

# what? where? who?



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Giles Cattermole considers guidance and God's will

PART 1:

## God guides, we follow

This is the first part of a three-part series on guidance. Parts 2 (Godly wisdom) and 3 (Godly decision-making) will be published in the Summer and Winter issues of *Nucleus*, and will give more practical application of the wisdom below.

What sort of things do we seek guidance for? Perhaps for your career, what specialty you should do, or whether you should work overseas in medical mission. Perhaps you're thinking you shouldn't be doing medicine at all; in my first year at medical school I felt so out of my depth that I thought I ought to give up and do maths. Some of you may be feeling the same way, even if it's not maths that you'd switch to. Some of you may have been advised that you're wasting your time in medicine, and should be in full-time paid Christian ministry. Or maybe you want guidance about relationships; who is the right person for me? Should I get married anyway? There are all sorts of things for which we might seek direction: what house to live in; what church to go to; how to balance time between work, friends, church, sport, leisure and how to spend money.

And there are all sorts of ways that you might be advised to look for guidance. After all, in the Bible God spoke 'through the prophets at many times and in various ways' (Hebrews 1:1). He spoke through angels (Genesis 19), dreams (Daniel 2), and visions (Acts 10); to Samuel audibly and directly (1 Samuel 3), to Moses through a burning bush (Exodus 3), and to Balaam through a donkey (Numbers 22). He guided his people in fire and cloud (Exodus 13), and the Magi by a star (Matthew 2). Gideon was convinced of God's guidance by a miraculous fleece (Judges 6); the apostles sought guidance in drawing lots (Acts 1).

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But much of God's guidance was also 'behind the scenes', without the person being aware of how God was guiding them. Some of God's plans are revealed, some remain secret (Deuteronomy 29:29). Joseph went from pit to Potiphar to prison to palace ... without any suggestion that he knew what was happening next. Yet he was able to look back at it all, and see that despite the evil of his brothers, God had planned it for a purpose (Genesis 50:20). Guidance was recognised retrospectively, but not prospectively. The same is true for us. I can look back at my life and see how God has led me to where I am now; how he brought me and my wife together; how he led me through different jobs and homes; how one step prepared me for the next. But most of the time, I had little idea of what was coming next. This is especially true of our own conversions: before

we knew Christ, we were spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:5); we didn't know his loving guidance - but looking back, we can see how God used our situations, our backgrounds, the people who spoke to us, the books we read, in order to bring us to salvation.

## God guides

Regardless of whether we perceive God's guidance in advance or not, the point is that our God guides. He is in control, and he cares for us. He is in control of the whole sweep of creation (Daniel 4:35), of his salvation plan (Acts 2:23), and of everyday details like the grass growing, or the hairs on our heads (Psalm 104:10-15, Matthew 10:29-30). What he plans will come to pass (Isaiah 55:11); God is sovereign. And he cares for his people like a shepherd (Psalm 80:1, 23:1-3). He has good plans for our future (Jeremiah 29:11). God is loving. If he were sovereign and unloving, we would not wish to be guided by him. If he were loving but not sovereign, there would be no point in being guided by him. But he is both loving and sovereign: he loves us, has a plan for us, and will carry it out.

## God's goal

If God guides, what's the destination? What is his goal for creation and for his people? Ephesians 1:3-14 tells us that it's all for the praise of God's glory (v6,12,14); that God's will, pleasure and purpose is to bring all creation together under the rule of Christ (v10); and that his goal for us in Christ is to be adopted as his sons (v5), to be redeemed and forgiven (v7), to be holy and blameless (v4), and to receive our guaranteed inheritance (v14). God's plan for us is to be made like Jesus (Romans 8:29), to do the good works he's planned for us to do

(Ephesians 2:10), as we look forward to the inheritance that never fades (1 Peter 1:4). And God will make this happen; he will bring this plan to completion (Philippians 1:6).

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## our role

So if God has a good plan for our lives, that he will bring about as part of his restoration of all creation under Christ, to the glory of God, then our role must surely be to trust his plan, and follow it praying that God's will be done (Matthew 6:10) and seeking first God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33). Having praised God's purposes in Ephesians 1, Paul goes on to pray that we would know God and know the hope to which he's called us (v17-18). Knowing God is not passive or merely intellectual - it's active and personal. It means trusting him, and obeying him. Our role is to understand God's plan for us, and live it out! We're to be people of faith and love (v15). We might not understand how God is getting us to his destination, but he is sovereign and we are to have confidence in him; that he will get us there. We know what the destination is and that we are to grow in holiness and maturity, to become more like Christ, as we are made ready for heaven. God is sovereign: he has a plan which he will complete. We are responsible: to know God's plan and follow it, to know God and obey him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## wisdom

Our goals for our lives should be the same as God's. To be in Christ, being made like Christ, as we prepare to be with him for eternity, when all creation is brought under his rule to the praise of God's glory. But our goals are often quite different: I want to marry the right person, get the right job, and live in the right place. God is of course in control of all those things, and he cares deeply about me and the choices I make. But we need to realise that marriage, career or home are not the end-goals themselves; they are things which might help or hinder us as we seek God's goals.

Understanding how our decisions about the stuff of every-day living fit into God's plan for us, and living accordingly, is what the Bible calls wisdom. Paul asks that we would be given the Spirit of wisdom (Ephesians 1:17). We're told in Proverbs (4:5) to 'get wisdom'. In the next article in this series, we'll think more about what it means to be wise.

In the meantime, keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. Pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19). ■