaiah 42:16

“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it’, whenever you turn to the right hand or whether you turn to the left.” Isaiah 30:21

To know the will of God we need know the Word of God. We need the wisdom of God. And the Bible is clear that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs1:7). The Scripture tells us that if any of us lacks wisdom, we should ask God who gives generously to all (James 1:5).

No one should expect to gain an understanding of the will of God if they spurn the Word of God. ***“Then they will call on Me, but I will not answer; they will seek Me diligently, but they will not find Me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would have none of My counsel and despised My every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to Me will dwell safely and will be secure without fear of evil.”*** Proverbs 1:28-33

Before we should even begin considering guidance questions of vocation, location and marriage partner, we should ensure that we are right with God. Jesus taught: ***“If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching...”*** John 14:23

Carefully read The Ten Commandments. ***“The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”*** Psalm 19:7

“But he who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the Word, this one will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:25

Is there Restitution that you need to do? Have you ever stolen anything, or borrowed something and failed to return it? If you have not yet done Restitution for that, make that an urgent priority. Restore that property to its rightful owner.

Have you been responsible for damaging someone else’s property? Have you repaired or replaced the item?

Have you been guilty of speaking behind someone’s back? Have you repented of this and made right with that individual?

If you are concerned to do God’s will, ensure that you apologise to everyone that you owe an apology. That you forgive those who have spitefully used you. That you leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled to your brother before you come to worship God.

This is the will of God that you love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and that you love your neighbour as yourself. It is God’s will that you do unto others what you would want them to do unto you.

You see, those who seem to think that the will of God is primarily concerned about vocation, location and selection of marriage partner, miss the point. We are our own worst enemy. If we are not right with God it doesn’t matter where we are, or what we are doing, or who we are married to. We will take our problems with us.

However, if we have come to the foot of the Cross, surrendered to Christ and forsaken our sin, if we are diligently studying God's Word daily, delighting ourselves in the Lord, seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness, then we will be a blessing, wherever we are. We will also be more responsive and open to understanding God's will and recognizing His guidance as to the **where**, the **when**, the **who** and the **how**.

We need to put first things first. When I am humble and teachable, prayerful, joyful and thankful, wholeheartedly following in the teachings and example of Christ, then we will find the reality of what the Psalmists declared: ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will guide you with My eye."*** Psalm 32:8

God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him. You can know the peace that passes all understanding and experience the joy of being in the centre of God's will. ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones."*** Proverbs 3:6-7

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the Day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through Faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:17-21

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." Hebrews 13:20-21

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