

WORKSHEET: Receiving God's Guidance in Prayer

This worksheet is designed to give you some key steps and best practices to follow as you seek God's guidance in prayer. (It is a supplement to the May 27, 2018 sermon entitled "Personal and Corporate Guidance" from the *Prayer in the Book of Acts* series.)

In praying for God's guidance, we recognize that life experience, education, wise principles, good information, and common sense are still important. It's just that they often aren't sufficient by themselves to help us discern God's specific guidance for us in certain situations.

We also recognize that scripture is the bedrock for discerning God's will (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16). We may indeed find direct counsel for our situation in God's word, and we'll certainly find biblical principles to help guide us. In certain cases, though, we will need a more particular and direct word of guidance from the Holy Spirit, and scripture teaches us to seek such guidance in prayer. Here are some relevant steps and tips you can experiment with:

1. **It takes practice.** Learning to hear God's guiding voice with a reasonable degree of confidence doesn't happen overnight. Like anything else that's worth learning, it takes time and practice. As you experiment with this worksheet, be patient, and give yourself permission to be a learner.
2. **Quiet yourself in God's presence.** It's difficult to hear God's voice when you're hurried or stressed. Do what it takes to settle down and minimize distractions. For example, change your environment. Put on some worship music. Sit in silent stillness before God (Psalm 46:10).
3. **Prepare to surrender.** Decide ahead of time to obey whatever word of guidance God might give you. It's hard to hear the voice of God when you're not prepared to yield to whatever it is he wants to say.
4. **Ask God specific questions— start with small things.** In learning to hear the Holy Spirit's guiding voice, you might not want start off asking him about major issues in your life that carry a lot of emotional freight. Start with simpler areas of life where you need God's guidance:
 - *Shall we make this purchase, Lord?*
 - *Father, would you like me to pursue this ministry opportunity?*
 - *Dear Jesus, shall we go on this trip?*

Examples of basic questions that can be helpful to ask God in most any situation are:

- *Lord, is there anything you want to say to me about this?*
- *Is there something we need to know here, Lord?*
- *Is there anything you would have me do, Father?*

When you ask such a question, just listen, and see if you can sense God bringing any word of guidance or counsel from his Spirit to yours.

5. **“Try on” different answers.** In his book *Walking With God*, John Eldredge writes about what he sometimes does when he asks God a question and isn’t sensing a clear answer. He will “try on” one answer and then another, in an effort to listen more carefully to the Spirit and to get a sense of what God’s up to. He will linger in a listening posture after he “trys on” each answer, to see if God confirms one answer or another:

- *Is it yes, Lord? Are you saying yes to us on this?*
- *Are you saying no, Lord?*
- *Do you want us to wait, Lord? Is that what you’re saying?*

Eldredge is careful to note that this is not about “filling in the blanks” ourselves, just trying to hear what we want to hear. It’s an effort to “tune in” more carefully to what the Spirit is bringing to us from God.

6. **No pressure.** If you have a hard time sensing the Spirit’s voice on a matter, don’t sweat it. You’re learning. Remember, it takes time and practice. Maybe take a break and come back to it later.

7. **Do I feel desolation or consolation?** St. Ignatius of Loyola taught that we should never make decisions in desolation, but only in consolation. What do these terms mean?

- **Desolation** is an emotional and mental state that turns us in on ourselves, drives us into negative feelings, cuts us off from community, and drains us of vision and energy.
- **Consolation** directs our focus beyond ourselves (remember from the sermon, *God’s guidance often flows in the direction of God’s mission*), lifts our hearts so we can empathize with the joys and sorrows of others, generates new inspiration and energy in us, and shows us where God is active in our lives and is leading us.

8. **Scripture check!** Ask, “Is what I’m hearing consistent with biblical truth?” If not sure, then make sure to study God’s word on the issue, and check in with one or more mature believers who know scripture well (see #9 below).

9. **Community affirmation.** Share what you believe God is saying with other believers you trust, who walk with God, know scripture, and ideally who know you well and are able to speak into your life with grace and truth. Pay attention to how God may affirm or redirect you through your brothers and sisters in Christ.

10. **Take action or wait as needed.** Follow through on the guidance you’ve received in prayer. Act on it accordingly, or, as the case may be, continue to wait on God’s timing for more clarity or answers.