



ACBC
Counseling. Discipleship. Training

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GUIDANCE

Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)¹

- 1) There is no way to know God's will and receive His guidance apart from Scripture
- 2) There are Scriptural principles and practices to cover all circumstances of life, available to those who take the time/make the effort to understand and know the Bible adequately
- 3) Scriptures speak both directly and indirectly ... They help us to make either yes/no decisions or they bound the problem with a limited number of solutions

I. The Guidance of the Holy Spirit

- God only guides or leads His people today by Scripture or by Providence

A. By providence (Pr 21:1; 16:9)

- We do not need to know God's decreed will and how He is providentially bringing it about before we make a decision (Dt. 29:29)

"I'd like us to consider that maybe we have difficulty discovering God's wonderful plan for our lives because, if the truth be told, He doesn't really intend to tell us what it is. And maybe we're wrong to expect Him to." (DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 18)

- No one is ever outside of God's decreed plan (La 3:37-38; Ro 8:28-29)

B. By Scripture (Ps 73:24)

1. Scripture is sufficient (2 Pe 1:3)

"Whenever we are confronted with a question about Christian practice, we must apply the teaching of the Bible. Sometimes the Bible will deal with it directly, and we must go by its direct teaching. Often the Bible will not deal with it directly, and then we must look for general principles to guide us. It does not matter what other people think. Their behavior is not a standard for us. But the Bible is a standard for us, and it is by the Bible that we must live." (J.C. Ryle, *Walking with God*)

2. Man is responsible (2 Ti 2:15)

3. Man is completely dependent on the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit's role is to convict, teach, and conform us – all through the vehicle of the Word of God (Jn. 16:8; 17:17).

¹ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 24.



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- The Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture (2 Pe 1:21)
- The Holy Spirit brings about conviction of sin through the Word (Jn 16:8)
- The Holy Spirit illuminates the Bible – enabling Christians to understand God’s truth (1 Jn 2:20,27)

"The doctrine of illumination does not mean we can know and understand everything (Deut. 29:29), that we do not need human teachers (Eph. 4:11-12), or that study is not hard work (2 Tim. 2:15). It does mean that Scripture can be understood [because of the Holy Spirit] by every Christian who is diligent and obedient." (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, 65.)

- The Holy Spirit is the agent of righteous living (Ga 5:16-26; Ro 8:1-17)

“The Spirit leads believers through God's Word by illuminating the text (so that they can understand it) and then empowering them to obey it and live by it. While this is certainly a deeply spiritual activity that we do not fully understand, God has none-the-less revealed enough of the process so that we can objectively know God's will and obey Him (Eph. 5:17, Col. 1:9-10).” (Keith Palmer, *Grace Bible Church Perspective Series: God's Will and Impressions*)

II. Understanding Your Counselee

A. Why he/she wants to know:

1. Wants to please God
2. Desires to know all the facts + complete assurance everything will turn out fine

“We can stop pleading with God to show us the future, and start living and obeying like we are confident that he holds the future.” (DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 42)

“... God’s normal way of operation is not to show [His] plan ahead of time – in retrospect, maybe; in advance, rarely.” (DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 42)

3. Desires perfect fulfillment
4. Has too many choices

B. Five common problems:

1. Overly focused on amoral decisions
2. Doubting God’s character



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3. Sinful preoccupation with the future

“Anxiety is simply living out the future before it gets here.” (DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 46)

4. Neglect of personal responsibility, accountability, and initiative

5. Hopeless subjectivism

III. Basic Principles for Decision-Making

A. The pattern of wisdom:

1. Trust in His will of decree
2. Obey His will of desire
3. Seek first His kingdom and trust Him to take care of our needs

B. Four basic principles²

1. Search the Scriptures (He 5:14)
2. Get wise counsel
 - a. Every believer needs pastoral oversight and the body of Christ to help him stay true to God’s Word (Pro 1:5; 12:15; 15:22; 18:1-2; He 13:17)
 - b. Be teachable
3. Pray (Mt 6:33)
 - o When we pray, we should ask for holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, or an awareness of sin vs. asking God to tell us what to do so everything will turn out pleasant for us.
4. Make a decision
 - o Don’t over-spiritualize
 - o Do what you desire most so long as you have these other things in place

² Adapted from Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*



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C. Four “tools” for the foolish³

1. Open Doors

- Since God often uses trials for our sanctification, an “open door” making a path easier isn’t necessarily God’s will for us. Don’t assume the relative ease or difficulty of a path is God’s way of telling you to do or not do something.

2. Fleece

3. Random searches through the Bible

“... for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side.” (“John Newton on Diving Guidance” in *Guard Us, Guide Us: Divine Leading in Life’s Decisions* by J.I Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, 244.)

4. Impressions

"Here’s the point: I do believe that God might providentially use a spontaneous thought in my head to accomplish something wonderful. But that’s what it is, and no more. It’s a remarkable providence, not a prophecy. As I have been saying, God ultimately controls and uses everything providentially. ... The fact that He uses an idea in my mind to achieve some good purpose doesn’t make the idea itself inspired. It also doesn’t make a bad idea good, just because God uses it for good." (Phil Johnson, sermon titled "*Providence IS Remarkable*")

When I look to God's Word, however, I do not see any indication that God either commands Christians to follow such impressions or even that God uses impressions or feelings to reveal His will or give guidance. While I do not question at all the sincerity of those that would say God uses impressions to guide or speak to them, I would graciously call them to test what they believe in light of God's Word. (Keith Palmer, *Grace Bible Church Perspective Series: God’s Will and Impressions*)

The Spirit does use the Word of God to convict us, bring joy, produce peace, etc. The Christian life is deeply emotional. But those feelings are a response to understanding the truth of God's Word, which the Spirit illuminates when we spend time studying and meditating on God's Word. (Keith Palmer, *Grace Bible Church Perspective Series: God’s Will and Impressions*)

³ Adapted from Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*