

## Message: Guidance

### Sermon Series: Promises

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Many Christians ask: “*What is God’s will for my life?*” While it would be nice if detailed instructions floated down on a tablet from heaven, life doesn’t work that way. However, we can find in scripture some basic truths about God’s will. For us to know God’s will first means we must have a relationship of trust with God (Proverbs 3:5-6). We must trust that God is good (Matthew 7:7-11). We must take steps of faith in God. We must have a proper understanding of who we are (2 Corinthians 5:17). We must maintain a measure of humility (James 4:13-17). We can also ask God for guidance (James 1:2-8).

Paul gives instructions in 1 Thessalonians regarding God’s will. Rather than describing what kind of job they should take he just says do not be idle. He doesn’t tell them which church to join because there was only one and whoever was leading it should be respected. The will of God is for us to encourage, help, have patience, forgive, do good, rejoice, pray and be thankful. Maybe we should focus on this list and not on some other rabbit trails we tend to take. If our character lines up in the right way, the results usually work out well. If we are looking for a quick fix, we may get lucky, but we will never be the people God wants us to be.

Nobody does life perfectly. We all make mistakes along the way. Even if we’ve blown it and spent a lot of life wandering in the wilderness away from God, we believe people can still re-connect and find God’s purpose in life.

**APPLICATION:** In what ways do you struggle with “analysis paralysis” or “fear of missing out”? How hard is it for you to make life decisions for fear of making a mistake? Do you think it’s possible there is more than one “right” or “good” choice? Why or why not? If God gave us detailed instructions about life, we probably wouldn’t have much room for growth or faith. Sometimes we must do the best we can with what we know.

Why do we need guidance? I’d trust all of us would answer, “Bc we want to do God’s will.” And not bc we want God to do our will. **Homer Simpson** kneels by his bed with a prayer of gratitude as God has been good to him. He says. “*For the 1<sup>st</sup> time in my life everything is absolutely perfect just the way it is. So here’s the deal. You freeze everything as it is, & I won’t ask for anything more. If that is OK please give me absolutely no sign.*” (Nothing happens In 2 seconds) “*OK deal. In gratitude I present to you this offering of cookies & milk. If you want me to eat them for you give me no sign.*” Immediately: “*Thy Will be done*” (Scarfs cookies down & drinks the milk)

We know life works better if we’re on the same page with the Almighty. 2<sup>nd</sup> questions is: **How** do we receive guidance? My response = answer this question, first, who is “WE?” Is “We” “Me” or is “We” “Us?”) Usually when we talk about “guidance” it is usually cast in terms of “Me.” “I want God to tell me which school to attend, which job to take, where I should live, who I should date/marry,” etc. These are all appropriate questions. But there is another side of guidance. It is not the personal side – it is the corporate side. “What should we do as a church?” We are at that time in the life of The United Methodist Church. Whether Personal or Corporate, I evaluate guidance with 4 criteria. If you’ve been here for a while and don’t know/can’t articulate them, I’ve failed as a teacher for you. There are 4 ways we receive guidance:

**Scripture.** We must always begin with “What does the Bible say?” Yet, we must distinguish between a general sense of guidance and a specific sense (for one person at one time in one situation). We learn much from the record of how God gave guidance in the past. **Abraham’s servant** asked for guidance when Abraham told him to go back to the old country and get a bride for his son, Isaac. As the servant approached a watering hole and

saw women drawing water, he prayed that the “right choice” would be the one who said to him, “*May I draw water for your camels, also.*” When Rebekah said the magic phrase, the deal was struck. **Moses** received God’s guidance by seeing a burning bush, being given a rod, being led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. **Gideon** gave a fleece – asking for dew to be on it one night but not the next night if this was really God’s will for him to proceed. We see the early church casting lots (rolling dice) to select **Matthias**, the successor of Judas Iscariot. (Many believe that spot had been reserved for Paul and the disciples acted hastily – Matthias is never seen/heard from in the Book of Acts.) **Peter** had a vision about no longer living in accordance with a kosher diet. **Paul** had an initial conversion vision on his road to Damascus + another vision to “come over to Damascus and help us” to take the gospel west to Europe. The **early church** In Acts 15 found God’s guidance through a conference in Jerusalem and felt God was leading them to accept Gentiles into the church w/o making them become Jewish first.

So many scriptures teach about guidance. Several were in our readings this week. This is **primary**, not secondary. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said he “was a man of one book.” That book is the Bible. He was well read on all kinds of topics, but this comment reflected his commitment to scripture as the governing **authority** for his life.

**Matthew 7:7-8** *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.* Don’t be passive if you’re needing guidance – ask, seek, knock. Jiggle door handles and see what opens.  
**John 16:13** *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.* The Holy Spirit leads us into truth.

**James 1:5-6** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.* Again, ask God.

**Tradition** means the church. “Church” can mean “what is ancient” (creeds/doctrines). It can also mean “the institutional” church (i.e. “United Methodist”). The Greek word for “church” is “ecclesia” (“the called-out ones”). At its core, the church is not a building or a creed, but is flesh and blood. The church is about people. People need content and structure. Asbury is intentional in bringing people into community. We’re not meant to live life alone. The church is so important: *“Show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.”* We become like those we are with. Sports fans hang out with other sports fans. Exercise folks hang out with other exercisers. People who attend church will find friends who like to do the same. Scripture and Tradition are both “external authorities.” They come from outside us, not simply within us. We need the church to help us interpret scripture.

**Reason.** God gave us a brain so we can think through matters. God’s will is reasonable. It makes sense. If someone shows us a text in the Bible that says Paul was bitten by a snake and he didn’t die and there’s another text that says if we’re bitten by a snake we won’t die, should we bring snakes to church and prove our faith by letting snakes bite us? Why would anyone do that? When we were in Vici there was a church that didn’t believe in taking medicine. They’d give their cows medicine but not their kids. While we were there, several, including the head elder, died. We need to be more than: *“God said it, Jesus did, I believe it, that settles it.”* We should read scripture, talk to others, hear from different sides, and make informed decisions.

**Experience.** John Wesley said, “I felt my heart strangely warmed...I trusted in Christ alone for salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had saved me from the law of sin and death.” He didn’t say, “I felt my head strangely enlightened.” He was talking about having a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We can read

scripture, be in church, have great thought processes, but if we don't have personal experiences, we have missed the bottom line. However, we must ALWAYS begin with scripture. In our culture, and even in the church culture today, the major disagreements we have is over the question: "Do I begin with my experience and thinking, or do I begin with scripture and tradition." They all play critically important roles, but we must lead with scripture.

Do you want guidance for YOU or for your CHURCH? It's not an "either/or" question, but both/and. Scripture gives us general principles of life. We lean into "what has the church tradition said for 2,000 years about it?" Quite possibly, nothing. What makes sense to you? How do you feel about it?

Here's our text for today:

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-22** *We ask you, brothers, to **respect** those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. <sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers, **admonish** the idle, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, be **patient** with them all. <sup>15</sup> See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to **do good** to one another and to everyone. <sup>16</sup> **Rejoice** always, <sup>17</sup> **pray** without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give **thanks** in all circumstances; for **this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you**. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the **Spirit**. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is **good**. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of **evil**.*

What's God's will for your life? In general terms, Christians are to respect/esteem/listen to leaders; live in peace; have crucial conversations; encourage, helpful and patient with everyone. Do good. Let joy, prayer and gratitude in everything be part of your life. Let the Holy Spirit work in you. Avoid evil.

This is not an exhaustive list. Some is general but some is specific to their unique situation. We need to stick with the idea that God gives us guidance, so we can know His will generally and seek His will specifically. The Bible gives us general principles we are to embody. It is somewhat like a flashlight – it illumines, but it is not a floodlight. We have a narrow perspective/field of vision. We take one step at a time.

This is one of God's **Promises** to us. **Psalm 23** *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*