



# GUIDANCE AND DISCERNMENT

JULY 20, 2022

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

-Unknown / African Proverb

## The Discipline of Guidance

This week we are focusing on the Spiritual Discipline of **guidance**. Guidance refers to the prayerful conversations we have with other believers about all aspects of our lives: our faith, our families, our plans for the future, and everything in-between, both big and small.

## Guidance as an Avenue for Spiritual Formation

As you may recall from previous class sessions, we’ve said that the ultimate goal of Spiritual Formation is for God to transform our hearts from the inside out so that our actions and attitudes become a better and better reflection of Jesus (see **Ephesians 4:22-24, Galatians 4:19, and Romans 12:1-2**).

And this is true for Christians everywhere, from every era of church history. Despite the immense diversity of the body of Christ around the world and across the centuries, we all share the same the ultimate goal of being conformed to the image of Christ.

But there’s two important truths that we need to acknowledge about reaching this ultimate goal: (1) It never happens all at once, and (2) everyone’s journey from here to there will be unique, since we’re all starting from specific places and circumstances.

Think about it this way: If two people from opposite sides of town wanted catch up for lunch, they’d probably agree to meet somewhere in the middle. They have the same destination, but they need to

take different roads and sometimes drive in opposite directions in order to arrive at the same place.

For Christians, that’s where the discipline of **guidance** comes in. We know what our ultimate goal is—to be more like Jesus—but it’s not always entirely clear what smaller steps we need to take along the way. For example, how do we know it’s better to enroll at college A or college B? Will choosing a career in medicine or finance be better for my walk with Christ? Does God want us to homeschool our kids so we can guard their hearts or enroll them in public schools so they can be a witness?

When we wrestle with questions like these, *we can and should seek God’s wisdom through prayer and Scripture*. But we need to remember that God has given us another tool for discerning his will: the Godly advice of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Adele Calhoun describes our need for Spirit-filled, Godly mentors this way:

*“We don’t automatically change our ideas, attitudes, and behavioral patterns just because we learn something new that is good for us. Most of us need more help in transformation than that. We need examples, relationships, hands-on experience, support, and empowering. We need mentors. In Christian theology the Holy Spirit is the mentoring nuclear reactor of transformation. And one of the tools in his hand is the body of Christ.”*

-Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

**A Godly mentor will be able to help you recognize the ways God is at work in your life and will be able to help you discern the specific steps God wants you to take in your journey of becoming more like Jesus.** In that sense, guidance a Spiritual Discipline, because it's a way that we open ourselves to the transforming work of God in our lives.

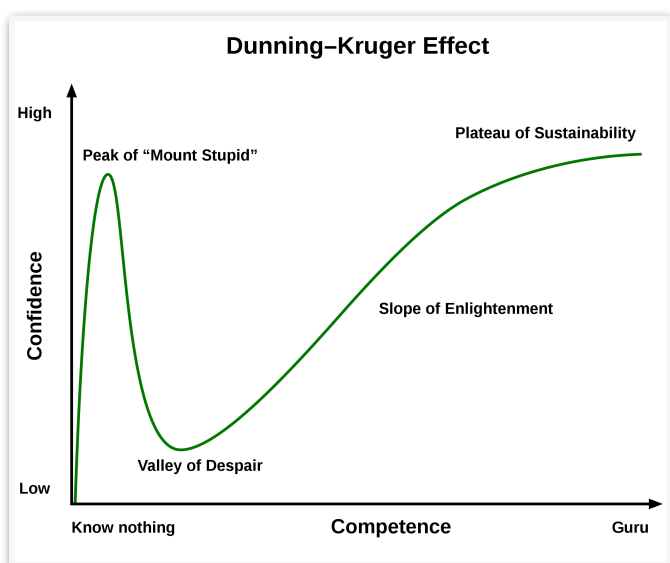
Without this type of Spirit-led guidance from our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are left only with

our own intuition and instincts, which experience (and Scripture) tells us are not always trustworthy guides.

**The rest of this handout covers three reasons why we need the Godly advice of our brothers and sisters in Christ**—starting on the surface level and moving towards a more in-depth discussion of discerning the movements of the Spirit and God's Will together in community.

## Reason #1: We Need the Community of Faith Because We Make a lot of Questionable Decisions on our Own.

- **Proverbs 12:15**, “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.”
- **Proverbs 15:22**, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”



**Dunning-Kruger Effect:** People who perform the lowest on any given test (or measure of ability) are more likely than anyone else to overestimate their abilities.

- **Implication:** *People who would benefit the most from some good advice, encouragement, or mentoring are the last people to think they need it.*
- To learn more, visit <https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/dunning-kruger-effect>.

## Reason #2: We Need the Community of Faith Because God has Chosen to Speak Divine Truth Through Other Christians.

### Example 1: The Old Testament Prophets:

- “The word of the Lord came to (prophet)...”
- **Exodus 19:7**, “So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak.”
- **2 Samuel 24:11-12**, “11 Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer: 12 “Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says...””

### Example 2: The Apostles who wrote the New Testament:

- **1 Corinthians 7:10**, “To the married I give this command (*not I, but the Lord*)...”
- **2 Peter 3:15-16**, “15 Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, *just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.* 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, *as they do the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction.”

### Example 3: Christians with the gift of Speaking:

- **Mark 13:11**, “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”
- **1 Peter 4:10-11**, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. 11 *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God...*”

## Reason #3: We Need the Community To Help us Discern the Will of God in All Areas of our Lives.

### 3A. GOD HAS A WILL: A PLAN, DESIRE, OR PURPOSE FOR OUR LIVES.

**What Do We Mean by “God’s Will”?** “The considered and deliberate divine purpose, intention, or determination... God’s resolve to move toward a certain kind of future for others.” (from the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*)

#### Four Important Points About God’s Will

- It’s always **freely exercised** (i.e. no one forces God to do anything)
- It’s always motivated by **love** towards others and **faithfulness** to God’s own promises.
- God’s will is **resistible** (humans have free will to resist or ignore God’s will)
- There are **timeless, unchanging** aspects of God’s will (e.g. his desire for everyone to know him), as well as **fluid** parts of God’s will that change as a result of human actions (*see below for a discussion of Absolute and Circumstantial Will*).

#### GotQuestions.org Handout— Three Aspects of God’s Will:

1. **Sovereign (or Hidden) Will:** The things God causes or allows that we don’t necessarily know about until they are done.
2. **Revealed Will:** What God has already revealed to us through the Bible.
3. **Dispositional Will:** God’s attitude or deepest desires, e.g. God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4)

#### Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary — Two Aspects of God’s Will

1. **Absolute Will** — The unchanging, big-picture desires that God has for the world (and especially all of us). God’s desires that are broad enough and consistent enough throughout history that they are *always true*.
  - **Example:** God wants everyone to know him, to repent of their sins, and to receive salvation through Jesus (see **1 Timothy 2:3-4** and **2 Peter 3:9** for examples of God’s absolute will).
2. **Circumstantial Will** — God’s plans, purposes or desires for specific people in specific situations. The smaller things that need to happen in order for God’s Absolute Will to come true.
  - In this sense God’s will is *“Living and Active”* (AYBD, cf. Hebrews 4:12).
3. **The Relationship Between Absolute and Circumstantial:**
  - “God’s will for the people moves with their times and places; new occasions teach new duties... Yet, in every change of law or prophecy, the word of God is informed by a will which is faithful and constant...”

### 3B. GOD’S WILL IS KNOWABLE AND ACTIONABLE. IT IS POSSIBLE TO DISCOVER THE WILL OF GOD AND IMPLEMENT IT.

*“The will of God is here understood as something more objective, available to the community of faith; it can be learned and indeed done, the doing of which is considered a delight and not a burden.”* (AYBD)

- **Romans 12:2 (NLT)**, “2 Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. *Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*”
- **Psalms 103:21**, “Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants *who do his will.*”

### 3C. GOD REVEALS HIS WILL IN A VARIETY OF WAYS—INCLUDING THROUGH THE GUIDANCE OF OTHER CHRISTIANS

- **Scripture**—“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” -**2 Timothy 3:16-17**
- **Prayer**—“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” -**James 1:5**
- **Promptings of the Holy Spirit** — “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” -**John 16:13**
- **Dreams, visions, signs** — “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” -**Acts 2:17**.
  - See also Joseph’s dreams in **Matthew 1-2**, Paul’s vision of Jesus in **Acts 9**, Peter’s vision of God’ in **Acts 10**, Paul’s vision of the Man of Macedonia in **Acts 16**, Paul’s vision of God in **Acts 18**, Paul’s vision of God in **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**, and the introduction to Revelation (e.g. **Rev 1:9-11**)
- **Other Christians**—See point #2 (*page 2, right side*).
  - **Acts 1:21-26** — A group discernment process about who would replace Judas as an Apostle.
  - **Acts 6:1-7**—A group discernment process over how to care for the Hellenistic widows (Culturally Greek, religiously Jewish) widows.
  - **Acts 13:1-3** — The Holy Spirit prompted Paul and Barnabas to go and preach during a time of corporate worship. The church community continues to worship with prayer and fasting. Then they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them on a missionary journey.
  - **Acts 15** — A group discernment process on whether or not Gentile converts to Christianity needed to adhere to the Jewish purity laws (like circumcision and a kosher diet)

### 3D. GOD’S WILL CAN BE RESISTED OR MISUNDERSTOOD.

*We need to carefully evaluate claims about God’s will and discern if they really are from God.*

- **Some people will falsely claim to speak for God. We need to recognize the fraudulent messages.**
  - **Matthew 7:15-17** “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.
  - **1 John 4:1**, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
- **The ability to discern is a Spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12) that can also be cultivated through consistent training (Heb. 5)**
  - **1 Corinthians 12:7, 10** “7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another *distinguishing between spirits*, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues...”
  - **Hebrews 5:14**, “14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have *trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*”