

## LIVING WELL #8: DOING GUIDANCE WELL

ESV TCL 2026/01/11

**Q.** In Matthew 2, the wise men needed God's guidance, as did Gideon, David and the eleven apostles (Acts 1). Do we?

### 1. GUIDANCE OR WISDOM?

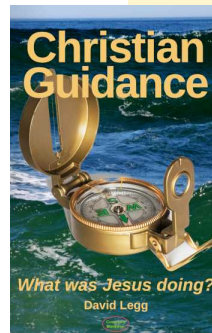
*Proverbs 4:5 Get wisdom, get insight; ...*

*Proverbs 4:7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.*

*Proverbs 23:23 Buy truth, and do not sell it;  
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.*

Perhaps the key verse in the book of Job is:

*Job 28:28 And he [God] said to man,  
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,  
and to turn away from evil is understanding.'*



### 2. THE MAIN SOURCE OF GUIDANCE

The Bible contains wisdom that is both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' in its benefits:

*Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life,  
but the years of the wicked will be short. ESV*

The Reformation doctrine of the 'sufficiency of scripture' is detailed in systematic theologies<sup>1</sup>, but originates within the Bible itself:

*2 Timothy 3:15-17 ... from infancy you [Timothy] have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. NIV*

These verses should give us complete confidence in the Bible to guide us, teach us wisdom, correct and train us.

This all contrasts starkly with the Roman Catholic view that scripture is not sufficient; it must be supplemented by traditions and the authoritative teaching of the church (called 'dogma').<sup>2</sup>

Some books about guidance suggest that all we need is the Bible – nothing else. **Discuss.**



### 3. OTHER PEOPLE

We tend to underrate other Christians as sources of godly guidance. Consider this passage:

*Isaiah 30:21 And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it", when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. ESV*

**Q.** Isaiah 30:21 is a well-used guidance verse. How does verse 20 help us?

*Isaiah 30:20 Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. NIV<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> A fine example being Louis Berkhof's (see photo) 1938 *Systematic Theology* which exists in a two volume set, a single volume abridgement and a short summary. All have been made available from the *Banner of Truth Trust*, e.g. ISBN 0851510566 and ISBN 0851510558 *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*.

<sup>2</sup> From *Christian Guidance*, p21ff, D.W. Legg, 2025, [Covenant Books UK](https://www.covenantbooks.co.uk/).

<sup>3</sup> The ESV mistranslates the word (מוֹדֵיץ (mo.reh) teachers) as singular and gives it a capital letter 'Teacher' incorrectly.

## Avoiding others?

One excuse for not involving others in our decision-making can be that it is so easy, private, non-committal and attractive simply to type a question into Google™ or ChatGPT™.

**Discuss** the wisdom of using AI, Google™ etc. for guidance.

## Good examples

The NT contains many instances of setting or imitating good examples, in addition to Jesus'.  
*1 Timothy 4:12 ... set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*  
ESV

Set each other good examples, learn from good examples, and avoid copying bad ones!

## 4. PRIORITIES

*Matthew 6:33 But seek first his [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* NIV

*Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* ESV

**Q.** How does having godly priorities help us with guidance?

## 5. PRAYER

*'Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life. We must learn to pray. We have to.'* – T. Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, 2014, Hodder.

*'And Satan trembles when he sees / The weakest saint upon his knees.'* – W. Cowper 1773

## 6. PROVIDENCE & DOORS

Jesus was alert to God providing what he needed, in other words, to providential guidance.

*Luke 5:1-3 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, ... <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

*Jonah 1:3 ... Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to [Spain?].*

When *Jonah* decided to flee from the LORD, he had a marvellous 'providence' just waiting there for him – a splendid open door? **Q.** How about Paul's open door?:

*1 Corinthians 16:9 ... a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.* ESV (from *Ephesus*)

## 7. SIN, TEMPTATION & DESIRES

WWJD or WDJD? (Jesus' **example**, taken from *Christian Guidance*, p38):

*'Luke 22:39-46 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.*

Prayer was not something irregular for Jesus; he knew how to engage with his Father even when there was no emergency. He should be our example.



40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation."

Jesus tells his disciples to do the same as he is doing, both his example and command.

41-42 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

We are given insight here into the struggle that the human Jesus had with God's will for him. In general it is not God's righteous will for a human to want to die, but Jesus' wisdom has prepared him to see that he is the Passover lamb, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

Here is the Father's initial answer to Jesus' prayer.

44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Jesus perseveres in unspeakably earnest prayer.

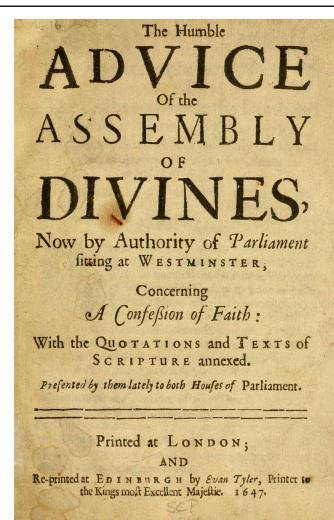
45-46 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." NIV

Now, who would fall into temptation, Jesus or his disciples? When faced with the coming emergency, who would act wisely (Isaiah 52:13), the suffering servant or his disciples? Who would chop off someone's ear (John 18:10); who would simply run away (Mark 14:50)? Not the one who pursued wisdom all his life, filled himself with scriptural wisdom and prayed earnestly for strength not to fail.'

## 8. TRIALS, SUFFERING & CHASTISEMENT

The Westminster Confession tells us: 'The most wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves his own children for a while to bear many different temptations and the corrupt desires of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to reveal to them the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts. He does this so that they may be humbled, and then lifted up to a closer and more consistent reliance on himself, and to make them more wary of future opportunities to sin, and for various other just and holy purposes.'<sup>4</sup>

Q. How does the confession help us to understand God's guidance?



Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. NIV

Q. How does this transformation of our minds take place?

## 9. LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Nevertheless, having God's guidance does not mean that we know everything ...

2 Corinthians 5:7-8 For we live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, I say, ...

<sup>4</sup> Modernised, from Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646/7, 5.5 under the heading 'Of Providence'.

We can face the future with *confidence* not if we know what it holds, but if we know the one who knows the future, and holds us in his hand (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

## 10. FLEECES, PROPHECIES, DREAMS?

In Judges 6, Gideon left out fleeces overnight, asking God to make them wet or dry as signs.

Some people try to 'put out fleeces' for divine guidance today:  
'If she's the one I should marry, let her be at church today.'

*Judges 6:16;36-40 The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive." ...*

*<sup>36</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup> behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew." <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night; ... .*

**Discuss** whether or not we should follow Gideon's example.

6:16,36

6:39

## Avoiding charlatans

*1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I [Paul] not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?*

*2 Corinthians 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. ESV*

*Acts 20:29-31 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> So be on your guard! NIV*

**Q.** How do the above verses help protect us from false, teachers, prophets and apostles?

## 11. SUMMARY

We need God's guidance every day, but not through fleeces, dreams, prophecies and 'pictures'. The main guidance we need is prayerful wisdom, from scripture, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to interpret God's providence, all the time exemplifying living by faith, prioritising God's kingdom and righteousness.