



Discovering God's Will

A Process For Learning God's Will For Your Life.

CORE Discipleship is a faith-based, Christian organization. Our mission is to help you make disciples of Jesus. We provide a simple and reproducible discipleship process based on Jesus' "inner circle" or "core" comprised of Peter, James, and John. We also provide discipleship training and free discipleship resources as free downloadable eBooks.

Just like you, Father God is using the many events and circumstances of life's journey to mold and shape me into the person He desires. Occasionally, I've cooperated completely. It's in those rare moments when something extraordinary takes place - Heaven touches earth, mountains are moved, a part of me is transformed.

Through His infinite patience and unfathomable love I am learning to become the man He created me to be. As I daily surrender my life to Him through His precious Holy Spirit, I see more clearly life eternal.

My hope and prayer for you are that you too will discover God's purpose and become exactly what He has planned for you all along - His son or daughter.

May God grant that we become His disciples by His grace,

Doug Morrell

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Doug is a seasoned discipler and small group leader. Since graduating from Texas Tech University in 1984, he's worked in a dual capacity -- working within for-profit businesses around the country while also serving the church in various pastoral roles. Additionally, he and his wife Suzie are the founders/directors of CORE Discipleship, a ministry dedicated to making disciples who make disciples. Doug and Suzie have three children: Katheryn, Hannah, and Nathaniel.

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HOW CAN I KNOW GOD'S WILL?

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11)

God knows the future, and His plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as we surrender our whole selves to God's plans and as He goes with us as we fulfill His mission, we can realize unlimited possibilities. The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:17, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” It may be difficult to believe that the person who does the will of God will live forever. But this is based on the facts of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and promises. Knowing that this evil world and our desires for its pleasures will end can give us courage to control our greedy, self-indulgent behavior and to continue doing God's will. Now, this does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship in this world, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion. When evil, pain, suffering, or hardship strikes, we can still be thankful for God's presence and for the good that He will accomplish through the distress. God loves you and wants only His best for you!

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

God works in “all things” – not just isolated incidents – for your good. This does not mean that all that happens to you is good. Evil is very present in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. It's important to note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill His purpose. It's also crucial to note that this promise is not for all people. Only those who love God and are called according to His purpose can claim it. Those who are “called” are those the Holy Spirit convicts and enables to receive Christ – born-again, regenerated, Holy Spirit-filled believers. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust God, not life's treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth -- they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because God is with them.

Everyday, we all face choices. We either choose the right course or the wrong course, but we must choose. God desires that we learn to make right decisions. You don't have to be mature to enter into the Kingdom of God, but you do have to be mature if you are to experience all of God's blessings for you now.

At the outset, we must understand that for us to desire to do and be about God's will is absolutely normal and that this is a lifelong process and journey. However, we must also understand that we often time try and arrive at God's will for us by beginning with the wrong questions. We ask things like, “How can I know for sure that what I am doing is what God wants me to do?” Or “Is this person the one God intends for me to marry?” Or “What kind of work does God want me to be involved with?”

All of these are good questions, but if we begin with these questions, we've missed a crucial step – these kind of questions are “guidance” based meaning we are looking for indicators like open or closed doors, signs, or circumstances.

If we approach the subject of “how to determine God's will for my life” from this perspective, we will become frustrated and will never arrive at a satisfying answer.

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”



“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Romans 8:15-17

How then can I know God’s will for me?

We must first turn to God’s Word for the only true answer. There are just two places in the New Testament where we find the phrase, “this is the will of God,” both occurring in First Thessalonians:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3)

“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18)

Here we discover that God’s will is my sanctification. Sanctification has to do with what I am, not what I do. In truth, **you can never discover God’s will until you begin with this all-important first step: have you presented yourself - your body, soul, and spirit - to God?** Have you agreed to God’s will – a voluntary submission and surrendering of your life – to His desire to inhabit you entirely? In truth, we should not even attempt to know God’s will for us until we have given Him complete control of our lives – body, soul and spirit.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1, 2)

By reading God’s Word, we become more acquainted with God’s heart. There are times, however, when we need God’s specific guidance in other areas of our lives. We need to ask God through prayer to help us know His will in these areas. He is big enough to make sure that we know. Sometimes God can lead us through how things happen to us. It is also wise for us to seek counsel from other spiritually mature leaders who know us well.

It can be helpful to know if you are doing God’s will by asking yourself these simple questions:

1. Does the attitude or action please God?
2. Would God say it is good?
3. Would it cause me or someone else to lose touch with God or cause me or someone else to stumble?
4. Is it healthy and good for me?

Sometimes when we have choices between things that both agree with the Bible, the important thing is to start going in one direction. God will direct you if your heart is open to Him and you honestly want to do what He wants for you. Remember, if what you do is done in faith, it is not sin even if you misunderstand His direction. Everything God does is restorative and redemptive.

If you’re trying to follow God, it’s always a good thing to know how God communicates with you. Usually, God doesn’t call you up on the phone or send you a fax. Thankfully, believers can rely on this promise from the Bible: “Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; He’s the one who will keep you on track.” (Proverbs 3:5-6, The Message)

When Christians say that God “told” them something it usually doesn’t mean they heard an audible voice. Instead, they mean that they “heard” God speaking to their innermost being – impressing them about something. He does this through His Holy Spirit who dwells within the heart of every true believer. The Holy Spirit is our Guide and our Teacher, directing us to do what God wants us to do.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). We

can have confidence that, as we look to Christ with every decision, His Spirit will give us the wisdom and direction that we need.

Most often, the Bible is the way God “speaks” to us. For example, you might read a verse in the Bible that seems like it was written just for you and your particular situation that day. Or, the pastor’s message from the Bible may suddenly confirm your direction.

But the Holy Spirit will “speak” to you at other times and in other situations as well. He will let you know when you have done something wrong, or bring to mind someone to pray for, or give you peace (or lack of peace) about a certain decision. Many refer to this as their “conscience” speaking. When you pray, ask God to give you a sensitivity to His Holy Spirit, so that you will be alert to the many ways that He “speaks” to you throughout the day.

Born in Prussia in 1805, George Mueller discovered a pretty good plan for understanding God’s will. In fact, he began running from God early in life. By age ten he had devised a scheme to embezzle government money entrusted to his father. He spent his school days in drunken immorality. He even served time in jail at age sixteen for failing to pay his bills. The university he attended had some 900 divinity students, but Mueller said there were not nine of them who truly feared God. He continued his sinful habits during his college days until finally at age 20 the burden of his sins overcame him and he trusted Christ as Savior. Soon he committed himself to a full-time gospel ministry. When Mueller was twenty-five, he went to Teignmouth, England, with his new wife, Mary, to pastor a small church. He gave up the small salary offered when he discovered it was paid through the rental of church pews. From that time on he resolved to live by faith. Mueller moved in 1832 to Bristol, England, to be the pastor of another church. There his famous work with the orphans began when two young children were thrown upon the church’s care. Mueller had only two shillings to his name when he began the orphanage work, but over the next sixty years God sent more than \$7,500,000 to supply their needs. New buildings were built or purchased, staff were hired, and the hundreds of children never missed a meal. Many times prayers were said over empty plates only to have food arrive at the last moment. Mueller resolved never to tell anyone what his needs were. He told them to God and confidently expected them to be met. During his life, Mueller started 117 schools that educated over 120,000 young people and orphans. The Bethesda Chapel that he pastored in Bristol had some 2,000 members at his death. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “Of flowers of speech he has none, and we hardly think he cares for them; but of the bread of Heaven he has abundance.”

His words provide the basis for obeying God’s will and this study:

“I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter.”

“Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If I do so, I make myself liable to great delusions.”

“I seek the will of the Spirit through, or in connection with, the Word of God.”

“Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God’s connection with His Word and Spirit.”

“I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright.”

“Thus, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge.”

“Our suffering can make us more sensitive servants of God. People who have known pain are able to reach out with compassion to others who hurt.”

SEVEN KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Surrender

We must first understand that knowing God's will is not a program; it is a relationship. It's not what you do, it is what you are. You must first understand God's will is your becoming like Christ; God loves and accepts you.

2. Peace

This means dropping your own desires and selfish pride and choosing to accept whatever it is that God might have planned for you. Peace must be present throughout the process.

3. Discernment

This means being careful to not confuse your emotions with the Holy Spirit's promptings. Feelings can change like the weather, so we should never put our faith in our emotional desires.

4. God's Word and the Holy Spirit

The Bible and the Holy Spirit are as close to you as you allow. Those who consistently discover God's will for their lives are those who stay in His Word and are filled with and follow the Holy Spirit's leading.

5. Reflection

Your life and circumstances are all in God's hands. Take a look around – how has He led you to where you are? What is the timing, situation and provision?

6. Prayer

Asking God what to do. Thankfully we can be up front and direct with God – He loves us unconditionally and knows our deepest needs.

7. Confirmation

Finally, through each of the prior steps you should have a good idea of what to do. This whole process will calm you and bring you to a place closer to God, and better able to understand what He has to say to you. It is then that we submit our plans to other more spiritually mature believers for their counsel.

All seven of these principles work hand-in-hand and must never be isolated or one thought of more highly than another. The greater the decision, the greater the need for having several of these principles confirmed before you make a major, life changing decision.

The Bible maintains a consistency of having at least two or three of these principles confirmed prior to moving out in faith. Most errors occur when any one of the seven is overemphasized above another.

Additionally, we must understand that Satan often uses decoys to throw us off track. When we are seeking God's will for our lives – for ourselves, our families, our businesses - Satan will present something that appears to be "good" as a decoy to distract and deceive us. It is his hope that we will think we have found what we have been looking for and stop searching for the real truth.

"There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification." (1 Cor. 14:10)

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:14)

Satan and his servants can deceive us by appearing to be attractive, good, and moral. Many unsuspecting people follow smooth-talking, Bible-quoting



leaders into cults that alienate them from their families and lead them into the practice of immorality and deceit. Do not be fooled by external appearances. Our impressions alone are never accurate indicators of discovering God's will; so it helps to ask these questions:

1. Does the direction line up with God's Word (Acts 17:11)?
2. Does the one giving direction affirm and proclaim that Jesus Christ is God who came into the world as a man to save people from their sins (1 John 4:1-3)?
3. Is the life-style of the one giving advice consistent with Biblical morality (Matthew 12:33-37)?

The dangerous thing about these counterfeits is the fact they are so believable. They usually incorporate scenarios that are very plausible and possible. Unfortunately, the results of these deceptions can be devastating.

It is important to carefully seek God's will for our lives. If you think you have found His will for your life, ask Him to provide you the inner peace and assurance that this leading is from Him.

As well, new believers are often very sensitive to what is right and wrong, what they should or shouldn't do. Some actions may be perfectly all right for us to do, but may harm a Christian brother or sister who is still young in the faith and learning what the Christian life is all about. We must be careful not to offend a sensitive or younger Christian or, by our example, to cause him or her to sin. When we love others, our freedom of choice should be less important to us than strengthening the faith of a brother or sister in Christ.

What an incredible promise and challenge! God promises to lead those who belong to Him spirit, soul, and body. God will continually guide you as you activate His principles. As you do, you will reach your destiny and God's provision for you.

Let God direct you one rung at a time.

We join Paul as he said, "I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can see something of the future he has called you to share" (Ephesians 1:18, TLB).

SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS

Jesus used a show, tell, release, and supervise model of training. Likewise, this material is designed to follow His teaching method.

If this study is to be used in a group setting, everyone should have an attitude of desiring to learn from others in the group. The group is both an accountability group and a place for academic training (ideas, concepts, principles, facts, etc.).

If you are participating as a couple, there may be areas that appear to be gender specific – not so. Each person must complete each study from his or her viewpoint. This makes for some really honest communication when you review together. Have fun!

The small groups should provide an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, and love. This kind of environment will promote openness. This is key. Most people live their lives wearing a mask. You don't really see the "truth" of their lives behind the disguise. You simply see the image that they think you want to see. The purpose of the small groups is not simply academic: it is to encourage and model honesty at the deepest, gut level. The small group should be the place where people become unmasked.

"The Bible maintains a consistency of having at least two or three of the principles confirmed prior to moving out in faith. Most errors occur when any one of the seven is overemphasized above another."



*“But I, when I am lifted up
from the earth, will draw all
men to myself.”*

John 12:32

Your small group should be interactive. Remember that relationships are dependent upon communication. For relationships to be real, communication should not be a monologue, but a dialogue. When you are face-to-face with people you know who love you – who are listening to your heart and your words – the truth of the Gospel can penetrate and confront the reality of your life in a very healthy manner.

Christianity is 100% spiritual. Expect change. Expect the Holy Spirit to move in the small groups. As the truth of God’s Word penetrates beyond the mask, expect to see a response (these are some of the reasons why it is important to have a seasoned Group Discipler in the group). Responses are outward, visible signs of an inner working of the Holy Spirit; they can either be responses or reactions to the presence or work of the Holy Spirit. Five questions should be asked to help discern whether these responses are of God or not (again, a seasoned Discipler is knowledgeable and not unaware):

1. Is Jesus being lifted up?
2. Is this creating a greater hunger for God and His Word?
3. Is this leading people to love God and each other more?
4. Is this bringing truth and greater spiritual depth?
5. Is there any practical change taking place (sometimes this must be judged over a period of time)?

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY APPLICATION

Being sensitive and open to the Holy Spirit is fundamental. Healing is rooted in a relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Words of encouragement, love, understanding, prayer, petition, faith, etc. should be spoken to the person being prayed for. Follow-up counseling by the Group Discipler is strongly suggested. One of the main reasons why people have their condition(s) return after having been prayed for is that they do not change their life-styles. When praying for the sick, Jesus usually touched those He ministered to and commanded the illness to leave. The power of touch cannot be underestimated.

PRACTICAL SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

1. Personal Sharing (10-15 Minutes)

This is the icebreaker period. The group is allowed to talk freely and openly of whatever is on their hearts regarding the material. The Group Discipler may have to encourage some to share. When the group first meets, this time usually is longer and becomes shorter as people get to know one another.

2. Group Sharing (45-60 minutes)

This is the time to discuss real-life application, problems, concerns, and yes, the session material. It’s a time for everyone to practice friendliness, sensitivity, honesty, transparency, listening, focus, ask questions, participation, and especially, personal application. Remember the study of the material, as a group, is not the primary purpose of the group. The purpose is to help each person become all that God intended for him or her to become so that each is more conformed into the image of Jesus!

3. Prayer (15-20 minutes)

Allow the group to minister to each other. Everyone should feel free to be a part. It doesn’t matter whether or not you pray individually in smaller groups or all together, sitting or standing. The group will have requests. The group is then in a position to pray, allowing God to move, and learn what God is calling them to do to meet those individuals needs.

4. Close (5-10 minutes)

The Group Discipler initials each person’s completed session, makes sure



PRINCIPLE NUMBER ONE: SURRENDER

To understand God’s will, we must first understand why it takes place.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Sanctification has to do with what I am, not what I do. The word sanctification comes from the same root word from which we get our word holy. We are to be holy. What makes something or someone holy? It is that it or they belong to God. It is God’s desire that we become entirely His property. “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you become God’s property.” So, we must first understand that we now are God’s property and our lives and attitude should reflect this new standard.

“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Spiritual maturity is not determined by your birth date. Rather, spiritual maturity is determined by the degree in which we walk in love and unity. Therefore, our growth as disciples of Jesus could be determined using this simple equation: Knowledge of God’s Word plus Obedience to God’s Word plus Time Equals Spiritual Maturity.

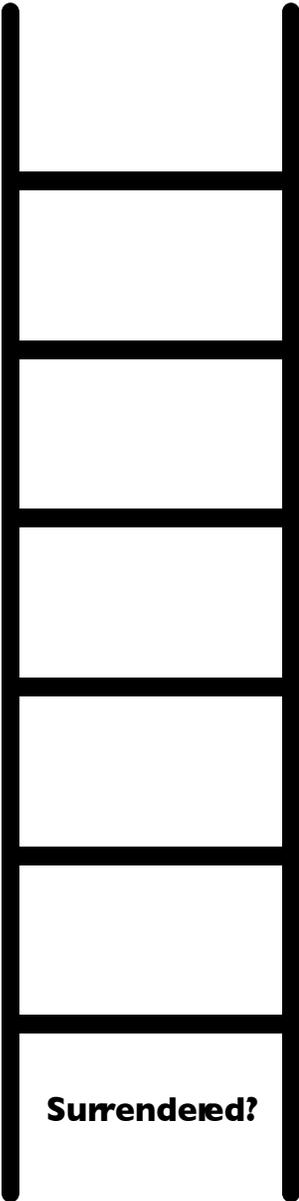
The indwelling presence of God in our entire being is the will of God for us, but it is something we must choose moment-by-moment. Love never compels, and God is love. Therefore, God’s desire is that we voluntarily allow Him to occupy our threefold being – spirit, soul and body. However, we must agree to it. He will never force the process of your becoming holy or as some call it “set apart” or “sanctification”.

So what is absolutely essential before a life is pleasing to God? “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Please note, it does not say it will be difficult – it says it is impossible. Therefore, the life that pleases God is the life that is lived by faith and we must recognize the distinction between belief and faith; you can believe in Christ, but you must move out in faith to demonstrate the sincerity of your belief. We must live a life of faith to be pleasing to God. In fact, the Bible says, “everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

We must believe that God’s view of everything is true regardless of popular opinion. If God says something is good, and we say it is bad, we can never experience freedom. If God says something is bad, and we say it is good, we are deceived.

When you are united with Christ by trusting in Him, you are experiencing the power that raised Him from the dead. That same mighty power will help you live a morally renewed and regenerated life – it is the power of the Holy Spirit. But before we can walk in newness of life, we must also die to sin. Just as the resurrection gives you Christ’s power to live for Him, His crucifixion marks the death of your old sinful nature. We can’t know the victory of the resurrection without personally applying the crucifixion – we must die to ourselves daily, which means we’re not fulfilling our old sinful desires of the flesh.

In the future we will become, but until then we must overcome three very powerful forces: Overcoming this world’s temptations, Satan’s deceptions, and our own inwardly selfish desires. This means we will experience difficulties that help us grow. We rejoice in suffering not because we enjoy pain or deny its tragedy, but because we know God is using life’s difficulties and circumstances, Satan’s attacks, and our own sinful nature to build our character – in essence, using these as vehicles to accomplish His purposes. The problems that we run into will develop our perseverance, which in turn,



will strengthen our character, deepen our trust in God, and give us greater confidence about the future.

We must understand that spiritual growth is personal (Philippians 2:13), progressive (Deuteronomy 7:22), joyful (1 Peter 1:8-9), painful (John 15:2; 16:8; Hebrews 12:5; James 1:2-4), and productive (John 15:2, 8, 16).

To realize God's will and to become spiritually mature we must:

- Be submitted to God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16);
- Be equipped by God's team (Ephesians 4:12);
- Demonstrate mutual, unconditional love of one another (2 Thessalonians 1:3);
- Have daily spiritual nourishment from God's Word (1 Pet. 2:2);
- Have opportunity to exercise faith (Philippians 1:6);
- Have an understanding of moral absolutes (2 Peter 1:5-11);
- Be grounded in essential doctrine (Hebrews 5:11-14).

As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a perverse world. Some people say that troubles are the result of sin or lack of faith, but the Bible also teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for us. Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of downward and inward (Mark 13:35, 36; Philippians 3:13, 14); they can build strong character (Romans 5:3, 4); and they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who also are struggling (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). Our troubles may be an indication that we actually are in God's will!

"All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering." (2 Thess. 1:5)

We can gain relief in knowing that our sufferings are strengthening us, making us ready for Christ's kingdom. We can also gain relief in the fact that one day everyone will stand before God; at that time, wrongs will be righted, judgment will be pronounced, and evil will be terminated.

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" (Rom. 5:3)

The Bible encourages us not to live according to the flesh, but to put to death the deeds of the body. Therefore, being "led by the Spirit of God" involves a daily, progressive putting to death the sinful desires of our lower nature. This suggests that, while all Christians are in some ways being "led by the Spirit of God," there are ever increasing degrees of being led by the Spirit. Regardless of how long you have walked with God, there is always room for improvement. As you are more fully led by the Holy Spirit, the more completely you will be obedient to God and be conformed to His holy standard – understanding His will.

Obedience to God always begins with humility. We must believe that His way is better than our own. We may not always understand the way God works, but through humble obedience, we can begin to receive His blessings and develop an understanding of His character. We must remember that:

- God's ways are always best.
- God places a premium on our obedience.
- God can use anything or anyone to accomplish His purposes.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

"We must believe that God's view of everything is true regardless of popular opinion. If God says something is good, and we say it is bad, we can never experience freedom. If God says something is bad, and we say it is good, we are deceived."



“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.”

Psalm 119:133

God’s will for us in our moral and spiritual life has been clearly shown to us in His Word. God’s will for us never goes against the Bible. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 and Ephesians 4:22-6:24 we discover a list of things that we know are His will, and throughout the Scriptures God shows us how He wants us to live.

LET’S REVIEW:

1. Have you surrendered your life to God? In what ways have you maintained possession of certain things? Do you believe that God is owner of all you have and are? Why or why not? Explain: _____

2. In what ways does God speak to you? Give an example: _____

3. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27). What does this mean to you? _____

4. In what ways are you dying daily to yourself? Give examples: _____

2

PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO: PEACE

The next step and one in which you must maintain throughout the process is to seek at the beginning to get your heart (soul or your mind, will and emotions) into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to any given matter. In other words, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and practice being in God’s presence. We must be still and know that God is God (Ps. 46:10).

This means we must consciously choose to disregard our own desires and selfish pride – choosing to accept whatever it is that God might have planned for us. We must seek to maintain an upright heart and a clear conscience.

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”
(Acts 24:16)

In this place of quiet, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to your heart any known sin, trespass, or offense you might have. Ask God’s forgiveness, and if needful and at all possible, go and ask others for their forgiveness, too (Mth. 5:24).

Am I at peace?

How can we know we are walking in God’s peace especially when we’re confronted with so many situations each day?

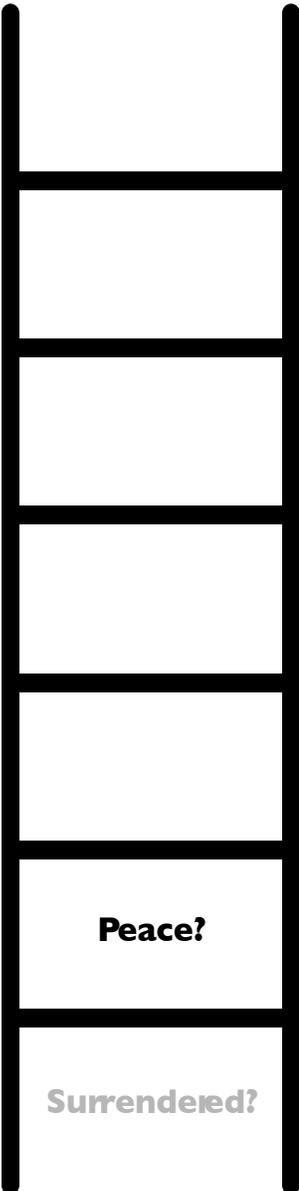
It helps to keep in mind the two-sided reality of the Christian life. On the one hand, we are complete in Christ (our acceptance with Him is secured). On the other hand, we are growing in Christ (we are becoming more and more like Him). At one and the same time we are our Father’s sons or daughters and our brother’s servants. We feel both the presence of Christ and the pressure of sin. We enjoy the peace that comes from being made right with God, but we still face daily problems that often help us grow. If we remember these two sides of the Christian life, we will not grow discouraged as we face temptations and problems. Instead, we will learn to depend on the power available to us from Christ, who lives in us by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of peace:

1. Peace with God (being made right with God – reconciled)
2. Peace of God (peace as we are led by God)

As believers, we now have peace with God, which may differ from peaceful feelings such as calmness and tranquility. Peace with God means that we have been reconciled to Him. There is no more hostility between us – no sin blocking our relationship with Him. Peace with God is possible only because Jesus paid the price for our sins through His death on the cross. For instance, the following Scriptures speak of our being reconciled with God:

- We are justified (declared not guilty of sin) (Rom. 2:24)
- No condemnation awaits us (Rom. 8:1)
- We are set free from the law of sin and death..... (Rom. 8:2)
- We are sanctified and made acceptable in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2)
- We are righteous and holy in Christ..... (1 Cor. 1:30)
- We will be made alive at the resurrection..... (1 Cor. 15:22)
- We are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)
- We receive God’s righteousness..... (2 Cor. 5:21)
- We are one in Christ with all other believers (Gal. 3:28)
- We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3)
- We are holy, blameless, and covered with God’s love (Eph. 1:4)
- We are adopted as God’s children..... (Eph. 1:5-6)
- Our sins are taken away; and we are forgiven (Eph. 1:7)
- We will be brought under Christ’s headship (Eph. 1:10-11)
- We are marked as belonging to God by the Holy Spirit..... (Eph. 1:13)
- We have been raised up to sit with Christ in glory (Eph. 2:6)
- We are God’s work of art (Eph. 2:10)
- We have been brought near to God..... (Eph. 2:13)



2

1

- We share in the promise in Christ (Eph. 3:6)
- We can come with freedom and confidence into God's presence (Eph. 3:12)
- We are members of Christ's body, the church..... (Eph. 5:29-30)
- We have been given fullness in Christ..... (Col. 2:10)
- We are set free from our sinful nature..... (Col. 2:11)
- We will have eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10)

Yet, there is another abiding peace we should be familiar with.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (Col. 3:15)

The word “rule” comes from the language of athletics: Paul tells us to let Christ’s peace be the umpire or referee in our hearts (the Holy Spirit is the umpire). Our hearts are the center of conflict because it is there that our feelings and desires clash – our fears and hopes, distrust and trust, jealousy and love. We deal with these constant conflicts and live as God wants by deciding between conflicting elements by using the rule of peace. The kingdom of God is made up of such peace.

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (Rom. 14:17-19)

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil. 4:9)

In the Greek, peace (i-ray'-nay) has this meaning; prosperity, quietness, rest. In the Hebrew (shaw-lome') peace has this definition; safe, well, happy, health, peace, prosperity, rest, safety, welfare. God wants His peace continually present in His children's lives.

Unfortunately, many believers have a difficult time believing that God is good and that He desires only good for His children. Regardless, God's Word instructs us to live in peace with all men:

“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14)

Sin always blocks our vision of God; so if we want to hear or see God, we must renounce sin and obey Him (Psalm 24:3, 4). Holiness is coupled with living in peace. A right relationship with God leads to right relationships with fellow believers. Although we will not always feel loving toward all believers, we must pursue peace as we become more Christ-like.

Satan's Two Weapons

As we seek to know God's will, we must be aware that one of Satan's tactics is to set us up to do something and then accuse us before God for doing it. The devil – our enemy – has always been a:

- Deceiver (2 Cor. 11:14) and
- Accuser (Rev. 12:10)

We must understand that Satan does not want us living in peace. Anything that violates your peace is not from God. With that said, we must also understand that we should never substitute God's peace for our own unwillingness to do what He has commanded. For instance, there are many things we will say we do not have “peace” about, but in fact, may be God's will. An example is when we are commanded to live a “holy” life, but we are not at peace with God's directives. We are deceived in believing that just because

“At one and the same time we are our Father's sons or daughters and our brother's servants. We feel both the presence of Christ and the pressure of sin. We enjoy the peace that comes from being made right with God, but we still face daily problems that often help us grow.”

2. Describe the two kinds of peace and give some illustrations from your life of each:

3. True repentance does not end with words of confession – that would be mere lip service. It must lead to corrected behavior and changed attitudes. When you sin and are truly sorry, confess this to God, ask for forgiveness, and accept His grace and mercy. Then, as an act of thankfulness for your forgiveness, make the needed corrections. Otherwise, when we are walking in known sin, should we expect God’s direction for our lives? Why or why not?

4. The Hebrew word “shalom” has a very applicable meaning to our lives. How can you walk in this kind of peace today regardless of situation/circumstance?

5. All of us have encountered people who cause us to be more than a little anxious. What should we do if we feel our peace beginning to leave us? Give specific examples of how you would handle this type of situation:

“Anything or anyone that violates your peace is usually not of God. The unsaved cannot have peace with God. And the redeemed (saved) can lose God’s peace if they violate His righteousness.”

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I choose to be quiet and know that You are God. Help me to practice your presence each and every moment of this day and every day for the rest of my life. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

3

PRINCIPLE NUMBER THREE: DISCERNMENT

The next step, as we try and discover God’s will, is that we should always be careful that we’re not just following our emotions. Your feelings can change like the wind, so don’t put your faith in them. We are to be Holy Spirit led.

Understanding Our Responses

All of us realize that we have a body. However, most believers have not yet learned to tell the difference between their “soul” response and their “spirit” response. Obviously we know we exist and there is certainly more to us than our physical bodies, but is there some easy-to-understand way we can learn to tell the difference between the two?

We Are What We Think: “As a man thinks so he becomes. As he continues to think so he remains.” We find that in our normal routine of life, we are faced with many circumstances and situations. We can’t choose our situations, but we can choose our response to any situation – it’s all about choice. That’s why so many non-Christians have a hard time telling the difference between someone “born-again” and those who are not. A Spirit-filled believer discovers that much of what they’ve been taught is from the world. In other words, what you are determines what you see; what you see determines what you do. In truth, becoming a spiritually mature believer who hears from God has a great deal to do with “unlearning” the world’s ways and “learning” God’s ways.

There are basically three ways from which we gather and process knowledge or understanding:

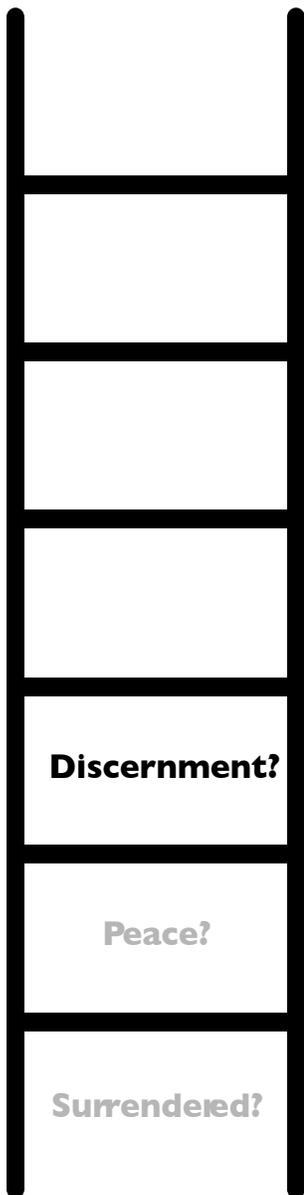
- Perceptual knowledge (eye, ear) through observation and sensory experience.
- Conceptual knowledge (heart and mind) by reason and intellectual inquiry.
- Spiritual knowledge (love) by moral and personal affinity. Knowledge of the things of God is more of a spiritual than an intellectual exercise.

There are basically two elements necessary to know the things of God:

- A revelation from God by the Holy Spirit.
- An appropriate spiritual response by man (1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4).

“The eye is the lame of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22, 23)

Spiritual vision is our capacity to see clearly what God wants us to do and to see the world from His point of view. But this spiritual insight can be easily clouded. Self-serving desires, interests, and goals block that vision. Serving God is the best way to restore it. A “good” eye is one that is fixed on God.



3

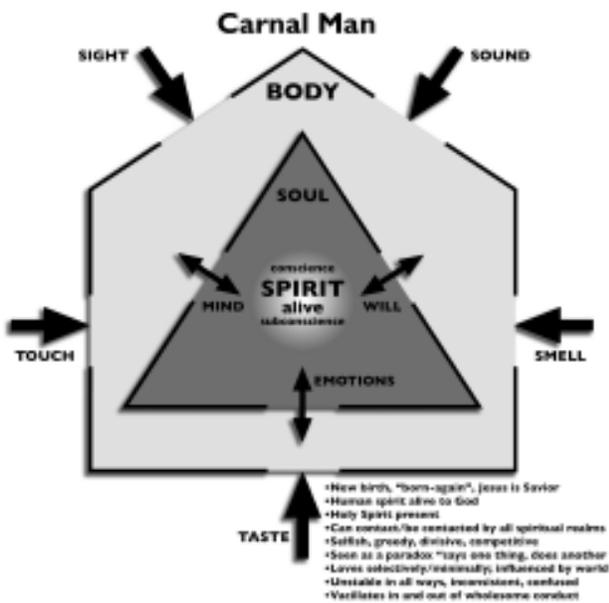
As a man’s own inner thoughts are known only to him, so only God’s Spirit knows the mind of God. Spirit answers to spirit, not Spirit to mind. The Holy Spirit interprets spiritual things to spiritual people. The Bible itself was given to us as the Holy Spirit put spiritual “ideas” into specific spiritual “words” of His own selection.

2

At the outset it will be helpful to understand some of the terms used in the Bible to describe both born-again Christians (the born-again Christian being either “carnal” or “spiritual”) as well as those who have never received Christ Jesus as evidenced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (unregenerate or the natural man). All people fall into one of these three spiritual categories.

1

An Unbeliever:
The Natural Man:



An unregenerate person (not "born-again") who does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit; this individual can have absolutely no understanding nor appreciation of the gospel message; sees the world only through a limited, worldly perspective and bases their world view from the processing of both perceptual and conceptual knowledge (soul without Kingdom of God Holy Spirit illumination); cannot appreciate nor grasp God's Kingdom realities; is both repelled and mildly attracted to authentic, Holy Spirit filled people.

"We Are What We Think: "As a man thinks so he becomes. As he continues to think so he remains."

A Believer: (can be either "carnal" or "spiritual")

1. The Carnal Man:
The carnal man, regenerate or "born-again", but who demonstrates a lifestyle resembling that of an unbelieving, unregenerate person. The carnal Christian is a believer with childish ways, as seen in a jealous, competing, divisive and sectarian spirit; an immature Christian who lives more for human opinion than for Christ or God's Kingdom realities. Because a carnal Christian is neither hot nor cold, they live in a spiritual paradox having little to no impact in the lives of others. They are often times viewed as being "hypocritical" by unbelievers for though they are

“born-again” their lives are not much different from unbelievers.

A Believer:

2. The Spiritual Man:

The spiritual man, regenerate and possessing spiritual maturity, as seen in freedom from sectarian strife (1 Corinthians 3:3, 4), has a nature that responds to the truth; unbelievers find the spiritual man difficult to understand while carnal Christians find this person to be both attractive and repulsive; their life-styles, like a living tree, indicate progressive change and maturity; the single most evidence of a spiritually mature person is the demonstrable love relationship with God, expressed in love toward all others. It is often times said of these that they are “Christ-like”.

Receiving Jesus involves turning to God from “self” and trusting Jesus to come into your life then living His life through the Holy Spirit.

In the “new way of the Spirit” found in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit gives us power to obey God, a power the Law by itself can never provide. The Law is good, but it cannot empower us to obey it. We must agree that there will always remain a struggle with sin in the lives of each and every Christian believer (Romans 6:12-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:16, 17; 1 Peter 2:11).

Some people try to earn their way to God by keeping a set of rules (obeying the Ten Commandments, attending church faithfully, or doing good deeds), but all they earn for their efforts is frustration and discouragement. However, because of Christ’s sacrifice, the way to God is already open, and we can become His children simply by putting our faith in Him. No longer trying to reach God by keeping rules, we can become more and more like Jesus as we live with Him day by day. We should let the Holy Spirit turn our eyes away from our own performance and toward Jesus. He will free us to serve Him out of love and gratitude. This is living “in the new way of the Spirit.”

Keeping the rules, laws, and customs of Christianity will not save us. Even if we could keep our actions pure, we would still be doomed because our hearts and minds (souls) are perverse and rebellious. Like Paul, we can find no relief in the synagogue or church until we look to Jesus Christ Himself for our soul’s salvation that He gives us freely. When we do come to Jesus, we are flooded with relief and gratitude. Will we keep the rules any better? Most likely, but we will be motivated by love and gratitude, not by the desire to get God’s approval. We will not be merely submitting to an external code, but willingly and lovingly seeking to do God’s will from the inside out.

The realization of sin through the tool of the Law makes us conscious (aware) of our spiritual death. The Law cannot deliver a person struggling with sin. Yes, the Law can enlighten our conscience, but it is powerless to produce holiness of life. You see the fault is not in God’s Law – it is entirely spiritual – the fault is with the law of sin.

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” (Romans 7:14)

“but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” (Romans 7:23)

The “law at work in the members of my body” is the sin deep within me even after I am “born-again.” This is our vulnerability to sin; it refers to everything within us that is more loyal to our old way of selfish living than to God.



*“So I say, live by the Spirit,
and you will not gratify the*

desires of the sinful nature.

For the sinful nature desires

what is contrary to the

Spirit, and the Spirit what

is contrary to the sinful

nature. They are in conflict

with each other, so that you

do not do what you want.”

Galatians 5:16, 17

The Soul

Our Human Soul: What many call our conscience, the Bible calls the soul. The soul receives information from the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). The soul consists of:

- a. My mind (my ability to reason);
- b. My emotions (my ability to feel);
- c. My will (my ability to choose).

In Hebrew, the word for soul is nephesh (neh-fesh). Translated, it means a life, a living being; soul, self, person, mind, personality; inner desires and feelings. This noun occurs more than 750 times and is a very significant word in the Bible. Unlike the English word "soul," which usually describes only the inner person and is contrasted with the outer person, nephesh describes the whole person as a unit, that is a life, a living creation. The mind and emotions feed information and assert direction upon the will. Those who have not received Christ as Lord and Savior make all of their decisions based entirely from this highly subjective level. Christians who have not learned to distinguish between that which comes from the soul and that which comes from the Holy Spirit are also subject to this soulful, conscious level. ALL decisions flowing out of this level of will are dictated by the soul (what we think and how we feel). Let's read that again: ALL decisions flowing out of this level of will are dictated by the soul (what we think and how we feel). Major life-changing decisions should NEVER be based on our soul response.

The Human Spirit

Our Human Spirit: ruach (roo-ach) meaning Spirit, wind, breath. This word occurs nearly 400 times. Generally ruach is translated "spirit" whether concerning the human spirit, a distressing spirit (1 Samuel 16:23), or the Spirit of God. Just as there is a conscious area of our lives, there is an unconscious area called our subconscious. The Bible calls this the spirit. For those not born-again, this area is present, but "dead" to God meaning the person is unable to have a relationship with God; it is dark, chaotic, confused, uncertain, and void of any truthful direction; it simply lies dormant. Or conscience is a function of the spirit, but the conscience can be very misleading. Non-Christians who seek guidance from this "inner power" are often misled, uncertain and perplexed.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord He begins to assert His authority over and in our lives"- we are born-again. The spirit within is made alive at this new birth. Does this mean only Christians do good? Of course not - many people do well to others. On a relative scale, many are moral, kind, and law-abiding. Only through being united with Christ's perfect life can we become good in God's sight.

The Bible emphasizes that we do not need to live any longer under sin's power. Christ miraculously destroyed the penalty of sin and its power over us on the Cross. Through faith in Christ we stand acquitted, or not guilty, before God (Romans 3:21, 22). God does not take us out of the world or make us robots - we will still feel like sinning, and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we became Christians, we were dead in sin and were slaves to our sinful, soulful nature. But now we are alive with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Our spirit then became a place of glory and beauty, fully under the control of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us as we allow Him to guide us.

We must learn to discern between our soul-to-spirit response and our Spirit-to-spirit response. It is only when we choose to "be still" in the presence of God and meditate on His Word and will that we begin to discover His will for us. This has been called "practicing His presence" and can be achieved each and every moment of our lives - this is not reserved for the super-saint; it is God's perfect plan for those who seek first His kingdom.

"We must learn to discern between our soul response and our Spirit-to-spirit response. It is only when we choose to "quieten" ourselves in the presence of God and meditate on His Word and will that we begin to discover His will for us."

LET'S REVIEW:



“May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”

2 Thessalonians 3:5

1. The body receives information from what five areas? _____

2. The soul is made up of what three things? _____

3. What are the three spiritual categories of man? Which one best represents you? Would others agree? _____

4. Do you believe that there are differing levels of spiritual maturity? How can you know if someone is walking in the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22)? Are you daily asking to be filled and led by God’s Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

5. What does the Bible say about Christians being “carnal” or “worldly” (1 Cor. 3:1-23)? Describe some characteristics of those who are worldly and those who are spiritual: _____

4

PRINCIPLE NUMBER FOUR:

GOD’S WORD & THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we try and discover God’s will, our next step should be to seek the will of the Spirit through, or in connection with, the Word of God.

The Bible and the Holy Spirit are always available to you. Keep reading and looking for the Holy Spirit’s leading. Read the Bible and meditate upon it. We know God through prayer and meditation upon His own Word.

Regarding God’s Word, the Bible says:

“My son, keep your Father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life . . . “ (Proverbs 6:20)

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Ps. 119:105)

God’s Word guides us. It is both Word and Spirit. Not just one, but both. In every life situation, God’s Word and the Spirit will always bear witness. They will never contradict each other. There may be occasions when we feel led to make a decision, but it may be a clear violation of God’s Word. Both Word and Spirit must always be in agreement with each other. The Bible says:

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen. 1:2, 3; 26; 2:7)

God provides a pattern or principle of how the Word and Spirit work together. The Word of God and the Spirit of God work in harmony. There are some who follow the Word of God only. There are others who follow only the Spirit. It is never just one over the other, but both working together in agreement. It is a balance and a commitment to character (fruit) with a pursuit for the charismata (gifts).

To maintain balance, the Holy Spirit will always be in agreement with God’s Word. Where there is all Word and no Spirit there is condemnation and death. Where there is all Spirit and no Word, there is confusion and no order.

In today’s religious environment, the most prevailing and telltale sign of Christian immaturity is Biblical illiteracy. Most people don’t read God’s Word and don’t understand God’s will, His ways, or His character. God is revealed in His Word. If we don’t know His Word we can’t know Him and should not expect to know His will.

We live in a time of political correctness, moral relativity, and rapidly declining theologically balanced, biblically strong guidance. But the truth is, if the Bible clearly says “no” then the answer to our situation or question is always “no.” If the Bible is clearly “yes” then the answer is clearly “yes”. If the situation falls into what appears to be a “gray” area – where there is no clear Scriptural conclusion – we should look for a pattern across the Scripture and then follow the remaining principles.



4

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The biggest threat in the church 2,000 years ago and today is legalism. Jesus revealed this problem and Paul wrote of it in his letters to the Corinthian church.

“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:1-18)

Old Testament Covenant	New Testament Covenant
Letter	Spirit
Ink.....	Spirit
Stone	Hearts
Death.....	Spirit
Condemnation.....	Righteousness

“The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” means that trying to keep the Old Testament laws will end in death. Only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ can we receive eternal life through the Holy Spirit. No one but Jesus has ever fulfilled the law perfectly. As a result, the whole world is condemned to death. The law makes us realize our sin, but it cannot give life.

Under the New Covenant, eternal life comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives new life to all who believe in Christ. The moral law (Ten Commandments) still points out sin and shows us how to obey God, but forgiveness comes only through the grace and mercy of Christ (Rom. 7:10-8:2). Through the Holy Spirit, God provides freedom from sin and condemnation (Rom. 8:1). When you trust Christ to save you, He removes your heavy burden of trying to please Him and your guilt for failing to do so. By trusting Christ you are loved, accepted, forgiven and freed to live for Him. This is what it means when the Bible says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Cor. 3:17)

In Matthew 9:17 Jesus says that the Word (wineskin) and Spirit (new wine) must work in harmony. For the Holy Spirit to have expression it must be contained and channeled through the Word. The Word is the structure. The Holy Spirit is life. The Holy Spirit will never contradict the Word. There is direction, focus and impact when the Holy Spirit is channeled. This provides us with limits, balance and protection. The freedom this provides is remarkable.

In effect, the freedom we have allows us opportunity to violate any limit, boundary, or restriction placed upon us not found in God’s Word to the extent that it first does no harm. Usually, these limits are man-made regulations, customs, and traditions having nothing to do with Scripture. Though these rules may have served a good purpose and were conceived with good intentions, they often times place people beneath a heavy taskmaster and ultimately make God’s Word of no effect.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (John 1:1; 14)

Jesus was the first Spirit-filled believer. He became the very Word of God. He trained for ministry for 30 years, the Holy Spirit came upon Him, and then He began His ministry for a period of just over three years.

“...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” (Acts 10:38)

“Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do

“Jesus was the first Spirit-filled believer. He became the very Word of God. He trained for ministry for 30 years, the Holy Spirit came upon Him, and then He began His ministry for a period of just over three years.”

nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” (John 5:19)

“So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” (John 8:28)

Jesus limited Himself only to what was in the Word. He violated traditions of man, but never the Word.

For many, it is a daily struggle to try and keep the Word. There is not a day that we don't struggle with trying to keep God's Word and walk in the Spirit. We must continually come into agreement with the Word. The end result is a life-style wholly submitted to God. It is a moment-by-moment refilling of the Holy Spirit.

The frequency of our success in hearing from God directly increases as we apply these principles. Consistent guidance without God's Word is impossible.

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:8, 9)

We must remember that gifts of the Holy Spirit are what God does; the fruit of the Holy Spirit is who He is. Both are needed in balance for us to become all God desires of us.

Because the fruit of the Spirit involves character, as compared with the gifts (which involve divinely given abilities), some tend to prioritize or neglect one at the expense of the other. But it should be noted that God's Word does not prioritize one above the other. Even the fact that they number the same – nine each – seems to indicate God's balance on the issue.

We can be used in the gifts while we grow in the fruit of the Spirit. All of these processes are for us now. They are all of grace and they are all for Jesus Christ's glory.

We need balance. It is both the Word and the Spirit working in harmony. It is a commitment to character with a pursuit for the charismata.

What has the Holy Spirit said?

A great deal of suffering, loss of resources, broken and destroyed relationships, misunderstandings and misconceptions about the Holy Spirit could be avoided. Most of the pain most of us encounter is the result of self-inflicted spiritual gun shot wounds. Still, God assures us that He will guide us, but we need to be obedient to His Word.

We must remember, the bigger the decision, the more risk, the more confirmation and witness we need before we make a decision.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel for them.” (Acts 16:7-10)



“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Ephesians 6:12

The “Spirit of Jesus” is another name for the Holy Spirit. In this passage of Scripture, we learn that the Holy Spirit had closed the door twice for Paul, so Paul must have wondered which direction to take in spreading the gospel. Then, in a vision, Paul was given specific direction, and he and his companions obediently traveled into Macedonia.

It is important to note that the Holy Spirit guides us to the right places, but He also guides us away from the wrong places. As we seek God’s will, it is important to know what God wants us to do and where He wants us to go, but it is as equally important to know what God does not want us to do and where He does not want us to go.

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Phillip, “Go south to the road - the desert road- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (Acts 8:26)

In following God’s leading, it may seem to be a demotion at times. Follow anyway. At first you may not understand His plans, but the results will prove that God’s ways are always right.

“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” (1 John 2:18-20, 26)

“You have an anointing from the Holy One” could read, “The Holy Spirit has been given to you by the Father and the Son.” When you became a Christian, you received the Holy Spirit.

One way the Holy Spirit helps us is by communicating truth. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit guides believers to Him (John 16:13). People who are opposed to Christ are also opposed to His truth, and the Holy Spirit is not working in their lives. When the Spirit leads us, we can stand against false teachers and the spirit of the antichrist. Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to teach His followers and to remind them of all that Christ had taught (John 14:26). As a result, Christians have the Holy Spirit within them (“the anointing”) to help keep them from going astray.

In addition, believers have God’s inspired Scriptures, against which we can test questionable teachings. To stay true to Christ, we must follow His Word and His Spirit.

God is three persons in one – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to offer salvation to all people through spiritual renewal and rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, His physical presence left the earth, but He promised to send the Holy Spirit so that His spiritual presence would still be among mankind (Luke 24:29).

The Holy Spirit first became available to all believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit empowered specific individuals for specific purposes. Now all believers have the power potential of the Holy Spirit available to them.

At Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believed in Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit (are baptized with Him) when we receive Jesus Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit must be understood in light of His total work in Christians.

“We must remember that gifts of the Holy Spirit are what God does; the fruit of the Holy Spirit is who He is - both are needed in balance for us to become all God desires of us.”



“I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

Galatians 3:2, 3

- The Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot belong to Christ without His Spirit (Rom. 8:9).
- We cannot be united to Christ without His Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).
- We cannot be adopted as His children without His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6, 7).
- We cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).
- The Holy Spirit is the power of our new lives. He begins a lifelong process of change as we become more like Christ (Gal. 3:3; Phil 1:6). When we receive Christ by faith, we begin an immediate personal relationship with God. The Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ.
- The Holy Spirit unites the Christian community in Christ (Eph. 2:19-22).
- The Holy Spirit can be experienced by all, and He desires to work through all if allowed (1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:4).

The Holy Spirit is God’s seal that we belong to Him and is His deposit guaranteeing that He will do what He has promised. The Holy Spirit is like a validating signature on a contract. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us demonstrates the genuineness of our faith, proves that we are God’s children, and secures eternal life for us. His power works in us to transform us now, and what we experience now is a taste of the total change we will experience in eternity.

The following passages from John teach these additional truths about the Holy Spirit:

- He will be with us forever (John 14:16)
- The world at large cannot accept Him (John 14:17)
- He lives with us and in us (John 14:17)
- He teaches us (John 14:26)
- He reminds us of Jesus’ words (John 14:26; 15:26)
- He convicts us of sin, shows us God’s righteousness, and announces God’s judgment on evil (John 16:8)
- He guides into truth and gives insight into future events (John 16:13)
- He brings glory to Christ (John 16:14)

The Holy Spirit has been active among people from the beginning of time, but after Pentecost (Acts 2), He came to live in all believers. Many people are unaware of the Holy Spirit’s activities, but to those who hear Christ’s words and understand the Spirit’s power, the Spirit gives a whole new way to look at and address life.

You won’t know that the Holy Spirit has come if you are waiting for a certain feeling; you will know He has come because Jesus promised He would. When the Holy Spirit is working within you, you will:

- Believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Son and that eternal life comes through Him (1 John 5:5)
- Begin to act as Christ directs (Rom. 8:5; Gal. 5:22, 23)
- Find help in your daily problems and your prayer life (Rom. 8:26, 27)
- Be empowered to serve God and do His will (Acts 1:8; Rom. 12:6)
- Become part of God’s plan to build up His Church (Eph. 4:12, 13).

All believers are baptized by one Holy Spirit into one body of believers, the Church. We don’t lose our individual identities, but we have an overriding oneness in Christ. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit takes up residence, and he or she is born into God’s family. “We were all given the one Spirit to drink” means that the same Holy Spirit completely fills our innermost beings. As members of God’s family, we may have different interests and gifts, but we have a common goal.

Paul mentions two gifts God gives when we become believers:

- A seal of ownership to show whom our master is.
- The Holy Spirit, who guarantees that we belong to Him and will receive all His benefits (Eph. 1:13, 14). The Holy Spirit guarantees that salvation is ours now, and that we will receive so much more when Christ returns.

Christ lives (remains) in us through the Holy Spirit, and we also live in Christ. This means that to the degree that we place our trust in Him, rely on Him for guidance and strength, and live as He wants us to live, we are being Holy Spirit led. It implies a personal, life-giving relationship. John uses the same idea in John 15:5, where he speaks of Christ as the vine and His followers as the branches.

Because “being led of the Holy Spirit” is the most subjective of the seven guidance principles, it can also be the most dangerous. It can usually be identified by statements such as, “God told me...” or “I feel led to...” The problem with such statements is that when someone begins a statement with “God told me” they are communicating an unwillingness to hear from anyone else. They are saying there is no higher authority to appeal to and that they have been to the mountain and have heard from God. In such instances, the person does not desire counsel. They simply want their way. A better approach would be to say something like, “I sense the Lord has said such-and-such to me, but I also realize I am fully capable of missing Him. So, what do you think?” In this instance, the person asking for counsel is sincerely attempting to hear from God and is evidenced by their willingness to submit their plans to others and hear what they might suggest. The Bible says:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:15, 16)

Some people think that worldliness is limited to external behavior – the people we associate with, the places we go, the activities we enjoy. Worldliness is also internal because it begins in the heart, and is characterized by any of the following three attitudes:

1. Lust of the flesh - pleasure, preoccupation with gratifying desires, to feel something.
2. Lust of the eyes - bowing to the god of materialism, to have something, especially financial increase.
3. Pride of life - obsession with status or importance or position, to be something, position and authority.

When the serpent tempted Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:6), he tempted her in these same three areas. Likewise, Jesus was tempted of Satan in the desert in the same three areas (Mth. 4:1-11). Satan’s methods have not changed. We all are tempted in the same three areas. Some Christians don’t think it’s important to understand the “wiles” of our enemy, but could you imagine going into a real wartime battle today not knowing anything about the enemy? Knowing how the enemy operates can help us overcome temptation and help us discern God’s will.

God values self-control (discipline), a spirit of generosity, and a commitment to humble service. It is possible to give the impression of avoiding worldly pleasures while still harboring worldly attitudes in your heart. It is also possible, like Jesus, to love sinners and spend time with them while maintaining a commitment to the values of God’s kingdom.

“The Holy Spirit is God’s seal that we belong to Him and is His deposit guaranteeing that He will do what He has promised.”



“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Galatians 5:22, 23

The devil’s temptations focus on three crucial areas:

1. Physical needs and desires;
2. Possessions, position, and power;
3. Pride.

It’s interesting to note that Jesus wasn’t tempted inside the temple or at His baptism, but in the desert where He was tired, alone, and hungry, and as a result, at His most vulnerable. The devil often tempts us when we are vulnerable – when we are under physical or emotional stress (for example, lonely, tired, weighing big decisions, or faced with uncertainty, and many times, just after we’ve experienced a spiritual breakthrough). But he also likes to tempt us through our strengths, where we are most susceptible to pride. We must guard at all times against his attacks.

Some of the ways God has provided for us to thwart the devil’s attacks:

- Exercise self-control, live a “disciplined” life; be a disciple of Jesus in every area of our personal lives (mentally, physically, spiritually);
- Exercise a spirit of generosity;
- Commitment to humble service (serving, not being served).

There is potential in all of us to walk in greater truth than we presently do, but the principles of God’s Word must be in place to help us get there.

LET’S REVIEW:

1. God’s eternal Word and the Holy Spirit always bear witness to our decisions. Have I ever moved out on just one or the other? What was the outcome? How can I become surer of the decisions I make? _____

2. What are some examples of “Word” only versus “Spirit” only demonstrations in my life? What can I learn from employing both? _____

3. There are many absolutes in the Bible, but what do I do in areas where there are no specific answers? What are some key considerations regarding my decision when there is no clear Scriptural direction? _____

4. What does it mean, “where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom?” Can I abuse those God-given freedoms? In what ways can I always know if my freedom is not according to God’s will? _____

5. Jesus was the first “Holy Spirit-filled” man. Am I filled with God’s Spirit? Do I find myself feeling “empty” during the day? How can I be “refilled?”

6. List the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Remember that gifts promote you, but character holds you. Are there areas in my life where I

desire the gifts of God over the character of God? In what areas do I need to allow God to work? _____

7. Why is it important to have several people confirm a big decision you're about to make? Provide a recent example: _____

8. The "anointing" is spoken of quite often. What is the anointing? _____

9. List seven key endeavors of the Holy Spirit: _____

10. What are the two gifts given by God for those who accept Christ? _____

11. When someone comes to you and says "God told me" what higher authority can you appeal to? What is this person really saying? How can you deal with this type situation? _____

12. Worldliness can be described in what three attitudes? _____

13. Satan focuses on what three main tactics in our lives? _____

14. Though "hearing the Holy Spirit" is essential in knowing God's will, it should never be considered by itself. Three ways I can guard against Satan's attacks are: _____

"The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Spirit produces these character traits that are found in the nature of Christ. They are the by-products of Christ's control - we can't obtain them by trying to get them without His help anymore than we can become a car by sitting in a garage."

PRAYER

Father, I am committing myself to Your Word. Open my eyes to the truth of Your Word so that I can overcome my own selfish desires for position, power, and pride. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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PRINCIPLE NUMBER FIVE: REFLECTION

The fifth step includes asking ourselves three important questions: What are others saying? What is the situation and timing? Is there provision?

What are others saying?

Many times, God communicates and confirms His will for us through others. As you contemplate your decision, consider what others have been saying to you. They will see in you and encourage you to follow God’s promptings.

Other times, God may direct your path by closing a direction. He did this with the Apostle Paul.

“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardship are facing me.” (Acts 20:22, 23)

“Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.” (Acts 21:3-14)

We must understand and not be afraid of allowing others to speak into our lives. The life of the New Testament Church is intended to be blessed by the presence of the gift of prophecy (speaking forth the mind and counsel of God). In noting love as our primary pursuit, Paul states in 1 Cor. 14:1 that prophecy is to be welcomed for the “edification and exhortation and comfort” of the congregation”– corporately and individually. Such encouragement of each other is “prophecy” (not “words” in the sense of the Bible, which uses the very words of God), but in the sense of human words the Holy Spirit uniquely brings to mind for another person. These simply serve to encourage and confirm us.

In the New Testament, prophecy is mostly of one type falling into three broad categories: encouragement, edification, and exhortation.

“But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” (1 Cor. 14:3)

- Edification: builds up
- Exhortation: encourages
- Comfort: cheers you up especially in time of trouble

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The prophetic is powerful, but it can also do harm if we don’t establish and follow certain boundaries. For example, the Corinthian Church was a spiritual “power house” that abused their spiritual gifts - they had all the gifts in operation. Discontinuance of spiritual gifts was not Paul’s solution to the abuse; the guidelines he has given provides safeguards assuring order in any meeting or service if followed.

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” (1 Cor. 14:26)

The Bible says that we should not ignore nor toss aside the gifts the Holy Spirit gives. In 1 Cor. 5:20, Paul mentions prophecy (5:20); in 1 Corinthians 14:39, he mentions tongues. Sometimes spiritual gifts are controversial, and they may cause division in a church. Rather than trying to solve the problems, some Christians prefer to smother the gifts - this weakens the church. We should not stifle the Holy Spirit’s work in anyone’s life but encourage the full expression of these gifts to benefit the whole body of Christ.



“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire...” (1 Thess. 5:19)

We shouldn’t make fun of those who don’t agree with what we believe (“treat prophecies with contempt”), but we should always “test everything,” checking their words against the Bible. We are on dangerous ground if we scoff at a person who speaks the truth. Instead we should carefully check out what others say, accepting what is true and rejecting what is false.

“...do not treat prophecies with contempt.” (1 Thess. 5:20)

“Test everything. Hold on to the good.” (1 Thess. 5:21)

The bottom line is simply that we should hear words of encouragement as such and place them into our thinking as we attempt to discover God’s will for us.

What is the situation & timing?

“...Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (2 Cor. 13:1)

“...for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” (Pro. 24:16)

Many times, the situation and/or timing can provide guidance as we attempt to know God’s will for us. However, the situation and timing can also be misleading if not brought into balance. Let’s take a look at a story from the Bible and see if we can discover how God used the situation and timing to reveal His will.

“When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam’s foot against it. So he beat her again. Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left.” (Num. 22:25-26)

The account concerning Balaam’s donkey serves as a lesson in understanding God’s timing and circumstances. We learn that one generation has died and a new generation stands poised at the border, ready to enter the promised land. Neighboring nations, however, cause Israel to begin worshiping other gods. Balak was a king who feared the large number of Israelites traveling through his country, so he hired Balaam, a prophet, to pronounce a curse on them. Balaam refused at first, but an offer of money changed his mind. Later Balaam influenced the Israelites to turn to idol worship. God let Balaam go with Balak’s messengers, but he was angry about Balaam’s greedy attitude. Balaam claimed that he would not go against God just for money, but his resolve was beginning to slip. His greed for the wealth offered by the king blinded him so that he could not see how God was trying to stop him.

Donkeys were used for transportation, carrying loads, grinding grain, and plowing fields. They were usually highly dependable, which explains why Balaam became so angry when his donkey refused to move. The donkey saved Balaam’s life but made him look foolish in the process, so Balaam lashed out at the donkey. We sometimes strike out at blameless people who get in our way because we are embarrassed or our pride is hurt. Lashing out at others can be a sign that something is wrong with us. We should never allow pride to lead us to hurt others.

Sometimes your donkey – circumstance – can save your life. Realize that not all restraint or opposition is from the devil. God will often oppose those whose ways are reckless before Him.

“The life of the New Testament Church is intended to be blessed by the presence of the gift of prophecy (speaking forth the mind and counsel of God).”



“By faith we understand

that the universe was formed

at God’s command, so that

what is seen was not made

out of what was visible.”

Hebrews 11:3

Though we may know what God wants for us to do, we can become blinded by the desire for money, possessions, or prestige. We can avoid Balaam’s mistake by looking past the allure of fame or fortune to the long-range benefits of following God.

God can guide you through circumstances. Often times believers say that an open door or closed door are the signs they look for – this is not a very reliable means of determining God’s will. For instance, God used circumstances to confirm Elijah (ravens, considered dirty), the prodigal (the pigpen was part of God’s plan), Paul (the island of Malta), and John (island of Patmos).

Sometimes detours are in God’s will, sometimes they are not. Circumstances demand evaluation. God sometimes gives you something that’s not in His will to bring you back into His will, but God will never do something that will violate your will (choice).

Like Balaam, we most often see only the circumstance, i.e., a flat tire, demotion, losing a job, no promotion, financial troubles, etc., as negative problems. In reality, God could be using these circumstances to save you! They sometimes force us to go in another direction.

God uses friends, situations, elders, brothers and/or sisters, whatever it takes to get us to listen to Him. He usually begins very gently and if we don’t listen, proceeds by increasing the pressure.

Others around those who can’t seem to see the truth ask, “Why can’t he see the truth – it’s so obvious.” They can’t because they are deceived.

If we as believers were to evaluate Noah, Moses, Jonah, Joseph, Daniel, Jeremiah, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Jesus, Stephen, Paul, etc. based solely on their circumstances we would most likely conclude that all of the great men and women of God were out of His will. Yet, these were honored as having been faithful. It appears we devalue that which God esteems many times. We usually define success as to numbers; not so with God’s faithful.

Think about this for a moment. Stephen preached one sermon and was stoned to death. How many of us would train for a lifetime for ten minutes of presentation? Yes, God sometimes sacrifices one for millions (think in terms of His Son). It is the power of One.

“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:10)

Others were tortured, mocked, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, tempted, slain with a sword, destitute, afflicted, tormented. Others subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, made strong, became mighty in battle, turned their enemies to flight, and received their dead raised to life again (Heb. 11).

If your position – attitude is to always blame others you’ll always remain a victim. We are to take responsibility for our behavior. This is paramount to maturing in Christ and deepening our ability to hear God.

We must understand that sometimes we must speak to our circumstances - sometimes our circumstances speak to us.

Regardless of circumstance or situation God says we are never to be afraid. Faith is able to trust God and not act out of fear.

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:5)

We must understand that fear shows lack of faith in God and His promises.

Rely on the Lord's protection against verbal attacks and do not fear them. Believe that God honors faith that is stronger than death.

If you rate everything based on whether you feel blessed or only as things are going your way, you're in for major disappointments. Remember that God gave His only Son so that many could become the sons of God.

In Christianity there is certainty in uncertainty. We all face storms. We are either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or a storm is on the horizon. Regardless, there are always storms. Humility is always the best posture regardless the weather.

Balaam said, "I did not know..." God says that if we want to know the truth that He will guide us – if we are obedient and humble. If you respond according to God's response, it won't matter the outcome, you'll discover God's will for you.

Is there provision?

The entire universe is governed by God's principles. Principles are fundamental "laws" that govern life. A part of spiritual maturity is learning God's principles and then ordering our life according to those principles.

From Abraham to the apostles, God has provided a trail of models who have marked the way following the path of faith: the price is unselfishness, service, sacrifice, and giving. From their journeys, another fact becomes clearly evident: God's promise of abundant blessing to those who are sacrificial, self-giving servants of His. God promises (covenants) to those who are His disciples to

- 1) bless,
- 2) prosper, and
- 3) abound.

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Gen. 8:22)

When God created the first living thing, He gave it the ability to grow and multiply. How? Through the seed. Your life began by the seed principle. Every act of your life since your birth has operated by the seed principle, springing from good seeds or bad seeds you have sown, whether or not you were consciously aware of your seed-planting. The principle continues today. To overcome life's problems, reach your potential in life, see your life become fruitful, multiplied, replenished, in health, finance, spiritual renewal, family or your entire being, determine to follow God's law of seedtime and harvest. Don't be deceived. What you sow is what you reap.

God gives us resources to use and invest for Him. Paul uses the illustration of seed to explain that the resources God gives us are not to be hidden, foolishly devoured, or thrown away. Instead, they should be cultivated in order to produce more crops. When we invest what God has given us in His work, He will provide us with even more to give in His service.

We should not expect to become wealthy through giving. Those who receive your gifts will be helped, will praise God, and will pray for you. As you bless others, you will be blessed. If it's God's will, He will provide.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."
(Gal. 6:7-9)

"We walk by faith not by sight. Sometimes we speak to our circumstances. Sometimes our circumstances speak to us."

LET'S REVIEW:



*“Follow the way of love
and eagerly desire spiritual
gifts, especially the gift of
prophecy.”*

1 Corinthians 14:1

1. What are some reasons that prophetic confirmation is not used in the church today? _____

2. Prophecy should produce what three results? _____

3. Who is to judge the validity of all prophecy? By what standards? _____

4. Do you believe God still speaks through individuals? If not, why not? Do you think a prophetic word still continues today? If not, why not? _____

5. Many spirit-filled Christians believe that when they are under the control of the Holy Spirit that they cannot help but to say what is on their minds. Is this true? What does the Bible say? _____

6. What does the Bible say about men and women who give prophecy? Are there any differences? Similarities? _____

7. Why is timing important in discovering God's will? Give an example where you heard from God, but moved out too soon: _____

8. How much should you depend on circumstances when making a major decision? For example, an opportunity for new employment in another city presents itself. More money, better title. What do you do? _____

9. In what circumstances have you ever “beaten your donkey?” What can you learn from this practical story? _____

10. In what situation/circumstance have you found yourself where you thought you were detoured only to realize later that it was God’s sovereign Hand guiding you all along? What can you learn that needs to be applied to your situation today? _____

11. What is in each of us that causes us to blame others when we don’t get what we want? What needs to change? Do you accept responsibility for your actions? Would your closest friend agree? _____

12. Do you believe that because things are going well today in your life (financially your doing OK, your spouse is madly in love with you, the boss has just given you the corner office, and you just received a \$1,000,000 check in the mail) that God is blessing you? Take both sides to this issue and discuss: _____

“The main purpose of prophecy is to communicate God’s message to people, providing insight, warning, correction, and encouragement.”

PRAYER

Lord God, I want to know You and Your will. Help me to hear what others are saying, to understand the situation and the timing, and to consider Your provision before I move out on major decisions. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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PRINCIPLE NUMBER SIX: PRAYER

Throughout the entire “Discovering God’s Will process” it is critically important to maintain a posture of humility and prayer. It is at this point that you specifically ask God in prayer to reveal His will to you – what to do.

Thankfully we can be up front and direct with God – He loves us unconditionally and knows our deepest needs. Praying involves communication between you and God. It involves you sharing and listening – listening within your heart and to those people whom God chooses to speak to you. If you want a life of prayer, the way to get it is by praying. Don’t worry if you don’t know what to say, just take a few minutes each day and try talking and listening to God. If you can’t find any other time, pick a time when you can be alone and quiet, like in the shower, while riding the bus, by taking a walk, or before you go to sleep. Take the time for prayer truly works.

God created us to have fellowship with Him (Genesis 3:8) and to appoint us to rule over the Earth (Genesis 1:28). He desires that we share in His Kingdom through prayer. Prayer is the pathway for fellowship with God and releasing spiritual authority.

Samuel Chadwick wrote, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

Prayer is simply your talking with and listening to God. It is a dialogue; you talk, God listens – God talks, you listen. Prayer can take many forms such as:

- Thanksgiving (Psalm 100);
- Confession (Psalm 51);
- Intercession (John 17);
- Petition (Colossians 1:9-14);
- Communion (Psalm 139).

In prayer, submission is the gateway to receiving God’s fullest blessings. Jesus said, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). Jesus placed a priority on prayer.

Seven Steps of Focused Prayer:

Jesus teaches that prayer is focused. Although Jesus says we are actually to say this prayer, He does not suggest that this become a rigid ritual, but that it is to be used as a guide to prayer:

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13)

Our Father:

To begin, we must silence the activity of our noisy environment and soul, thinking about Who God is and who we are in relationship to Him – we are His children, He is our Father.

Hallowed be Your Name:

Enter His presence through praise and worship; as you think about Him, speak to Him of His goodness and virtue.

Your Kingdom come:

Ask for the establishment of God’s rule today in the lives and circumstances of those in authority (government at all levels, those in places of leadership, the church, etc.), your family, your loved ones, those



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in need of prayer as you remember them in meditation, as well as yourself.

Give us:

Pray daily asking for God's provision as He sees fit – learn to be content with whatever he provides; invite the Holy Spirit daily, moment-by-moment, to empower you for worship, witness, and warfare (Galatians 5:16). Ask God for direction regarding your situation.

And forgive us:

Ask God to forgive you knowing that God will only forgive our sins as we forgive others who have sinned against us; if you have something you've been holding against another brother or sister in Christ, it is imperative that you go to that person and mend the relationship, asking God to forgive you – and being at peace – regardless of the outcome, that you've done all you can to bring healing and restoration to the relationship.

And do not lead us:

Ask for God's strength to stand in His might; put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20); pray for a hedge of protection about yourself and your loved ones.

For Yours is the kingdom:

Thank God for sharing His kingdom, power and glory with you.

End by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN" (John 14:13, 14). We must remember that our asking must be in Jesus' name – Jesus Christ – and according to God's character and will. God will not grant requests contrary to His nature or His will, and we cannot use His name as a magic formula to fulfill our selfish desires. If we are sincerely following God and seeking to do His will, then our requests will be in line with what He desires, and He will grant them in His time (John 15:16; 16:23).

Once you get into the joy of prayer, things begin to happen. There's something about opening ourselves to God that changes the way we look at the world and each other. It's harder for us to be mean to someone when we remember that God actually watches and hears everything we say.

As your ongoing conversation with God (prayer) continues, new insights will emerge to you. Some recognize these insights in their hearts. Most of us hear them through the comments and observations of others who are close to us. For example, two unrelated individuals may say something like, "You are so good with teenagers; did you ever think of becoming a youth leader?" Or "You care so much; you'd make a good pastor." We all have doubts and God knows we are doubtful, but provides confirmation of our insights to reduce our fears and build our faith – so trust they'll be there. Just open your eyes and heart and pay attention. This is the way most of us "hear from God" – some person or group of people let us know that they saw or heard something we did or said and we trusted them enough to give it a try. As a result, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge.

Through each of these steps you should have a good idea of what to do. This whole process will calm your soul and bring you to a place closer to God, and better able to understand what He has to say to you.

"Once you get into the joy of prayer, things begin to happen. There's something about opening ourselves to God that changes the way we look at the world and each other. It's harder for me to be mean to someone when I remember that God actually watches and hears everything I say."

LET'S REVIEW:



*“he predestined us to be
adopted as his sons through
Jesus Christ, in accordance
with his pleasure and will”*

Ephesians 1:5

1. How would you describe your prayer life? Explain: _____

2. Is your conversation with God like that toward your best friend? Should it be? Why or why not? _____

3. Why does Satan not want us to pray? What takes place when you pray to God? _____

4. There are many types of prayer. Give an example of each: _____

5. Review Ephesians 1:15-22. How is it that Paul did not cease to give thanks? How can you maintain an attitude of prayer throughout your day for the rest of your life? _____

6. In discovering God's will, how does the "binding and loosing" fit in (Mth. 16:18, 19)? _____

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PRINCIPLE NUMBER SEVEN: CONFIRMATION

We all need more spiritually mature brothers and sisters speaking into our lives. If we desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and therefore, through trial, be strengthened.

What have godly counselors said?

God is not a God of confusion, but of order and peace. He wants His children to know Him. The question we need to ask is, "Why do people fail in the area of hearing from God so often?" Every major decision requires knowledge.

"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established..." (Pro. 24:3)

We must also recognize that each and every Christian can and most likely is deceived in some area of his or her life. The Bible says:

"Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will reap." (Gal. 6:7)

We know what it's like to take a drink from a water hose in summer. No matter how clean and pure the water is coming out of the source, the water coming out of the hose still tastes like water hose. The same is true of much of what we attribute as being from the Holy Spirit. His perfect counsel is just that, perfect. But because it is transferred through imperfect vessels -- "jars of clay" -- it becomes tainted with our own personal opinions, perspectives, and bias.

Many of us have had good, godly counsel that has changed our lives. Counsel is not prophecy. It is usually a recommendation and should be considered only as such.

"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure." (Pro. 11:14)

"...for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers." (Pro. 24:6)

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (Pro. 15:22)

There is safety in a multitude of counsel. When we face a major medical situation, we all seek professional counsel. How much greater is our soul condition and the direction of our lives? King David (a man after God's heart, king, leader, and giant-slayer) had 200 men of Issachar whom he counseled with (1 Chron. 12:32).

In 2 Chron. 10, the Lord raised up Jeroboam against Rehoboam, the successor to Solomon. Here, we see a man consulting with the elders, rejecting their counsel, consulting with a group of young, inexperienced friends, and taking their counsel. As a result, the kingdom was divided.

Why do Christians today who are in trouble go to others who are just like themselves for prayer and advise? Listening to ungodly counsel will always bring division and corruption.

"Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Cor. 15:33)

We all tend to shy away from godly counsel. Could it be that we really don't want to hear what someone else might say? Or is it that we don't want to hear an opposing viewpoint? We must remember that God's counsel is al-



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ways redemptive in nature.

The people we associate will shape our attitudes. If we run with negative people we will soon become negative. Likewise, if we associate with godly, joy-filled people, we will soon find ourselves becoming just like them. Don't walk away from negative, critical people – RUN!

The first mention of counsel is found in Exodus 18. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave Moses advice to delegate responsibility and empower others with authority to make decisions. Moses was God's man of the hour, led Israel out of bondage, stood in the presence of God, was given the commandments of God and still he received godly counsel from his wife's dad!

The Bible says that if you can't receive godly counsel, you are not wise.

"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." (Pro. 9:9)

"But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward." (Jer. 7:24)

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers." (Ps. 1:1)

The friends we choose determines to a great extent our destiny and success in life - godly counsel is a prerequisite for prosperity in its broadest sense. Godly counsel is the mirror that can show us deception. We all need help to see our blind spots. We are to live examined lives.

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD." (Lam. 3:40)

God doesn't give counsel to hurt us but to change us. Changing churches does not solve a problem. If you leave with a problem because you don't agree with the counsel of the elders, you take the problem with you. It will rise up again wherever you go.

"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel." (Pro. 27:9)

We are never to be controlled by another person. It is in a multitude of counsel where safety is found.

"I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." (Is. 1:26)

Finally, anytime there is pressure or an attempt to hurry your decision, just say NO! God is never in a hurry with the decisions He is placing before you. The bigger the decision, the more time is required for direction.

Beginning today, as you commit yourself wholeheartedly to God, prayerfully considering His Kingdom first and foremost, you can begin to realize the very plans God has for you - plans for your best for eternity.

"There is safety in a multitude of counsel. When we face a major medical situation, we all seek professional counsel. How much greater is our soul condition and the direction of our lives?"

LET'S REVIEW:



“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Proverbs 15:22

1. Explain what it means, “there is safety in the multitude of counsel”:

2. If godly counsel is recommended by God, why is it that most people do not seek out godly counselors who might help them? _____

3. If our attitudes are shaped by those we associate with, think about the types of people you associate with and list some attributes you would rather not have as your own. Are there areas where you know you need to change, but have not taken the challenge to change? _____

4. List some types of major decisions you might encounter in life that would necessitate godly counsel. Have you sought godly counsel in these areas? If not, why not? _____

5. Have you ever been pressured to make a quick, major decision in your life? What was your response and the outcome? How can you avoid making snap decisions? What should this tell you and what you might do in the future?

6. Often times, we are more concerned about immediate physical gratification than lasting spiritual satisfaction. We do not want what is best for us, and we refuse to trust in God’s care and provision (Numbers 11:18-33). If you complain enough, God may give you what you ask for, even if it is not the best for you. If you’re not getting what you want, perhaps God knows it is not in your best interest. Are there examples and/or circumstances where you’ve not trusted in His care and provision? Explain: _____

7. Proverbs 15:22 tells us that our plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. What does this mean to you? Do you submit your major, life changing decisions before godly counsel? Why or why not?

8. People with tunnel vision, those who are locked into one way of thinking, are likely to miss the right road because they have closed their minds to any new options. We need the help of those who can enlarge our vision and broaden our perspective. Do you seek the advice of those who know you and have a wealth of experience? Do you have a network of advisers? Are you open to new ideas and willing to weigh their suggestions carefully? Why or why not? _____

PRAYER

Jesus, I know I am deceived in some area of my life and I now commit myself to submitting myself and all major decisions before godly counsel. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

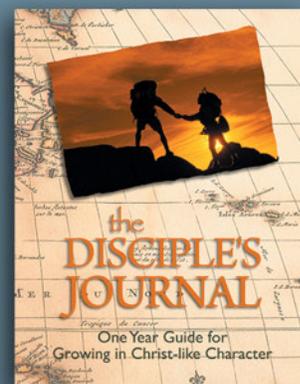
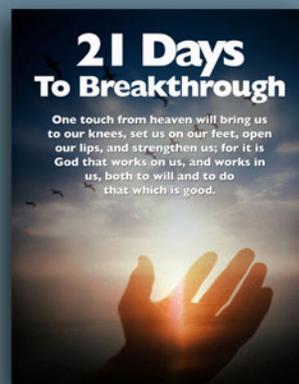
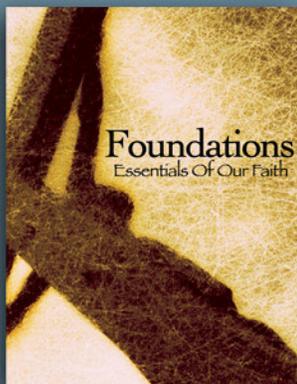
“God longs to guide us with love and wisdom rather than punishment. He offers to teach us the best way to go. Accept the counsel written in God’s Word and don’t let your stubbornness keep you from obeying God.”

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May God grant that we become
His disciples by His grace,

Doug & Suzie Morrell
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