
WAITING ON GOD FOR GUIDANCE

Prayer must be emphasized throughout our study of guidance. We must ask God specifically for a guided life and commit each day specifically to Him. Prayer is related to almost every step in guidance.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

You do not have, because you do not ask God (James 4:2).

Often when we face a major decision we spend time weighing the pros and cons, try to gather information, and then in the final stages ask God to guide us in our conclusion. God does expect us to use all our fact-finding abilities, our reason, and our human resources. But God is our primary Guide, and our priority must be to seek Him first.

God Has No Emergencies

There are those wonderful experiences in life when a sudden crisis arises and almost instantly God gives the needed guidance. We prefer to have instant answers all the time, but that would not contribute to our spiritual well-being. The nature of guidance often requires extended time. You must allow God time to prepare you, others, and the situation for which you are praying.

Patience is always an important element in prayer. What is an emergency to you is never an emergency to God. He has foreseen the whole situation. God is never surprised. God is never without resources. God is never late.

Give God Time to Work

God has given every person the Godlike power of choice, the ability to think, react, and make up his mind. Since Adam, man has constantly been tempted to assert his independence from God. We stubbornly resist accepting what we have not ourselves chosen. God in His infinite patience gives us the permission to learn lessons the hard way.

In many guidance situations, the reactions of others is involved. God does not compel; He works with them, permitting their use of their own will and choice. Don't become impatient.

You need never take a step in the dark. If you do, you are sure to make a mistake. Wait! Wait till you have light. Remind the Lord Jesus that as He is Counselor to the church of God, He will be, in your particular case, Counselor and Guide, and will direct you. If you patiently wait, believingly, expectantly, you will find that the waiting is not in vain, and that the Lord will prove Himself a Counselor both wise and good.

—George Mueller

1. Remember how patient God has been with you.

God may be exercising patience with you today in ways you do not realize. In fact, it may be primarily for your sake that waiting longer in prayer for guidance is important.

2. Remember that God may be more concerned with the opportunity of a situation than with the chronology.

God foresees when the situation is just right for the maximum result. That may be more important than the date or the hour on your clock. Your responsibility is to be ready and to make the most of the opportunity; give God time to get the situation ready.

3. Remember that only God knows the future.

Only God knows all the factors in the situation. Only He can coordinate all aspects at the most opportune time. Your part is to obey and to leave the future in God's hand. Let God be God. He will not procrastinate; God's time is always best.

Time waiting on God in prayer is never lost. From your perspective there may be much waiting and apparent delay. From God's perspective your waiting in extended prayer is investment.

Reasons Why You Need to Wait

1. *Waiting on God enables you to know God better.* To know a person you need to spend time with that one. To know God you must spend time with Him. The most precious knowledge in the world is the knowledge of God. After Moses had spent forty days with God on Mount Sinai he prayed, "You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you" (Exod. 33:12-13). God granted his request. No one ever knew God face to face as Moses did (Deut. 34:10). And no one was given such detailed guidance as Moses. Waiting on God enables you to learn more and more of Him and His will.

2. *Waiting on God teaches you spiritual lessons.* God works not only *through* you, but more important, *in* you. Prayer helps you grow in grace, faith, and Christlikeness. God has important and blessed purposes to fulfill. Waiting on God places you in His school of grace. You become a better disciple as you wait.

Normally guidance becomes simpler and more natural as you go on with the Lord, but God may permit you to go through special faith-developing experiences. Sometimes you may pass through a period of darkness and testing. God is teaching you stronger, purer faith and courage. God is weaning you from dependence on your emotional feelings to naked faith in God. Hudson Taylor in his later years confessed that this was true in his life.¹

3. *Waiting on God strengthens your faith.* Are you afraid to trust His provision and His time? Circumstances all around you may be in turmoil, but your heart can be at rest. Excessive haste may be an indication that you need to learn deeper lessons of faith. Trusting in God gives calmness and serenity. Trust delivers from feverish fretting, hectic struggling, and worry. The Hebrew of Isaiah 28:16

¹M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God's Will* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 125.

reads, "The one who trusts will never be in a hurry." God may keep you waiting until you are absolutely sure of His will and have an unshakable faith and deep peace. Then you can move ahead with joy.

4. *Waiting on God develops self-confidence.* God may keep you waiting until your assurance of His will becomes deeper. By waiting on God you will become more sure of yourself and more decisive. This happened to Gideon (Judg. 6). You do not need to see the whole path before you begin the first step.

5. *Waiting on God develops a spirit of praise.* God often needs to teach you to praise. Guidance is easier as you love, worship, and praise. When you have prayed to the place of assurance, the petitions change to praise. Praise clears the way for guidance. Praise sometimes changes things unchanged by prayer alone.

When you don't know what to do, praise the Lord! When you fear the future, praise the Lord! When your decision is too big for you alone, praise the Lord! When your time for making the decision is growing short, you still have time to praise the Lord. Praise makes you available to God and God available to you.

Praise God that He is your loving Father who desires that you know His will. Praise Him for His promises of guidance. Praise Him that He is at work even when you cannot see it. Praise Him for the guidance He is going to give you. Praise Him for His faithfulness. Praise Him that He is now clearing the way before you.

6. *Waiting on God quiets your heart.* When your heart is not quiet, you may not recognize when God speaks. A busy mind often does not sense the mind of Christ. "My soul, be silent before God alone" (Ps. 62:5 Heb.). For hours before the Titanic struck the iceberg and sank with immense loss of life in 1912, other ships in the North Atlantic tried to give warning, but all the ship's radio lines were jammed with passengers talking to friends and relatives on shore. They were too busy to receive the warning messages.

Your heart can be so filled with thoughts, plans, memories, and worries that you fail to hear the gentle voice of God. Jesus instructed us that when we spend time in prayer we should go into our room and close the door (Matt. 6:6). A quiet heart is essential.

How can you clear your mind and close the door? Read God's Word until your heart is completely quiet and you sense only His

presence and will. Perhaps it will help if you read Scripture aloud. Sing or read devotional hymns or choruses. I have at times read as many as fifty chapters from God's Word before I was completely alone with God. But on some of those occasions I received such unexpected guidance that my life has been greatly benefited.

7. *Waiting on God clarifies His impressions.* In a major decision God always gives you sufficient time to become sure. God's impressions are gentle, but as you wait before God, they become clear and strong. The longer you wait in prayer, the weaker Satan's distracting impressions become.

8. *Waiting on God makes you willing.* Unwillingness to do God's will should not be present if you are totally committed and Spirit-filled. But while God's will is being clarified, you may feel hesitation. In such circumstances, prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but preparing your heart and will. It may take time to bring your desire and mood into harmony with God's.

9. *Waiting on God delivers from hurry.* A hurried spirit has difficulty hearing God's voice. Perhaps you are too anxious and nervous to hear what He seeks to say. God may need to slow you down long enough to gain full access to your heart.

10. *Waiting on God prepares for greater blessing.* God has greater plans than you have realized. Give Him time to do great things. The greater the work He plans, the greater the prayer preparation that may be necessary, including prayer for guidance. God often waits so that He can be even more gracious (Isa. 30:18).

11. *Waiting on God helps prepare others.* When you find God's will, others may be helped to discern His will for them. God's guidance to you may need to come at a time when it helps others too. Most questions regarding guidance have implications for others. God may need to prepare them also.

12. *Waiting on God may change your relationship with others.* A critical attitude, bitterness, carnal interpersonal attitudes, broken relationships, alienation and estrangement, unforgiveness—any of these can prevent your sensing God's nearness and smile of approval. These all hinder your prayers for guidance.

As you wait alone with God, He may point out aspects of your relationships that hinder. Examine your heart in the light of these Scriptures:

A critical attitude: Matthew 7:1-6; John 8:7; Romans 14:4, 10-15; 1 Corinthians 4:5-7; 2 Corinthians 12:20; James 4:11-12.

Anger: Psalm 37:8; Proverbs 15:18; 19:11; 22:21-25; 25:28; 29:22; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Jonah 4:4; Matthew 5:22; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:26, 31; Colossians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:8; Titus 1:7; James 1:19-20.

Bitterness: Acts 8:23; Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15; James 3:14-15.

Broken interpersonal relationships: Proverbs 17:14; Matt. 5:23-24. (Note you are responsible to act regardless of who is to blame, among family, church, or friends.)

Unforgiveness: Proverbs 24:17, 29; 25:21-22; Matthew 5:39-46; 6:12-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:35-37; 17:3-4; Romans 12:14-21; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 3:9.

13. *Waiting on God may win spiritual warfare.* Satan recognizes that if you are guided by the Spirit, great damage will result to his kingdom. Satan will do all he can to confuse, discourage, mislead, and keep you from receiving guidance. Prayer warfare may be necessary in obtaining God's guidance.

Daniel received God's special guidance in the form of a vision. He needed God to clarify the vision further and prayed and partially fasted for three weeks. Then Gabriel brought the answer. He told Daniel that his prayer was heard and granted the first day. But demonic forces fought against Gabriel until at last Michael came and helped defeat them (Dan. 10). If Daniel had stopped praying before the twenty-first day, he would not have received the guidance.

More spiritual warfare occurs in the heavenlies than you and I are aware of. You need not worry about that. Just keep waiting on God until He gives you the guidance you need or else tells you it is unnecessary. Over and over again, individuals and groups have stopped praying just before God's answer came.

the secret of listening

If you have not experienced divine guidance frequently, you may at first find more difficulty distinguishing the voice of the Lord from your feelings and impressions. You may feel unsure of yourself or of the Lord's desire or ability to communicate with you naturally and regularly. Usually the more you have experienced the preciousness of God's guidance, the easier it becomes to discern when He is speaking. There are several reasons for this.

1. *You develop a deeper hunger for continual guidance.* It becomes more of a priority, and you receive more because you ask more.

2. *You learn to trust God more simply and expectantly for His guiding voice.* The more He speaks to you, the more relaxed and confident you become. You rest in God's faithfulness.

3. *You develop a spiritual habit of listening.* Often you are almost unaware that you are listening. You become so restfully alert that, whatever the circumstances, you sense His slightest whisper, the glance of His eye, or the touch of His hand. Spiritual listening has become natural to you.

You do not question that He will guide you again. You know He is a speaking God and you develop the habit of listening. You are ready for the Spirit to guide you on any subject at any time. You have learned God is interested in even the smallest details of your life. You learn to take everything to Him in prayer, and listening for guidance becomes almost your second nature.

How to Develop a Listening Ear

You can develop a spiritual attitude and habit of listening for God's guiding voice. Any Spirit-filled Christian can develop this holy lifestyle. It will add new joy and meaning to your Christian life and service. You must be alert and attentive, but this will not be difficult or burdensome. It will lead you repeatedly to gratitude and praise to God. You will become more deeply conscious of God's fatherly care than ever before. I challenge you to try it.

1. *Be filled with the Spirit.* Be sure that you have made a total surrender to God and have been filled with His Spirit. You cannot trust for this if there is unwillingness on your part to accept God's will. Total commitment means *total* commitment. Hereafter you may be concerned at times to be sure you understand God's will, but there will be no serious struggle about doing it. You have said an eternal yes to God, and He is fully Lord in your life.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said, "I can say from experience that 95 percent of knowing the will of God consists in being willing to do it before you know what it is."

Your simple faith has opened your heart to the fullness of the Spirit. He has indwelled you ever since your new birth. Now He floods your life again and again with His presence. After the 120 were cleansed, empowered, and filled at Pentecost, they had further infillings as they had need (Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52).

As you serve the Lord you expend your spiritual energy and at times you may feel dry and depleted. But you have every spiritual right to ask God to refresh and refill you. Even Jesus sensed the expenditure of power as He ministered (Luke 6:19; 8:46). God promises times of refreshing (Acts 3:19). It is God's good pleasure that you live in the daily fullness of His Spirit.

When the Spirit fills you, He continually exercises His lordship through your surrendered will. It becomes comparatively easy for you to be motivated, restrained, or guided by the Spirit.

2. *Ask God for a listening ear.* In guidance, as in so much else, we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Make this asking twofold. First, ask God to develop in you a listening ear. Second, from then on ask His guidance as you begin each day. You need not always express it in the same words, but the essence will be the same:

Lord, give me a listening ear today. Help me to recognize Your voice. Keep me alert and listening. Lord, I'm trusting You to guide me throughout today.

3. *Listen with expectancy.* To listen is to combine calm unhurriedness with quiet expectancy. Expect God's gentle touch, His slightest nudge or restraint. Go through your day expecting to hear His gentle voice at any time. Live in readiness, in constant availability, in moment-by-moment openness to God.

Prophets like Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15) and Elisha (2 Kings 3:14) testified that they "stood" before the Lord. The Hebrew word suggests standing in respect, obedience, and readiness to serve.¹ Just as the highest cabinet ministers stood in the presence of the emperor, instantly available to serve, so we too "stand" in God's presence at attention, alert, listening for any word from Him. What an honor to be available constantly to God!

4. *Remember that God speaks in many ways.* You may hear God at any time—during your quiet time, while you are busy at your duty, while attending a church service, while praying with or talking with friends, or even as you awaken. God may use a verse of a hymn, a passage of Scripture, a memory, or the counsel of a friend.

Above all, expect God to speak to you through His Word or prayer. Commitment to God's guidance involves commitment to continual reading of His Word. Read it prayerfully, regularly, and extensively. The more God's Word fills your mind and memory, the more easily the Spirit can use Scripture to guide you.

Observe how God guides, blesses, and works in the lives of others. One of the qualifications for a prophet was to be a close observer—of life, of the nation, of the people. "The LORD said to me, 'You have seen correctly'" (Jer. 1:12) has also been translated, "You are a close observer." As you prayerfully observe, you will sense God's will from many things.

5. *Begin to learn guidance in simple matters.* I suggest you begin with prayer. Ask God to give you a prayer assignment each day. "Lord, if someone is especially needing my prayer today, bring that

¹R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II:674.

person to my mind. Put that one on my heart." Then trust God to guide you. Pray for that person in your free moments. Put the name beside your clock, on your refrigerator door, beside your mirror, or some other place where you will see it.

Snatch moments during the day to breathe a prayer for that one—while you are shaving, washing, doing dishes, driving the car, or waiting. If you can be free for two or three minutes, kneel beside your chair or bed, or sit quietly and pray.

The next day, ask God who should be your next assignment. It may be your pastor, a sick friend, a young person, a family facing problems, an unsaved neighbor, your senator, your president. It may be one of your loved ones, but be careful to focus most of your prayer concern outside your family circle.

I hope you make use of a written prayer list. God may put someone from that list on your heart. For example, one of my prayer lists names fifty-four persons who are imprisoned for Christ. I try to name each one briefly before the Lord daily. At times as I awakened in the morning, one of those names was instantly on my heart; it was God's special assignment for that day. Sometimes God may bring to your mind someone you have not thought of for months; accept that one as your prayer assignment that day.

Practice listening by asking God to show you those you can bless. God is a God who blesses. He is kind to the evil and the good. Jesus went around blessing others. He lived to bless. As Christians we should constantly bless others.

Ask God to open your eyes to people. It may be an older person with a package that you can carry. He or she may mention a need, and you can promise to pray. You may see a child who needs attention. You might say, "You have such a nice smile" or "You will soon be a big girl" or "You are really growing, aren't you?" Then add, "I hope you help lots of people as you grow up, and be sure to pray to Jesus," or a similar witnessing remark.

On Sunday ask, "Lord, make me a blessing in church today." Try to bless as many as possible with a loving smile, a cheery greeting, or a "God bless you." Pray for your pastor as he preaches and give him an encouraging word; thank the soloist. Be natural, but trust God constantly to show you ways to bless others.

6. *Learn God's guidance in daily activities.* When shopping, pray,

"Lord, guide me to any special bargain, but don't let me waste my money." At a public dinner or function, ask, "Lord, if there is anyone I should speak to, guide me." You may be amazed at the helpful information received after such a prayer. When traveling by bus or plane, pray, "Lord, if you want me to sit by someone today, work it out." God has arranged amazing contacts following such a prayer. Commit your work to the Lord:

Lord, if there is something I am overlooking, call it to my attention. Lord, how should I solve this problem?

Commit your driving the car, parking the car, phone conversations, letter writing, interpersonal family relations, relations with your neighbors or fellow workers, and other such items—commit them constantly for God's guidance.

Ask God to guide you in your citizenship—when to write your senator, mayor, or other political leader over an action of government, a proposed law, or civic problems. Ask Him to guide you in putting civic names and needs on your prayer lists for longer and shorter times. Ask Him to guide you in everything.

7. *Expect guidance to be natural.* Dramatic guidance is rare. Don't wait for the unusual to happen. Just be yourself, but keep trusting God to guide you, use you, and make you a blessing. Expect Him to bring a suggestion to your mind at any time. Also expect Him to quietly restrain you from any unwise word or action.

Don't expect an audible voice or vision. Just be relaxed, yet open and alert to any suggestion from the Lord, no matter how small it may seem. What may seem rather unimportant to you may prove to be very helpful or important to another.

8. *Thank the Lord each time He helps and guides you.* We all overlook many occasions when God guides. He may call something to your attention in the paper and impress you to fill your car's gas tank, and the next day the price goes up. Someone may "incidentally" mention an important bit of information. Breathe an instantaneous "thank you" to the Lord. You will find these occasions becoming more frequent. Thank Him.

As guidance becomes more and more a part of your spiritual lifestyle, God controls your life and uses you in ways more blessedly real than you ever dreamed possible.

9. *Expect much of your guidance for the sake of others.* Jesus lived a life of sacrifice for others. Today He wants to use your hands, feet, mouth, love, and talents. When you live in the will of God, you live for others. You owe them the blessings God has given you. You are now to present your body a living sacrifice to God by being totally His and totally available for others (Rom. 12:1-2). God wants to extend the influence of your love and your prayer until it includes many people. Begin by blessing those near you, but don't be content until your blessing extends as far as possible. God can guide your love, prayer, and obedience to bless a whole world. Why not?

Your primary motive in guidance is to please and glorify the Lord. Your secondary motive is to be a blessing to others. This corresponds with the two great commandments, as summarized by Jesus (Matt. 22:37-40): love to God and love to your neighbor.

We are members of one another. "Each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5). We are to have mutual concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:25). Next to the glory of God, we should be motivated by what will best serve and help others who need the touch of Christ's love.

Listening, then, should be more often for the sake of others than for one's own sake. Real *agape* love is to be poured out on others. "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1 Cor. 10:24). Paul could testify, "I am not seeking my own good but the good of many" (1 Cor. 10:33). Beware of making your own interests your constant motive.

Seek God's way to bless others. Like Jesus, live for others. Then you will find that increasingly God will use others to bless you, bear your burdens, and benefit you in practical ways. This is God's law: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Seek first God's priorities; then He will supply your needs, often even before you ask Him (Matt. 6:33).

10. *Stay humble.* God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Guidance is one of God's provisions of grace for you. Don't be quick to tell others how God guided. There will be times when it is appropriate to testify to God's guiding help. Share this with humility, Christlikeness, and joy. Remember how unworthy you are.

If you begin to become self-confident of your ability to hear

God's voice and take guidance for granted, God may have to withhold His guidance for a time. God will guide you when to share your testimony privately or publicly and when to keep it a sacred secret between you and Him.

11. *Stay available to God.* God may occasionally guide you so that you are in the right place at the right time to fill a very important role. God may suddenly use you in a way that has a very dramatic result. Don't expect that frequently, but when you live a guided life daily, God can alert you for special, urgent needs.

12. *Keep praising the Lord.* Praise draws you closer to God and makes you more conscious of Him. Praise helps you to be more submissive and dependent on Him. It fills you with anticipation and faith for His help. Praise helps you to let go and let God work.

Quiet praise helps your heart to rest and become so silent that you can hear God's voice more easily. A praising heart makes your companionship with the Lord more intimate and precious.

13. *Leave the responsibility with God.* Learn to rest in God's faithfulness in guiding you. He has more ways to guide you than you know to ask for. He sees possibilities you don't realize. A father is more responsible to guide a submissive, obedient child than that child is to ask. God assumes the responsibility when you are totally committed to Him, listening for His voice and resting on His sovereignty in your life. When you truly long to please Him, God is always ready to go the second mile to be sure you are guided.