

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.”¹

FOREWORD

Six hundred years before Christ, Israel asked the question, “How should we then live?”² God’s response presented no possibility for uncertainty: “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”³

You desire to make godly choices. You know that every decision is an expression of your love for Christ. You are willing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus, but you do not know how to effectuate your ready obedience on a day-to-day basis.⁴ Nonetheless, you recognize that “your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries.”⁵

The Protestant Reformers understood man to be *incurvatus in se*, turned in upon himself. You call for your Lord to guide you because you know your chooser is broken. Your Savior has granted to you “everything pertaining to life and godliness,” you simply crave to know how to access life and godliness in your everyday decisions.⁶

The Holy Spirit has been sent to you by the Father and the Son to guide you via internal promptings and external stimuli. Are you ready to follow the Spirit’s guidance?

PRINCIPLES FOR GUIDANCE

- **Glory of God**

God receiving all the glory from your life must become your point of pivot. God’s glory, at the expense of your own glory, must be the non-negotiable arrow in your decision-quiver. God says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”⁷

- **Authority of Scripture**

A mind bathed in God’s word becomes less and less susceptible to false leadings. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”⁸ The Holy Spirit presses into your mind the righteousness of certain choices when you investigate the whole Bible for God’s holy wisdom.⁹ God’s written counsel assures enlightenment.¹⁰

- **God’s General Will**

God’s general will for you is unmistakable and comprehensible:

- “Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”¹¹
- “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”¹²
- “For this is the will of God, your sanctification... For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”¹³

- "...to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."¹⁴

You will not discover God's specific will for you unless you remain in His general will.

- **Commitment to Obey**

You must take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."¹⁵ God withholds His counsel when absolute surrender is lacking. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."¹⁶

- **Expect Guidance**

Lot's wife looked back; you look ahead.¹⁷ You reach forward to what lies ahead; pressing "on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."¹⁸ Move your horizons out so that you recognize what lies ahead. Plan from the end goal back to where you are rather than from where you are to where you think God wants you. You are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them.¹⁹

- **Live with Intentionality**

Think more than you act. Absent yourself from non-edifying commotion and diversions. Refuse to confuse activity with progress.²⁰ Determine quickly the appropriateness of any proposed gain against the calculated expense.²¹ Expect opposition.²² Make informed decisions without complete information.²³ Tutor your mind to appraise, interpret and apply all stimuli.²⁴ Do not shy from contradicting societal practices, conventional thinking and traditional approaches.²⁵

PRAYER

Prayer is your means of accessing God's revealing grace. Trust every assessment to God. "God never denied that soul anything that went as far as heaven to ask it."²⁶ Prayer is purposed to capture God's will, not impress God with your will. God answers only the prayer He plants.

Prayer plows heavenly soil so as to uncover God's design. Effective prayer adopts God's divine estimation of the matter. Pray for God to close inappropriate doors that appear opened and to open beneficial doors that appear closed. Ask for no guidance until you are certain of your willingness to labor in accord with God's guidance.²⁷

Affluence, position, power and success are seldom friends of fervent prayer. The purest gold is the most tried. The man accounting himself nothing is the highest esteemer of God's counsel.

Pray expecting God's answer. God says, "It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."²⁸ When you enter into prayer, embrace the spirit of Micah: "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me."²⁹

ASSURANCE

“The Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”³⁰ God will do all He promises.

You are valuable to God. He sent Jesus for you. Therefore, “the steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way.”³¹

But what if you have taken an action outside God’s will? If your activity is sinful, you are to repent even as David did when he confessed his adultery declaring, “I have sinned against the Lord.”³² Though sinful activity is accompanied by scarring, God remains your God. God says, “Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten... And you shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.”³³

You can only know God’s will for this season, not for the remainder of your life. He dispenses directional revelation with a grace-based stinginess that is only befitting an omniscient God.

“Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy pow’rful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more, feed
me till I want no more.

“Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through. Strong Deliv’rer,
strong Deliv’rer, be Thou still my strength and shield, be Thou still my
strength and shield.

“When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; bear
me through the swelling current, land me safe on Canaan’s side. Songs
of praises, songs of praises I will ever give to Thee, I will ever give to Thee.”
(William Williams, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”).

TIMING

Discovering God’s specific will for yourself requires enduring patience: “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”³⁴ Contrast the impatient flesh with the vigorous spirit. “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”³⁵

But why does God postpone your perception of His guidance? He may not be the postponer. Your sin or your lack of commitment may be clouding your awareness of God’s hand.

God may delay His answer to your petition because He is doing a work in your life via the delay, or He is laboring in the life of another and your delay enables your participation in the other person’s edification. God alone knows the rationale, but regardless of the cause, you know that God’s delays are divine. He is the protagonist: “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.”³⁶ When

uncertainty alerts you to God's delay, listen for "the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall go out to battle, for God will have gone out before you."³⁷

God is never hurried for He is not subject to time, and you are only subject to the time He foreordains. Moses says, "A thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."³⁸ You shall have no heart of wisdom to present to God unless you seek His timing concerning the press of your life.

God is good; all He does is good. He has nothing but perfect blessings for you. Trust His timing.

Perhaps God is tutoring you to depend solely upon Him. Take up your position with Habakkuk who said, "I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me. The Lord is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places."³⁹

GOD'S PATTERN

God reveals Himself in diverse yet distinctive ways in the lives of His redeemed. He establishes a pattern of His activity in each saint's life. For example, when Saul questioned David's ability to do battle with Goliath, David referred Saul to God's prior work when he was shepherding the flock. He said, "When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."⁴⁰

David trusted the means God previously deployed in his behalf and had no basis to distrust the Lord in his present battle. God reveals His precious will in the life of one man via his finances while in the lives of others, God's revelation is made clear through the voice of circumstances, godly associates or convicting preaching. Though the whispers of the Holy Spirit may be quiet, they are scripturally centered and quickly discerned by the yielded life.

God says, "Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."⁴¹ God's initial patterning work is in your mind for your mind is being transformed from a world-based perspective to a heavenly-based perspective.⁴² As God massages your mind and inclines you to His designs, you eliminate competing alternatives and your godly judgment becomes more eternally refined.

Thoughtfully pray concerning the pattern of God's prior work in your life. Think through your most trying times while asking the Spirit to reveal God's arrangement for alerting you to His will. He will most probably work in the future just as He has worked in the past.

INSTRUMENTS AND MEANS

Several of your Puritan brothers allow meaningful wisdom concerning the instruments and means God employs to inform you regarding His design for your life:

- “Peter hath a cock to tell him his cowardice, and Balaam an ass to reprove his avarice.” (Thomas Adams)
- “Though it be clay, let Christ use it, and it shall open the eyes, though in itself more likely to put them out.” (William Gurnall)
- “The most crooked tree will make timber for the Temple, if God pleases to hew it.” (Thomas Fuller)⁴³

Caution, counsel, circumstances and confirmations will serve you well as you ascertain the Lord’s will for your righteous walk. He provides resources for your discernment and opportunities for capturing clarity. He expects you to avail yourself of the spiritual disciplines set forth in Scripture:

1. Fervent, concentrated and consistent prayer;
2. Stillness accompanied by thorough and incisive thoughtfulness;
3. Fasting from food, entertainment, people, pleasures, etc.;
4. Keeping His Sabbath holy; and
5. Biblical stewardship.

You are extraordinary to God for He has “called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”⁴⁴ You live in extraordinary times. God has an extraordinary mission for your life. In order for you to live an extraordinary life, you must access God’s extraordinary instruments and means.

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

Perhaps the following interrogatives will assist you in making godly decisions.

1. What decision would be *most* pleasing to God?⁴⁵

Arrest all decay; recapture your innocence. Cease holding yourself accountable to man rather than God, for non-Christians love the approval of men rather than the approval of God.⁴⁶ Tragically, legions of Christians are willing to settle for what is good rather than what is best in terms of pleasing God.

William Carey wanted to take the doctrines of grace to Polynesia; God’s design upon brother Carey’s life was for him to impact the spiritual landscape of India. David Livingstone wanted to introduce the gospel of the only begotten Son of God to China, but God had prepared the continent of Africa for His Son’s gospel to be sounded forth by Livingstone’s tongue.

The Christian commonly becomes so focused upon *my* mission that he fails to seek the counsel of the Lord concerning *His* mission. Your desire is to please God for “unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”⁴⁷ Carefully consider the plans

God has for you because you know He has “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”⁴⁸ Pray for and ponder upon *most* pleasing and best rather than what might be adequate, acceptable and even good.

2. How will my spiritual strength be affected by this decision?

Break the cycle of addiction to faulted decision-making practices. The process you previously engaged failed you. What failed to enlighten before will probably not work today. Do not go back to the leeks and onions of Egypt, to making bricks without straw.

Demas so loved this present world he deserted Paul and went to Thessalonica.⁴⁹ He left the company of the evangelist of the ages, the presence of a man who turned this world upside down. Demas’ desertion alerts you to God’s holy caution. “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 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.”⁵⁰

Call upon the Spirit of Jesus to guide your spirit.⁵¹ He does not have the ability to fail you. “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”⁵² What choice will demand of you the utmost dependence upon the Holy Spirit?

3. What choice will require of me most complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit?

Cowardice handcuffs virtues. Oftentimes the difficulty is not in determining God’s design upon your life, but courageously embracing God’s righteousness. Wanting to hold back something for yourself is the forge of spiritual paralysis.

Christians refusing to completely depend upon God are doubters languishing with divided minds. Most of them experience little godly direction and limited joy in the Lord. God says, “I hate those who are double-minded.”⁵³ God cries out to you via the command of His servant Joshua declaring, “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.”⁵⁴

The watchfires of Christendom fail to blaze with God’s glory because God’s people are hesitating wavering double-minded milksops refusing to stand in the gap! Elijah was commissioned to lance Israel’s spiritual abscess by challenging an entire nation to make a choice.⁵⁵

Though the above example from the life of the Hebrews may occur in your life, generally tough choices do not come in dramatic colors with drums rolling and trumpets blaring. In the quietness of life you meet the most demanding circumstances. How involved is the Holy Spirit in addressing your state of affairs? Is He sifting your motives, purging you with heavenly fire and laboring for a thorough work in you?

4. What decision will result in delaying *my* gratification?⁵⁶

Your commonwealth is heaven, not earth.⁵⁷ Cease living by habit and begin walking by faith.⁵⁸ God commands you to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”⁵⁹

How crucified are you to the world’s pleasures, powers, possessions and positions?⁶⁰ When your comfort and well-being are at risk, you are most vulnerable to forget your crucifixion to the world. Do not allow the lust of your eyes to kidnap your esteem for the crucifixion of Christ for you, the crucifixion of the world to you, and the crucifixion of you to the world.

This world is a liar and a thief. Its amusements and pleasures debauch your mind thereby robbing you of your innocence and you become its spoil. Your world encourages its lusts to become your lifestyle.

Do not be rushed into making a decision God does not want you to make. Choices are to be made in the fullness of God’s time. Time is rarely as pressing as it appears, “Therefore, wait for Me,” God says.⁶¹

Velocity has drawn and quartered many a Christian. Near demands appear most urgent, but trusting in God’s Spirit will provide the yes and no of Christ. Pay the ransom of delayed gratification so that you might attend God’s university of stillness wherein you can unlearn your culture and become mature in the things of Christ.

5. How will this decision support my personal mission statement?

God published John the Baptist’s mission statement.⁶² His mission was to:

- ◆ Turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord;
- ◆ Go as a forerunner before Jesus accessing the spirit and power of Elijah;
- ◆ Turn hearts; and
- ◆ Make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

What is your personal mission statement? You cannot know your mission until God reveals it to you, but He rarely reveals a person’s mission unless that person yieldingly seeks His face. Have you sought His counsel concerning His mission for you?

As you begin to place down into writing your life’s mission, pray that your Lord Jesus Christ’s good hand will be upon you. Set your heart to study God’s law, to practice it and to teach His statutes and ordinances.⁶³ When you are within God’s divine and eternal will, He will enlarge the place of your tent, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. Doubts will vanish and assurance will escort you into the joy of your Lord.

6. Is any option actually a masked temptation?

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”⁶⁴

Decisional intersections cannot be rightly addressed unless your face is *already* set like flint on righteousness *prior* to approaching the intersection. As you know, “each one is

tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”⁶⁵

You are vulnerable to temptation’s seductions. Because you are tempted by what is temporary, your awareness of temptation’s methods and propositions must increase. Temptation’s bait is especially designed, presented and selected just for you. The hook that carries you away is concealed via the façade of innocence, excitement or self-delusion.

There are several effective means to escape temptations:

- ◆ Righteous prayers;⁶⁶
- ◆ Pure associations;⁶⁷
- ◆ A godly mental attitude;⁶⁸
- ◆ Do the good works accompanying righteousness;⁶⁹ and
- ◆ Be sober and on the alert for the devil.⁷⁰

When you think you have arrived at God’s will, write God a letter explaining why you made the choice. Fill the letter with the scriptural underpinnings for your decision. Scripture is an effective insulator against cloaked temptations.

EPILOGUE

Godly decisions are strangled by worldly influences. Worldly wisdom is an artificial intelligence. Worldly intellect is a pitiable substitute for eternal intelligence. God says, “Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.”⁷¹

God created you for the task that God has given you to occupy yourself.⁷² In that regard, God has established certain steps you are to take that are appropriate for just certain times. He has ordained your end as well as the means leading to His divine end. Failing to choose even the least of His means diverts you from your earthly purpose thereby burdening you with frustration and confusion.

You are only as holy as your most recent decision. Vital choices declare that you have chosen for yourself “today whom you will serve.”⁷³ Every impulse of the Holy Spirit with your spirit is sacred. The Spirit’s direction fuels you with holy energy whereas the spirit of this world drains you of holy energy. Make choices that reveal you are holy to the Lord, and are being separated from the unholy.

SUGGESTED READING

You cannot be about your Master’s business unless you purpose to know the business of your Master. Read the writings of authors that regard Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice. Your favorite books should be those wherein God is exalted, the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and the Holy Spirit is accessed.

Make sure the author draws the distinction between salvation and sanctification, grace and faith, regeneration and justification. When you settle for writings that are shallow, vague, misty and designed for increased sales rather than richer souls, you have chosen for your mind and heart to forfeit the length, breadth, width and depth of the true God of Scripture.

Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996).

Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism, A Biblical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1963).

Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983).

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with notes by Warren Wiersbe, (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1989).

Isabel Fleece, *Not By Accident* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000).

Douglas F. Kelly, *If God Already Knows – Why Pray?* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001).

Robertson McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale house Publishers, Inc., 1989).

Stephen F. Olford, *Not I But Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1995).

J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990).

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973).

The writings of the following authors will serve to enrich any Christian's soul:

Anthony Burgess, Jeremiah Burroughs, Stephen Charnock, Jonathan Edwards, William Greenhill, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Matthew Mead, Richard Sibbes, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Thomas Vincent, Thomas Watson, George Whitefield, The Church Fathers and The Protestant Reformers.

Most people are unable to progress via the writings of a wide range of Christian writers. Find the grouping of authors God has commissioned to facilitate your growth in Him. The Puritan writings are the deepest of the spiritual waters. Spiritual growth is enhanced when you tutor yourself to read slower as to apprehend the profundity of truth. The Puritans generally are quite close to the Source.

¹ Ps. 37:5

² Eze. 33:10

³ Ro. 6:11; 13:14

⁴ Mt. 16:24

⁵ Dan. 2:47

⁶ II Pe. 1:3

⁷ I Cor. 10:31

⁸ II Ti. 3:16f.

⁹ Col. 3:2

¹⁰ Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3

¹¹ Ro. 8:29

¹² Col. 3:2

¹³ I Thess. 4:3a,7

¹⁴ Tit. 2:12

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- ¹⁵ II Cor. 10:5
¹⁶ Prov. 3:5f.
¹⁷ Gen. 19:26
¹⁸ Phil. 3:14
¹⁹ Eph. 2:10
²⁰ Hag. 1:5-7
²¹ Lk. 14:28ff.
²² Dan. 6:10; The entire Book of Nehemiah.
²³ I Ki. 18:21
²⁴ I Chron. 12:32
²⁵ Col. 2:8
²⁶ John Trapp, *The Puritan Remembrancer* ed. by H. J. Horn (London: Stanley Martin & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 248.
²⁷ Js. 2:17,20
²⁸ Isa. 65:2
²⁹ Mic. 7:7
³⁰ Isa. 58:11
³¹ Ps. 37:23
³² II Sam. 12:13
³³ Joel 2:25f.
³⁴ Ps. 37:3
³⁵ II Cor. 5:7
³⁶ Lam. 3:25
³⁷ I Chron. 14:15
³⁸ Ps. 90:4,12
³⁹ Hab. 2:1; 3:19
⁴⁰ I Sam. 17:34f.,37
⁴¹ I Pe. 1:13
⁴² II Cor. 3:18
⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
⁴⁴ I Pe. 2:9
⁴⁵ Col. 1:10
⁴⁶ Jn. 12:43
⁴⁷ Ps. 127:1
⁴⁸ Jer. 29:11
⁴⁹ II Ti. 4:10
⁵⁰ Ro. 12:1f.
⁵¹ Acts 16:7
⁵² Lk. 18:29f.
⁵³ Ps. 119:113
⁵⁴ Josh. 24:15
⁵⁵ I Ki. 18
⁵⁶ Phil. 3:19
⁵⁷ Phil. 3:20
⁵⁸ Hab. 2:4
⁵⁹ II Cor. 4:18
⁶⁰ Gal. 6:14
⁶¹ Zeph. 3:8
⁶² Lk. 1:16f.
⁶³ Ezra 7:10
⁶⁴ Prov. 14:12
⁶⁵ Js. 14f.
⁶⁶ Mt. 6:13; Lk. 22:40
⁶⁷ Ps. 1:1
⁶⁸ Prov.23:7; Ro. 6:11; Eph. 4:27

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- ⁶⁹ Ro. 12:21
⁷⁰ I Pe. 5:8
⁷¹ Ps. 25:12
⁷² Ecc. 3:10
⁷³ Josh. 24:15