

*Hearing
the Voice
of God*

A biblical view of the principles for effective decision-making.

By William Higgins

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Part I

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

You have just graduated from college and are looking for your first full-time employment opportunity. Two or three have opened up, but you are not sure if any of them are the ones that you should pursue. What does the Bible have to say about these decisions?

You recently received an inheritance of \$57,000 and want to be wise on how you spend and invest it. There are several different directions that you are considering. Of course there are a couple of things that you would like to purchase, and there are numerous opportunities for investing and giving. What does the Bible have to say about financial decisions?

You have been dating an individual that you have grown very fond of and very close to. You are serious about the possibility of spending the rest of your lives together. You want to make a wise decision and not just one based on emotion. While there is a lot about your relationship that seems almost too good to be true, there are still lingering doubts. What does the Bible have to say about relational decisions?

You have been fighting the battle of the bulge for years now, trying to maintain your weight and get in better shape. You are aware of all of the fad diets and miracle weight loss systems that are available on the market, but you want to do something that will have long-term results and not just result in short-term weight loss with no long term impact. Does the Bible have anything to say about health decisions?

You are very interested in politics and have contemplated running for office in your local district. You have been active

as a volunteer and have heard some of the stories regarding the temptations that can confront those in the political arena. What does the Bible have to say about these kinds of decisions?

You have been very successful in your vocation and have had the opportunity to earn a measure of respect and notoriety in your field. More opportunities open every year as a result of this and that means that you are away from home more and more. Your home life has never been better, and you want to be sure that you can do your part to keep it that way. Does the Bible have anything to say about these kinds of decisions?

Impact of Advances in Science

Alvin Toffler wrote a significantly insightful and prophetic book that was published in 1970. In *Future Shock* he coined a phrase to describe the 21st century world. He referred to our earth as a “global village.” His thesis was that the transportation and communication advances in the 20th century have made it just as easy to visit or communicate with a town on the other side of the globe as to visit or communicate with a town only a few miles from where you live. This phrase “global village” is weighted with significance for the day in which we live.

Advances in transportation, communication, science, industry and every other field continue to propel us to even greater advances and discoveries. This means rapid and significant change. And drastic change in a relatively short period of time.

The world that our two- and three-year old children will live in as adults will bear little resemblance to the world of today if the change continues at the same pace.

One of the by-products of a rapidly advancing, highly changing society is a constant bombardment with decisions. Many of these decisions will have long-lasting and far-reaching effects. Ask yourself this question, what have been some of the major decisions that I have made over the last year, or even in the last month? You will no doubt find that there have been many that have been important decisions that impact your lifestyle, well-being and future.

We face vocational decisions, financial decisions, relational decisions, decisions about moving, decisions about dating and marriage, decisions about ethics, and many other decisions on a regular basis.

We all make many decisions in the course of a week. Some are very influential and the effects are felt for a long time. Others are relatively simple and the effects are of a much shorter duration. However, all decisions are important. God has something to say about how to make all decisions.

You may be facing a decision at this very time that is of major proportions. For those of you in this position, the pages you are about to read may have a life changing impact on your future. You will read with a real desire to learn and use what you read. You will attack these pages with zeal and apply them with sincerity.

Others of you reading this material will look at it as just more information in a world where you are already overloaded with information. What you read will have little or no affect in your lives. This is true not because the principles in this book are simple and unimportant, but because you will not see how these truths impact you and do not understand that you have a

need for assistance in decision-making. You do not ask for any help, and you do not want any help. The reason that you do not see your need is exactly the same reason that you will not be sensitive to God's leading in the decisions that you make.

All of us will be making decisions over the course of the next several months. By this time next year you will be able to reflect on these decisions and weigh their importance. Some of the decisions that you make you will look back and say that you are glad that you made them as you did. You may be able to see that God was leading and that you made a good decision, and you will be grateful.

For other decisions, you will look back and regret the decisions that you made because you neither saw nor decided according to God's plan for making decisions. These decisions were foolish ones and you can see the results. You can look back and see that you followed your own selfish desires, made decisions in the light of those, and now suffer the consequences.

You may well be making decisions regarding jobs, homes, churches, friends, relatives, even a marriage partner. Many things will change in the next year. That is why you need to be able to understand God's leading in making decisions. To the degree that you learn to make wise, God-honoring decisions will you be an effective tool in God's hands. If you constantly make foolish decisions you will be a dull tool. When you make decisions that honor and acknowledge Him, you will be a sharp, effective tool that He can use in the lives of others.

What these pages are going to focus on is large part has to do with the way that the mind of man functions. We don't know a

lot about how our minds work but one thing we do know, they work contrary to the mind of God. In many instances God's way of doing things is just the opposite of man's. What He said through the prophet in Isaiah 55:8, 9 is certainly true. It says:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thought than your thoughts.”

Without the advantage of being able to have God lead us in the decision-making process we are left to our own devices and those of the world around us. Not using what God has made available to us will enable the world to “squeeze us into its mold” (ref). The dangerous thing about all of this is that often we don't even know that it is happening. The Devil is very subtle in his methods, but very thorough in the results. We often quote Romans 12:2 and challenge one another in its truth, but often we fail to see what the real truth of these verses is. Romans 12:2 says:

“And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Ray Stedman, the former Senior Pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, made some keen observations about Romans 12: 2 in an issue of the Fuller Seminary publication, *Theology: News and Notes*. He wrote:

“It is easy to take the phrase from Romans 12:2 ‘Be not conformed to this world’ and thunder away about certain minor applications, reflecting the no-nos on

someone's private list. But abstinence from these does not necessarily constitute non-conformity to the world. Rather, it is to be freed from a materialistic value system, to be delivered from the idea that the total business of life is to make as much money as possible and save up for retirement so that you can spend your sunset years enjoying yourself to the utmost.

True non-conformity to the world is to become aware that you can invest your life in a cause that will endure beyond life. It is to change the whole concept of our relatedness with one another, and to teach what is truly important about this life.”

Conformity to the world is an attitude; the actions only reflect that attitude. Making wise, God-honoring decisions is not a process to plug in every time you encounter a decision. It is much more than that. It is really a lifestyle, a determined sense of commitment to the Lord. As Howard Hendricks, the venerable professor at Dallas Theological Seminary says:

“If you are going to be truly committed to the Lord, and live in light of His values, and make decisions based on His wisdom you are going to be different from the world. Significantly different! But the sad truth is you are also going to be significantly different from the majority of Christians.”

Hendricks statement is worth reflecting on to allow God to reveal to us how closely we are walking to the world's system and how much of it we have absorbed. Are we really different? In the pages that follow, you will read some indicators about the depth of this difference.



Part I

Chapter 2

Prerequisites to Hearing God's Voice

The Bible does give you some specific principles to be able to hear God's voice and determine God's leading in your life and decisions, but you need to examine the pre-requisites before you look at the decision-making principles. You must fulfill the pre-requisites if you are to be able to see God's leading. Other areas of life have pre-requisites that must be fulfilled to move forward, and the same is true in this case.

God's Will

The first pre-requisite has to do with the will of God. And the will of God is dramatically distinguished from the leading of God. There is much confusion today regarding the will of God. Leaders in the Christina church have not helped much either, because they do not speak with one voice on the matter. Many people confuse God's will with God's leading in life's decision.

Many people use the phrase "God's will" when they are really referring to "God's leading." This differentiation is not just a matter of semantics either. There is a definite difference.

The leading of God has to do with the matter of making decisions in the day-to-day fabric of life. These have to do with the practical, specific decisions regarding how and where we live, who to marry, what job to take, and those other questions that we all need answers to as we move forward in life.

The will of God however, is much more than decision-making. The will of God has to do with our lifestyle, attitude, and commitment to the things of God as reflected in six specific commands that God has spelled out for us in the Bible.

Suffice it to only list these commands here with a couple of Bible references. For a far greater discussion of the matter of God's will, refer to the other publication entitled *Finding God's Will for My Life*. The specific commands that reflect God's will for us indicate that He wants us to be:

Saved	I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9
Sanctified	I Thess. 4:3; I Tim. 6:10,11
Spirit-Filled	Eph. 5:17,18; Jn. 6:63
In Submission	I Pet. 2:15; Rom. 13:1-7
Steadfast	I Thess. 5:16-18; Col. 4:2
Suffering	I Pet. 3:16; Phil. 1:29

Each of these commands reflects something of the condition of our inner life. If we deliberately remove ourselves from any of these areas of God's will, it is going to be difficult to find His leading. Part of the reason for this is that if we fail to obey what He has clearly communicated to us we are going to find it even more difficult to find and follow His leading, which we must work at to discover. God's will is plainly spelled out. God's leading takes insight and work to discover.

Priorities and God's Leading

The second pre-requisite to understanding God's leading in the decisions you are facing also has to do with your attitudes. This second pre-requisite addresses the area of personal priorities. The priorities by which you live are a reflection of what you deem to be most important. All of us live by a very strict set of priorities. You may not know what yours are, you may not be able to list them or communicate them to others, but you live



by them. Your personal priorities are quite simply your attitudes and commitments in a more concrete form.

There are eight areas of life that you need to consider as you think about priorities. These will have a definite impact on the way that you live, and it is important to have a Godly perspective on each of them. It is not our intent here to discuss these in dept. if you would like a more in-depth discussion of each of these eight priorities and how to discover what yours are, refer to the publication *Priorities for Daily Living*.

The eight areas of life that you need to take into consideration when considering priorities include: (Listed in no particular order.)

God	Family
Financial security	Self
Personal ministry	Vocation/Education
Spouse	Organized church functions

Priorities are so crucial in understanding God's leading because they *reflect* your attitudes rather than determining them. Priorities do not determine anything; they simply reflect the way that you live.

When you are confronted with a decision in which you sincerely desire to know God's leading. You are going to filter what you discover through the matrix of your priorities. Every decision will be seen in the light of how it affects your daily priorities.

This means that you approach every decision with your attitudes, biases, and predetermined conclusions already in place. If your priorities are based on Godly principles then you

will filter your decisions through Godly attitudes, biases, and predetermined conclusions. However, if your priority system is faulty and not what God would have them to be, then the filtering process will also be faulty and you will be using worldly attitudes, biases and predetermined conclusions to evaluate your decisions. When your filtering system is faulty, God's leading will be very cloudy.

Most of us have some degree of both worldly and Godly attitudes, biases and predetermined conclusions. That is a reflection of where we are in life and of the influences that have brought us to this point. The guides to understanding God's leading take care of that. Your problem in understanding God's leading is compounded however when you think that your priorities are in great shape when in reality they really need some work. When we think things are fine and they are not, then we are in trouble. It's when we think that we are spiritual, but we are not, that we will have problems understanding God's leading.

If we are growing to be more like Jesus, and if that is our desire, God will use His plan to show us His leading. However, if we are not growing in this direction, and have no desire to, we will have great difficulty seeing His leading even it is clearly spelled out.

The following illustration will help to describe the problem of perspective and limited vision:

A young preacher moved to a small church in the Chicago area. Shortly after his arrival he was asked to preach to the local Alcoholic's Anonymous chapter. He saw this as a tremendous opportunity and went about

the task of preparing his message with great enthusiasm.

The finished product he thought was pretty effective. But to ensure that everyone got the point to his message he decided to use a visual aid. He reviewed his thoughts and the points that he was trying to get across and came up with an inspiring visual aid for the message entitled “The Disaster of Alcohol.”

On the night of the meeting he arrived early to set up the visual aid so that it was out of sight of the audience until the appropriate time. The hall began to fill. The preliminaries were conducted. Finally he was introduced as the speaker.

He presented his message and all those in attendance seemed to be following his thoughts pretty well. Finally in conclusion, he introduced the visual aid.

He brought out two large glass jugs. One was labeled water and the other was labeled alcohol. Next he brought out a nice big, fat earthworm. He told the audience to watch the worm and proceeded to drop it into the jug of water. The worm swam around and around and crawled up the neck of the jar to look out and then dove back into the water as happy as a worm could be.

Next, the young pastor fished the worm out of the water and dropped it into the jug of alcohol. The worm swam around for a few seconds, gave a spasmodic twitch and sank to the bottom of the jug dead.

The audience watched very attentively to the entire episode and so the young preacher decided impromptu to involve them in the discussion of the implications of the visual aid. He asked them, “What can we learn from this illustration?” It was quiet for a few seconds and then a well-worn man in the back of the room spoke up quite proudly and said, “If you drink you’ll never have to worry about having worms.”

Your perception is definitely colored by your priorities. That is why it is so important for your priorities to be based on biblical principles. If they aren’t, your decisions will probably not be very God-honoring either.

The principles to understanding God’s leading are not some magical formulae that you can just plug in whenever you need to make a decision. There is definitely a formula, but it must also reflect your personal lifestyle and priorities. If you try to implement this formula and are not living a biblical lifestyle it will be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The peg may fit, but it doesn’t fill the hole. The formula can be used, but it will not produce what was expected. The decisions will never be quite what God had in mind. And even if the formula does point out what God desires, it will often not be accepted because it doesn’t fit with your priorities.

Your life is a system. You cannot live with part of your system faulty and expect to see things work out the best way. If the “faulty system” reflects worldly priorities, then you cannot expect to see Godly direction.

Objectivity and Results

There is a third pre-requisite and it is a reflection of the first two. The third pre-requisite has to do with how we go through the process. Can we go through the process with a degree of objectivity to enable us to see what God wants to tell us, or do we already have our minds made up, forcing the facts to fit the mold that we have constructed.

The purpose of understanding God's leading is not to come up with a plan and then try to get support for it. Rather, you must be open to God's leading and see where it goes even if it is contrary to what you want or think best. You must want what He wants, not what you want.

George Mueller, the great missionary orphanage director in England said when he was trying to determine God's leading, "I set 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." No will of its own. That is exactly what you need to do to. Then you will be open to what God has in mind.

The objectivity and trust in God that we are speaking of extends beyond the decision you are seeking. In seeking God's

leading, it is possible to make a very costly mistake. The mistake relates to the results, and not the process. You may systematically go through the process that God has in mind and come out with what you believe to be His leading in the matter. You follow that leading and then everything seems to fall apart.

The inclination at that point is to question the decision. You think you made the wrong decision. You think that you misread God's leading. You question whether you understand His leading after all.

The problem with this approach to decisions is that it is an example of the way that man approaches things and not necessarily the way that God approaches things. God does not promise that if we live God-honoring lives and make wise, God-led decisions that things will always turn out peachy. Remember, one of the principles of God's will is suffering. Believe it or not, God wants us to suffer (You will need to read more about that to truly understand it.) He promises suffering, trials, persecutions if we follow Him. It is not meant to be an easy life, but a fruitful and fulfilling one.



Part I

Chapter 3

God's Promises Regarding His Leading

The objective that you should shoot for is to make wise, God-honoring decisions, and then trust Him for the results. Believe that there is a purpose if things do not go as you expect them to. With this attitude God will bless you more than you will ever imagine.

God did promise to lead us. In Psalm 32:8, the Psalmist says of God”

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go; I will counsel you with my eye.”

There are three key words in this verse that indicate what God has promised to do. To fully understand His promise, you must understand these words. He says that He will instruct, teach and guide (or counsel). These terms fit together to form the intricate pieces of a puzzle, but each is unique in what it contributes.

Instruct; means to be circumspect and intelligent. God promises to cause you to walk circumspectly, or justly, and with intelligence. He is not going to ask you to do stupid things, but will give you intelligence to do wise things that may be challenging or difficult to do. The term circumspectly carries with it the idea of respect from others. They will respect even if they do not agree.

Teach; literally means to flow like water, to point out, as if by aiming a finger. This is a scientific term from the field of hydrodynamics relating to the flow and forces of water. Geologists tell us something about the manner in which water, and in particular rivers, flow. The next time you have the opportunity to view a river over some distance, notice that it does not flow in a

straight line from one point to another. All rivers all over the world flow in the same way. These curving patterns, called meanders, follow a definite scientific plan.

I used to lead groups of high school students on canoe trips down the Russian River in California. Each year we would go back to the same place, but each year the river would be totally different than it was the year before. The reason for that is meanders.

The causes of meanders will give us some insight into what God is really saying with the word ‘teach.’ Meanders are caused by pressure from the banks of the river and by the debris that falls into the river. As debris falls into the river, it causes a slight change in the course that the river takes. As the debris on one bank continues to erode it eventually will be large enough to rebound to the other bank and then the same erosion process starts there. As this erosion of debris continues the river literally bounces from bank to bank wearing the banks down and forming gradual, ever widening curves. Eventually these curves get so large that they intersect and then it starts all over again.

What God may be saying when He uses the word ‘teach,’ is that we need to learn from the ‘debris’ that falls into the river of our lives. With His help we can learn from these problems, frustrations, setbacks, ‘debris’ that blocks our path and gain insight into life to help make wise decisions. We can then ‘flow’ from situation to situation, circumstance to circumstance, and learn from each, and be God’s person in each.

Guide; means to advise or counsel. God will be our personal advisor or counselor in the decision-making process. As a counselor, He helps us gain insight and perspective, but does not force us to make a certain decision. We make the final decision after all the counsel is in. He counsels with His eye upon us, and His eye can see much more than ours.

The Bible also says in Isaiah 48:17:

“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord your God, which teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way you should go.”

There are two words in this verse that we need to understand also.

Teach; literally means to goad, or by implication to teach with the rod being an Oriental incentive. A good definition of goad means to prod, urge or spur.

Profit; literally means to ascend or to be useful.

A literal translation of this verse could read:

“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord your God, which prods you to more lofty objectives, which walks with you step-by-step in the way you should go.”

God wants to ‘prod’ us to heights that we would not even attempt if left to our own devices. He knows we are capable of far greater things than we think, and challenges us to ‘shoot for the moon.’ In showing you His leading, He wants to not be limited by our finite minds.

Another familiar verse often used to discuss God’s leading is Proverbs 3:5,6.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”

This is another passage that emphasizes the need to rely on God’s thinking and not our own. It hints at the fact that God does not think the way that we do.

The phrase in this verse, “lean not on your own understanding,” could be translated to read, “do not under gird yourself with your own mental abilities, or your own ability to distinguish one thing from another.”

What the author of these verses appears to be saying is that when it comes time to make a decision you should not rely on your own logic and mental calculations alone, but you should gain insight from the direction that God will give.

One thing that the author did not say is that you should not think or try to understand. You need to think. You need to be able to distinguish one thing from another. You need to be able to think critically, but you must also balance this with gaining understanding of what God is saying in the situation. What God says must carry the most weight, and if we can’t understand what He is saying, all the rest is just so much wasted time and effort.

To summarize the promises that God has given you, He has promised to:

- Instruct, cause you to walk circumspectly.

- Teach, cause you to learn from life's "debris" and prod you to higher goals.
- Guide, counsel from His perspective.
- Lead, walk with you step-by-step.

All of the things that you have read so far is necessary background that you must understand before trying to determine God's leading.

You must know the pre-requisites and that you cannot simply plug the method for determining God's leading in like a quarter

in a soft drink machine and expect His leading to plop in the tray at the bottom. You must live according to His plan first. He will be leading you but if you are not living according to His priorities you will more than likely be blinded to His direction by your own previous decisions.

However, if we live our lives His way, He has promised to lead us, to "guide us with His eye upon us," and that is an exciting thought.



Part II

Chapter 1

Introduction to Principles to Hearing God's Voice



Introduction

The background material you have read so far provides a foundation for hearing God's voice, or understanding God's leading, but it does not provide the insight into how to find out what that is. All of those decisions we discussed at the beginning of this book are still very much a part of your life and you need to find answers. Questions that have to do with:

What does the Bible have to say about decisions regarding employment?

What does the Bible have to say about making financial decisions?

What does the Bible have to say about relational decisions?

Does the Bible have anything to say about health decisions?

What does the Bible have to say about these decisions regarding politics?

Does the Bible have anything to say about decisions regarding the pursuit of success balanced with a successful home life?

God has provided some valuable insight into this process in the Bible. In fact, there are six very specific guidelines to use to determine His leading. Let's take a look at what those are.

What follows is not delivered in any particular order. The principles that we will discuss must all be integrated to gain the understanding of God's leading that you would like to have.

It is also important to understand that the application of the principles that follow allows for a tremendous amount of freedom. God is not intending to have a very narrow path that we are to walk with regard to the decisions that we are talking about. A lot is left up to us. We may seek His leading, follow what we learn, and then make a decision with the best of our ability and know that He is behind it.

We have a lot of wiggle room for our own desires, likes and dislikes, preferences and what we want to do. God is not asking that all Christians act, think, look and talk alike. We can still be ourselves; it is just that we are better selves with His leading and blessing.

The principles will help us to decide what underlying motives, agendas, and ungodly desires may be guiding the decisions we are making. Once those are identified and dealt with then we are free to enjoy the life that we have in Him.



Part II

Chapter 2

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – How He Uses Circumstances

The first indicator that God frequently uses to convey some aspects of His leading is circumstances. That may not sound very biblical or spiritual, but it is true. Circumstances are frequently God's tool to bring you face-to-face with a decision that you have to make, and you will see that there is enough evidence to say that it is biblical.

Both the Old and New Testaments are full of examples of how God used circumstances to communicate His leading. Let's take a look at only a couple of them.

The first one is introduced in these verses in the book of Jonah, chapter 1:1,2:

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.’ “

God had a definite purpose that He wanted Jonah to accomplish. In fact, the purpose was twofold. First, this period in Jewish history records rampant rebellion against God. Israel did not want to listen to what He had to say through the prophets. Rather, they simply did what they desired to do. Nineveh was a Gentile, or non-Jewish city, and one of great wickedness. God wanted to bring Israel to their collective knees when they saw such a rotten, heathen city come to Himself.

The second purpose was with regard to the city of Nineveh itself. The people of Nineveh needed to hear and respond to the grace of God and have their lives change from being primarily a people seeking pleasure to being a people that seeks God. That was God's plan.

The way that He was to implement the plan was to have Jonah go down to Nineveh and point out their great wickedness in light of God's eternal truth. Jonah would proclaim to them that the only means of grace was to respond to God.

The only trouble with the plan was that Jonah did not vote for it. He did not want to see Nineveh repent. Verse 3 in Jonah 1 reads:

“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”

It would be easy to ask ourselves, What kind of prophet is this anyway? And the answer would be . . . a very human one.

Jonah wanted the city of Nineveh to get what was coming to them. They had lived lies that were fast and loose, why shouldn't they suffer the consequences? He also knew that if they heard the message from God, they just might respond and be spared some of what they so rightfully deserved.

Nineveh was also a very powerful foe of Israel, and if they were not destroyed, Israel's doom seemed sure. Jonah may also have been reflecting on the spiritual condition of Israel at that time. They were not doing too well spiritually and they would probably only feel worse when they heard of Nineveh responding to the Lord.

Do you see the difference in the way that Jonah was thinking and the way that God was thinking? This is a very good

example of the contrast in thinking style between man and God.

In light of his mental condition, Jonah took off to get away from Israel and from God. But Jonah was no dummy, he knew Psalm 139 which tells him and us that God is wherever we go. Despite knowing this off he went anyway. And where did he go? Jonah went to Tarshish, or at least he headed in that direction.

Tarshish is believed to have been a city in Spain at the opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea from Joppa, where God wanted him to go. So Jonah gets on a ship at Joppa and heads off in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

Nineveh was inland from Joppa, at the headwaters of the Tigris River. Jonah's priorities were definitely out of kilter with God's. He was certainly not objective in his decision, but he had his mind made up and off he went.

Jonah also had the results all figured out, rather than trusting God with the results as we spoke about a few pages back. But God was not quite finished yet as we see in Jonah verse 4:

“And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.”

God planned a little storm to get Jonah's attention. If you read further in the book you would see that this storm was fierce enough to scare weathered sailors and they were all praying to their gods. Jonah informs them that he is a follower of Jehovah, and they become aware that he is running away from Him.

Then Jonah tells his shipmates to throw him into the sea to appease Jehovah and they reluctantly do as he says.

The rest of the story is well known. In summary, Jonah is swallowed by the great fish, he calls on the Lord, is vomited onto the shoreline, proceeds to Nineveh and watches as the city repents. This story is a prime example of how God can use circumstances divinely controlled to lead us.

In the case of Jonah, the storm and the fish were the circumstances He used to show Jonah His leading. In your life His tools will no doubt be something else, but He will use circumstances. The question is, will you be alert to see the circumstances He uses?

Another great example of how God uses circumstances to communicate His leading is found in the book of Acts, chapter 8. The story is of Stephen and starts back in chapter 6. In chapter 6 you read of a problem arising regarding the treatment of some of the older widows. The elders chose Stephen and several other willing men as the first deacons to deal with this problem.

Stephen was a man held in high regard by the Christian assembly, and a man who lived his faith. In living out his faith in the world, chapter 6 verse 8 says he performed “great wonders and signs.”

This kind of action on Stephen's part caused some people of other beliefs to be very upset and so they brought him before the high priest to answer their charges.

Chapter 7 is Stephen's fantastic oration as he stands before the high priest and the people. In his speech, Stephen traces

Israel's history and their response to their leaders all the way from Abraham through Solomon, and related it to their present time. What he said caused heavy conviction for the men. Chapter 7:57 through chapter 8:1 details the story.

You read that Stephen's life was taken, and a man named Saul was in approval of the action. This was the beginning of a terrible persecution of Christians headed by this Saul. You can imagine the questions that went through the minds of the believers when they saw all that was happening.

“Just what should we do? Should we stay and suffer for our faith? Is this God's way of telling us to move elsewhere? Should we just hide out? What should we do?”

We all ask similar questions when difficult times come, and rightly so. We need to ask questions, but we also need to be slow to act instead of running right out and making decisions on the spur of the moment that we may regret later. The process of questioning is a very biblical one. We read in Acts 17:11:

“Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

The Bereans were eager to learn. They listened to those teaching them, but they did not let it stop there. They also went further and asked questions. They studied the Bible to see if what they were being told was accurate.

We need to learn to ask questions also. Then we need to learn how to find the answers. That is what this book is all about, finding answers to the question of how God leads.

You were reading in Acts that Stephen had been killed and a persecution of Christians initiated. In Acts 8:1 we read:

“Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

What is not apparent as you read this verse is the timeline. It looks like it all runs together, when in fact there is a span of time between part a of the verse and part b.

Part a ends with “on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem.” That is when all the questions that we posed earlier were being asked. Christians were wondering what they should do.

The persecution is gaining momentum and the questions are doing the same. When the difficulties become more intense the questioning becomes more intense also.

Acts 1b through verse 4 tells you what actually did happen.

“They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”

There were several things happening simultaneously. One, the Christians began fleeing the persecution, a very natural thing to do. Second, some committed Christian men buried Stephen and mourned him. Three, Saul continued to persecute all the Christians he could find. Fourth, the Christians were sharing their faith as they fled.

Now turn over to chapter 11, verse 19, and we see what was happening as the Christians fled. There you will read:

“So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul.”

Once again these verses document that the Christians were fleeing the persecution and that they traveled to several different locations. But look at what it also says, they were preaching the Lord Jesus Christ as they fled and the Lord was blessing their words so that many turned to Christ.

Finally, look at the very last few words in the quote above. It says that Barnabas left for Tarsus to look for Saul. Why would he be looking for Saul? Is this not the same guy that was leading the Christian persecution?

Isn't this the same guy that was responsible for beating and killing Christians? The same Saul that was having Christians thrown into prison? Isn't this the same guy that was approving of Stephen's stoning to death?

It is the same Saul. Only one thing is different at this time in the narrative. Saul himself had encountered the living Lord. He saw a vision of the Lord and his life turned around. Now instead of killing, you find him acting totally differently toward Christians. Verse 26 tells you:

“ . . . and when Barnabas found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

Saul's life was changed so dramatically that he was now leading the Christians in their discovery of what their faith was all about. He was teaching them instead of persecuting them.

The narrative in Acts describes the beginning of the realization of the command in Acts 1 to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. God used the circumstances of Stephen's death and the following persecution to lead many of his servants out into their world to share the good news and to lead Saul and many others into a personal relationship with the living God.

God also uses circumstances in your life to guide you in the way He would have you go. Your difficulty is in trying to determine what He is saying through the circumstances. However, we can readily admit that Jonah, the believers in Acts, and the other examples in the Bible in all likelihood did not see how God was leading them through the circumstances of life in which they found themselves either. They, and we, just need to respond to Him as they went along.

A lot of people have tried many different ways to determine God's leading through circumstances. One of those is the so-called "closed door policy." You may have even used this yourself, but listen to what Bill Bright, former President of Campus Crusade for Christ, has to say regarding the "closed door policy."

"Through the centuries sincere religious men have suggested spiritual formulas for discovering the leading of God. Some are valid; others are unscriptural and misleading. For example, a young seminary graduate came to see me. He was investigating various possibilities of Christian service and had come to discuss the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. I asked him, 'In what way do you expect God to reveal His place of service for you?' 'I'm following the closed door policy' was his reply. 'A few months ago I began to investigate several opportunities for Christian service. The Lord has now closed the door on all but two, one of which is Campus Crusade for Christ. If the door to accept a call to a particular church closes, I shall know that God wants me in Campus Crusade.'

Many sincere Christians follow this illogical and unscriptural method, often with most unsatisfactory and frustrating consequences. Don't misunderstand. God may and often does close doors in the life of every active, Spirit-controlled Christian. My reference to 'closed door' policies does not preclude such experiences, but refers to a careless 'hit or miss' attitude without the careful evaluation of all the issues.

This approach is illogical because it allows elements of chance to influence a decision rather than a careful intelligent evaluation of all the factors involved. It is unscriptural in that it fails to employ the God-given faculties of reason that are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Further, the 'closed door policy' is in error because it seeks God's leading through the process of elimination rather than seeking God's best first. It should be understood that true faith is established on the basis of fact. Therefore, vital faith in God is emphasized rather than minimized through employing Spirit-controlled reason. In making decision some sincere Christians rely almost entirely upon impressions, or hunches, fearful that if they use their mental faculties they will not exercise adequate faith and thus will grieve the Holy Spirit."

Circumstances often do play a part in trying to ascertain God's leading, but only a part. No decision should be based on circumstances alone. Often it is only through hindsight that we can see how God used circumstances to aid us in finding His leading, but it is only one of several things He might use. There are others.



Part II

Chapter 3

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – How He Uses Conscience

Conscience (Convictions)

Another way that God might reveal His leading is through our conscience or our convictions. This is why it is so important to be following God's will and living according to proper priorities as outlined earlier in this publication. If you aren't living that way, you are going to have difficulty discerning His leading because humans do not naturally think the way that God thinks as we have seen.

The word "conscience" in the New Testament means precisely the same thing that it means today in our language. According to Webster's, it is that part of our being which gives "moral judgment that prohibits or opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle." Our conscience plays an important part in our daily lives.

In the book of I Timothy, chapter 1:5, 19 the Bible says:

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith . . . which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

According to Paul in writing to Timothy, some of the individuals he has worked with had disregarded the warning of their conscience and smashed their faith on the rocks of temptation and struggles. God leads and sends conviction, positive and negative, through the conscience and you will be better off if you heed it.

A good conscience, that we can depend on, does not come easily or overnight. The Apostle Paul says in the book of Acts 24:16:

"I always do my best to maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before man."

The King James Version of that verse reads:

"Herein do I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense. . ."

The condition of your conscience is important. We hear a lot today about keeping your body physically fit, but not much about fitness of the conscience. There is a lot of information available about diet, exercise and how to keep your body in top shape, but there is not much about how to exercise the conscience and keep it in top shape. Yet, you have to ask, which is really most important?

Bob Foster, a Christian businessman and conference speaker, has said this about the conscience:

"Work hard to keep physically fit. . . labor daily to keep mentally alert. . . exercise constantly to maintain emotional stability, but how much 'output' goes into building a conscience void of offense?"

Let's take a look at our conscience. . . not so much to define it as to discover how it operates. Conscience is the playback of memory. . . a spiritual check up on the soul state. It is condensed character.

It is God's watch dog every ready to warn of possible danger. It is God's beacon light to shed light on the path ahead. It is the still small voice. . . a whisper. . . a walkie-talkie by which God speaks. It is His spy. . . a window. . . protest. . . sword! Eddie Cantor well expressed it: ' A

sleeping pill can never replace a good, clean conscience.’

Paul stood on trial before Felix and in his brilliant defense, he comments about an area of life often neglected by leadership. Paul knew that conscience was a device planted by God in the heart of man to guide him with respect to right and wrong. The man who heeds this inner voice becomes strong and powerful within his own person.

He is forthright and can look any man in the eye and is usually fearless when opposed by evil. Exercising one’s self to have a clear conscience develops great inner strength.”

A clear conscience develops great inner strength, but a conscience can only operate on what is fed in. there is a common phrase in the computer world, it goes, Garbage in, garbage out. Or in the terms of Scripture, I Tim. 4:1,2 says:

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars scared in their own conscience as with a branding iron. . .”

There may be times when you have nothing more tangible to rely on for a short period of time than our conscience or personal convictions so we need to guard them carefully. You might not be able to clearly articulate what you believe, but you must know what it is that can keep you steady while everything else may be falling apart. Is your conscience in that kind of condition, or does it need some exercise? Do you keep

short accounts with God to keep the channel open, or are there things you can think of right now that need cleaning up?

Take the steps to clear up your conscience and then follow through by keeping it in good shape. Listen to what it says and heed it by acting accordingly, or at least questioning so that you do not move ahead blindly.



Part II

Chapter 4

Principles to Understanding God's Leading – How He Uses Counsel

Counsel

Introduction

The third indicator that God uses to communicate His leading is the counsel of others. There is no such thing as an independent believer in God's economy. The only song, No Man is an Island, is certainly true in the church. No person lives completely unto himself or herself in the community of Believers.

All who called themselves Christians are linked with each other in a real Body, and need to learn to depend on each other for counsel.

The Proverbs have a lot to tell us about counsel. Just a sampling of what they say will give you some insight into the importance of counsel:

Prov. 11:14: "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory."

Prov. 12:15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel."

Prov. 15:22: "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they are established."

Prov. 20:5: "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out."

It is plain to see that counseling is important. We all need it if we are going to be successful in most things that we do. You need it to understand God's leading.

The big question is, who should we look to for counsel? How do you decide whom to ask you for help in understanding God's leading?

The Scriptures give at least six different categories of people from whom we should seek counsel. Let's take a look at each of those categories.

In each case it is important that you do your homework before you try to seek counsel. You should know exactly what decision you are trying to make. Think about the questions that you want to ask and the perspective that you seek. Make the most of the time to focus specifically on the issue you are wrestling with.

In addition to going with specific questions to ask, you will also want to ask them what questions they would be seeking answers to if they were facing the same issue or decision. Sometimes we don't know what we don't know and cannot come up with all of the questions that we need to ask. Also ask those you go to for counsel, who they think are wise in the particular area of your decision. This will provide you with a list of subject matter experts to approach.

Now that you have done your preparation, it is time to make your list of people to go to for counsel. Be sure that your list includes the following:

Spiritual Parents

Quite frequently there is no one that cares for you more spiritually than the person who was responsible for leading you to the Lord, or who is discipling you. It is only natural to seek that person out for counsel. Much of Paul's epistles were

really counsel in response to questions or situations sent by his spiritual children. He wrote his counsel to them to help them decide what to do or how to live. He cared deeply for them as we can see in I Thess. 2 and Phil. 1 and he wanted to aid in the rough spots and perplexing situations they found in living out their faith.

I Thess 2:

Phil. 1:

When you are seeking God's leading regarding a decision that you have to make, take some time to get in touch with the person or person's that lead you to the Lord or are involved in helping you to grow. They will have some counsel that you will want to hear.

Spiritual Leaders

Leaders in the organized church can be a source of untapped wisdom to assist you in understanding God's leading.

In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas had some points of significant disagreement so they brought their disagreement to the church leaders. In their case, since they themselves were leaders, they went to an outside group of more objective men in Jerusalem for counsel. These men gave oversight to the church on a more regional level.

In your case and mine, the leaders in the church that we will want to seek for counsel are those that make up the leadership of the local church that we attend. Whether this is the Senior Pastor or some other minister on staff will depend on the church and our active part in it. If you know a pastor at your church, then it would make sense to go to that individual for

counsel regarding God's leading in the decision that you are seeking to make.

Natural Parents

Proverbs 15 is full of information directed to children who will not pay attention to the instruction and counsel of their parents. Prov. 6:20-23 also speaks directly to this point.

“My son, observe the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother. Bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life.”

Nothing is mentioned in these verses, or in many others that speak of the value of parental counsel, to the effect that parents must be Christian before you obey them and ask for their counsel. In fact, Prov. 21:1 seems to indicate that God can influence them and direct you through them even if they are not believers. It says:

“The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

While speaking directly of a king, it could infer all those in positions of authority.

Parents have a distinct interest in their children and in the decisions they make. While they may not always be guided by Godly principles, they will be guided more often than not by what is best for you as their child. Ask for their wisdom.

Christian Friends

We all need friends we can share openly and honestly with. Friends who know us well enough to be blatantly honest when necessary. Friends who will encourage and challenge us. Friends who will even kick us in the seat when we need that too.

Heb. 10:25 says that we are to “exhort one another.” Exhort literally means to call near, or to call to one’s side. It is the same Greek word, *parakaleo*, used to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14:26 where He is referred to as the comforter, helper and guide.

Other verses that speak of the value of friends include Gal. 6:1,2 and James 5:16.

Gal. 6:1, 2: “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

Jas. 5:16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

The whole concept of the church as a body is that one member cannot exist in isolation and independence from the rest. You need to rely on Christian friends for insight into understanding God’s leading.

The Antagonist

The antagonist is the person in your life who is frequently no on your side. This is the person that usually opposes you, and is usually the one person you will not ask counsel from. But you need to hear what this person has to say. The antagonist is the one to keep us honest and truly objective in seeking the Lord’s leading. The antagonist is not the one who will say what we want to hear, but may say what we definitely need to hear..

The problem in antagonistic relationships is that emotions usually flare up and we cannot hear the truth due to the emotional fog. But listen to the antagonist. Where would David have been without Nathan in II Sam 12, or Moses without Jethro in Exodus 18, or Peter without Paul in Gal. 2. The antagonist has something to say to each of us and we are wise to listen.

II Sam. 12:1-7: “Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, ‘There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him. Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold,

because he did this thing and had no compassion.’ Nathan then said to David, ‘You are the man!’ “

Exodus 18:17-24: “It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?’ Moses said to his father-in-law, ‘Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.’ Moses' father-in-law said to him, ‘The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden

with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.’ So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.”

Gal. 2:11-14: “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ “

Each of these passages demonstrates the value of the antagonist and how God uses that type of person to communicate His mind and help the listener to understand His leading. You would be wise to pay attention to the antagonist in your life as well.

The Elderly and The Younger

People of different age group have different perspectives on life. For this reason, there is tremendous benefit in listening to those of a widely different age-group from our own. Our tendency is to listen primarily to those of our own age group

and pay attention to what they say. In doing so we limit our perspective on the issues and decisions we face.

Those that are more elderly have wisdom that they have learned over the years. Giving them the opportunity to share this wisdom means we will be so much the wiser. Proverbs 16:31 says “A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness.”

On the other hand, those of younger generations tend to be more on the threshold to learning and often have the benefit of increased knowledge without the limits of tradition. The young are constantly exploring new frontiers and learning along the way. They are pushing back the barriers and making new discoveries. The young see new ways of doing things that those older never even thought of.

In I Kings 12, King Rehoboam proved wise in seeking counsel from both the elderly and his young contemporaries. He may not have made the best decision, because of his own inner desires, but at least he got the counsel.

“Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. Now¹ when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it, he was living in Egypt (for he was yet in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon). they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.’ Then he said to them, ‘Depart for three days, then return to me.’ So the people departed.

King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, ‘How do you counsel me to answer this people?’ Then they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.’ But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him. So he said to them, ‘What counsel do you give that we may answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?’ Young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! ‘Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’”

You will be wise to use those older and younger than yourself to help you understand God’s leading.

The Wise

There are subject matter experts in any field in which you may be facing a decision. These may be found through referral or even accessing the World Wide Web on your computer. Specialists will be able to tell you more than you probably want to know about the topic you are seeking information and on which you need to make a decision on.



The subject matter expert that you find may not be a Christian.
You may not be able to find a Christian with the expertise that
you need to make a decision.



Part II

Chapter 5

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – How He Uses The Bible

Introduction

The fourth way that God will lead you is through His Word. God will NEVER lead you contrary to what His Word tells you. Since this is the case, it is imperative that you know what the Bible says and allow what it says to infiltrate into your inner being.

Psalm 119:24 says:

Your testimonies also are my delight, they are my counselors.

You need to cultivate a real desire and love for the Word of God, and find an excitement in finding out what it says to you.

If you don't know what the Bible has to say for your situation, you will need to find out how to dig into the Scriptures to find out.

The Value of Bible Study

Proverbs 2:4,5 says:

If you seek her as ⁽¹⁾ silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God.

It takes some hard work to find the counsel of the Scripture. Hidden treasures are not scattered all over the surface of the ground. They are buried deep, and in unknown places. So it is with the Bible also. Much of its' treasures are not where you can get them by light reading. You must learn how to observe,

study, think and question what it is saying. Only then will you truly find what it is saying to your situation.

Hebrews 4:12 tells you this about the working of Scripture:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

These verses tell you that the Bible can speak to the innermost part of your being. It will reach you at the deepest level if it is given the chance.

This kind of study does not come from simply picking up commentaries and books about the Bible to find those deep, hidden truths. Books of this nature are a great resource, but they are secondary to your own study.

You need to put the time and energy into the studying the Bible itself, and not just books about the Bible. That is where you will find the real riches, not after someone else has mined the passage. This kind of study is what God will bless, not trying to take the shortcut of reading about someone else's study.

If you think that the Lord is leading you in a certain direction. But the Bible speaks directly against it, you are wrong,

God will never, never lead you contrary to His Word.

Find out what it is saying.



Part II

Chapter 6

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – How God Uses Prayer

Introduction

The next thing that you can expect God to use to lead you in making decisions is prayer. Time spent in sincerely pouring out your heart to your Heavenly Father.

Prayer is much more than simply telling God what you want however. Prayer is also focusing on your relationship with Him, and on who He is. This kind of focus will help you to keep other things in perspective.

Prayer is much than talking also. When you pray how much of the time do you spend talking, and how much do you spend listening?

One reason you may not hear what God has to say is that He can't get a word in edgewise. When you pray, take some time to listen as well.

Some verses that might shed some light on prayer include:

Jas. 1:5-1; But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Jn. 15:7; If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

I Jn. 5:14,15; This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.



Part II

Chapter 7

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – How God Uses The Holy Spirit

Introduction

The last area that you will see that God uses in communicating His leading is the Holy Spirit. You would probably guess that this would be one of the means that He would employ to lead.

Romans 8:14 tells you that the natural thing is for the believer to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

I Cor. 2:9-12 informs you that man cannot discern the mind of God, but the Spirit can.

However, as it is written: No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

How does the Spirit give you this direction? It will not come like a bolt out of the blue while you sit on your chair and wait for it. It will not appear as handwriting on the wall or a news flash on your television screen. The Spirit may have done it in that way at one time, but He is not doing it that way anymore.

Jn. 16:13 tells you how He does work.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all 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.

The Spirit has come, as you say at Pentecost, so this is referring to here and now.

There are many ideas as to what this verse is actually saying, but one thing it is saying is that the Holy Spirit will use the ammunition, the tools that you give Him to teach you the Lord's leading.

These tools include circumstances, conscience, counsel, prayer and most importantly the Word of God. The Scriptures are the primary tool the Spirit uses to communicate to us. The more of the Bible we know, the more He has to work with. The less we know, the less he can do.

In many ways it is like carpentry. You can't build a house with a hammer and a saw and have it come out looking anything like what it is supposed to. You need a hammer, different kinds of saws, drills, levels, squares, and lots of other things. So it is with the Spirit. The more tools of Scripture He has, the greater the house He can build.

George Mueller says regarding the leading of the Spirit:

“I seek the leading of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word I lay myself open to great delusions. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.”



Your testimonies also are my delight, they are my counselors.



Part II

Chapter 8

Principles to Hearing God's Voice – Conclusion

Final Word

The final word God has to give us about finding His leading is time. Throughout the Bible the importance of waiting is stressed. Jacob has to wait for his bride (Gen. 29), the Israelites had to wait to enter the promised land (Exod 12-15), the disciples had to wait for the Holy Spirit (, Paul spent a lot of time waiting in jail.

You will have to wait as well. It is not the fact of waiting that is so important, but how you wait. You are to wait patiently, hopefully, expectantly; or at least begin to learn to wait in this manner. God does not give instant answers any more than He gives instant maturity. Answers involve time. If a decision is hurried you can be sure the Holy Spirit is not prompting it. If there is a push to make a decision without taking the time to work through the principles we have discussed, you can be sure that the Spirit is raising a caution flag.

Conclusion

In summarization of the principles that we have discussed, there are four statements to keep in mind and two stories to tie all of this together.

1. You will not always be able to see the direction God is leading in the decisions that you must make.
2. God will use both our failure and success in discerning His leading to mold us into His likeness.
3. Following His leading is not nearly as important as following His will.

4. There is tremendous freedom in making decisions and deciding on choices that do not fall into the categories of right and wrong.

A personal story will illustrate these principles.

I started this study of how to find God's leading in 1969. I was trying to make a decision regarding my future. Should I go to college? Should I try to find a job? What should I study if I do go to college? What should I do if I just find a job?

As a direct result of that study I enrolled in Biola University to study in the field of Christian Education. I was aware of God's leading in my life very definitely at that time and have known it in that regard since.

It was very exciting to make that decision with full confidence that God would bless. I felt very much that I was following God's leading.

I went through school and graduated. Then went on to graduate school to receive an M.A. in the same field with excitement of working in the local church in the education ministries.

The first position that I accepted in a local church was in a church in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. It was a good sized church with about 1000 people attending on a Sunday morning and I was responsible for the entire education ministry.

Things went along very well for the first year and then it all came down on my head. Through no fault of my own I found myself out of work and on my way back to California. I was crushed. I was angry. I did not understand if I had followed God's leading so accurately, why did it end up this way?

I had a difficult time for the next two years in trying to find work in another church. I was discouraged, frustrated and still angry.

Things had definitely not turned out the way that I had anticipated. And yet I could not deny that God had led me to school and to that church.

Just because things do not work out the way that you want them to does not mean God was not in them. He may have some other things for you to experience, as He did for me, that you may magnify Him more.

Remember our discussion of God's thoughts and our thoughts. He does not look at things the way that we do. He does not consider failure to be what we consider failure to be. Reflect on the life of Christ for a moment.

Here was the Son of God living on earth. He was the model for what a life in God could be. He was leading a band of men that would ultimately change the world. And then He was crucified. What appeared to be absolute failure in the eyes of man, turned out to be ultimate triumph in God's way of doing things.

When visions, plans, goals, ambitions, and decisions die in your life, you may also find that there is new life and direction and purpose that is resurrected with them.

God did ultimately lead back into the church ministry for a number of years. There were some definite successes, and some failures. Then He led into work with a major Christian humanitarian organization where I was privileged to lead the educational effort for their staff. Then He led into work in the business field in employment, contracting and self-employment capacities. And they were all a mixture of success and failure.

Much of the failure was as a direct result of my own shortcomings and mistakes. Much of the success was as a direct result of the gifts that He has blessed me with.

Through it all God has been molding me to be more like His Son. I have a long way to go and will enjoy both success and failure along the way that is to be sure. But He WILL achieve His purpose.

You will no doubt find experiences similar to thee in your future, as well as in your past. Finding and following the Lord's leading was never promised to be easy or all fun, but it is never dull.



The author

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