

## **Session 1: How we know that God offers us guidance**

### **I. Introduction: God tells us in the Bible that He will guide us:**

God has revealed to us in the Scriptures that He will guide us. Read the following Scripture passages below. This will be useful to help confirm the reality of God's desire to lead us.

1. "He guides me in right paths for His name's sake (simply because of who He is)." Psalm 23: 3
2. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My loving eye on you." Psalm 32:8
3. "If any of you lacks wisdom [guidance], you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." James 1:5
4. "I will praise the LORD, Who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken." Psalm 16:7-8
5. Thy Word [in the Scriptures] is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)
6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6
7. "And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11:9)

**Question 1:** Put a check mark by one of the passages above that interest you or touches your heart in some way. Why do you feel drawn to this passage?

**Question 2:** What particular word or words stand out or seem to speak to you most directly?

**Question 2:** As you take some quiet time to read over this passage 3 or 4 times, is there something more specific that relates to you personally?

**Question 4:** Would you describe this experience as something encouraging or hopeful or consoling or comforting or energizing? These would be the hallmarks that identify it as coming from God.

**Discuss** your responses with another person or a small group.

## **II. Scripture passages that reveal how God offered guidance to Joseph through an angel in his dreams.**

Read one of the passages below and underline key words in the passage that relate specifically to guidance. Then answer the questions that follow.

### **The Birth of Christ**

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been espoused to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home, for the Child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her into his home, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a Son; and he named Him Jesus. (*Matthew 1:18-25*)

### **The Escape to Egypt**

When the Wise Men had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the Child and His mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him." So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my Son." (*Matthew 2:13-15*)

### **The Return to Nazareth**

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. But when Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

**Question 1:** Does any aspect of this passage remind you of a specific situation in your own life?

**Questions 2:** Relate this briefly to another person.

### III. The TEACHING for Session 1: Relationship comes first!

We are here because we want to understand better how God gives us guidance and then to begin recognizing and receiving God's guidance in daily life. God offers us guidance in different ways. However, there is something that is essential before we seek God's guidance. The key is our relationship with Him. First of all, each of us has to come to understand, through a special grace from God, that we are loved. That's the beginning point. Saint John says in the first Epistle: "We love because God first loved us." (1John 4:19) Whether we are blessed to have been born in a family that raised us in the Catholic Faith, or whether we learn this later in life, a point comes when, through the grace of God, a person realizes that I'm in this world because I'm loved. I've been known from all eternity; I've been given life at a certain time, in a certain place and a certain set of circumstances because I've been loved from all eternity. And I've been given the choice to follow the Lord or reject Him.

We will not even want or be open to receive God's guidance if we are afraid of Him, if we are not aware of how much He loves us. We need a personal revelation from God of His unique and particular love for each one of us – an experience of His grace that allows us to know the depth of His love. Then we will grow in our trust for the Lord. The prayer card includes a point in which we ask the Lord for the grace of a deeper experience of His personal love. This is a very important part of our daily prayer, because when we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we become more aware of His guidance. And as we receive and obey His guidance, we grow in trust and go deeper in our relationship with Him.

Everything changes – we grow in peace, confidence and trust – when we know the truth of how much God loves us and that He wants to guide us. We want to remember that guidance is a gift from God. And our part in response to this gift is to dispose ourselves to receive this guidance. What is the proper disposition to receive guidance from Jesus? The proper disposition is the stance of a heart that is available, open and seeking. So that's our part: to be

- open
- available
- looking for and
- ready to receive the gift of guidance when God gives it.

God loves each one of us personally. And what He wants for us is better than what we want for ourselves, or that anyone else wants. So we make ourselves available to what God wants. Even when this entails a certain amount of difficulty or suffering, there's still a peace and joy deep down in our heart that comes from following God's guidance, trusting that He knows what is best for each person and all will work out together for good in the end.

How does somebody go about seeking guidance from God? Where do we begin to learn to listen to God's guidance? How can we tell if it's just us talking to ourselves or if we're listening to God?" These questions will be answered as we move through the following sessions. There will be 10 sessions which are listed below. These sessions will provide specific principles for understanding how God guides us and how to practice making personal application in our everyday life.

Session One – Relationship comes first  
Session Two – One step at a time  
Session Three – Follow Jesus' Word  
Session Four – God will give you a specific word of guidance at Mass  
Session Five – Sin Blinds  
Session Six – Being supported by a community of believers  
Session Seven – Messengers of God  
Session Eight – In the deepest place of encounter  
Session Nine – Peace is the “hallmark”  
Session Ten – Silence is needed

The format for each session includes:

- a teaching on a specific way that God offers us guidance followed by discussion questions that help participants to better understand the teaching
- a Scripture story and two modern-day true stories that portray God offering His guidance to people related to the teaching; discussion questions follow  
These stories reveal how the Holy Spirit still gives us guidance today.

As we study each of these ways that God offers us guidance, we want to realize that even more important than understanding God's guidance, we want to know the Guide – Jesus Christ – Himself. Learning to listen to God and recognize the different ways He gives us guidance every day helps us to develop a growing friendship with Him.

#### **IV. One modern-day true story of God offering His guidance**

It is not impossible but very rare that God will speak to us in audible words. One thing is for sure; God hears and answers every prayer even if we don't always understand His answer. In responding to our prayer, God wants to offer us guidance in many and various ways. The most important thing is that we take time for prayer and are open and available to Our Lord.

As Jesus tells us, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7)

The modern-day true stories below reveal how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance today. Discussion questions follow.

## Story 1

### ‘Four Mysterious Visitors’ by David Waite

Last Christmas got off to a promising start. Alison and I and the children – two of our four were still at home – had picked out a tree and its lights were twinkling merrily in the living room. I had lit a fire to take the edge off our raw English air. And then-twelve-year-old Matthew hesitantly asked me a question that would have been perfectly natural in any other household: “Dad, would it be all right if I put on some Christmas music?”

“Of course,” I said, too quickly.

I braced myself. As strains of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” began to fill the house, a familiar gnawing sensation grew in the pit of my stomach. *Not again*, I thought. Christmas carols were one of the triggers that could inexplicably bring on a severe anxiety attack. I slipped out of the living room and met Ali in the hallway.

“Are you all right?” she asked. I shrugged. “Do you want to turn off the music?”

“I can’t do that,” I said. I went upstairs to my office. Work should keep my mind occupied. I tried to focus on a newspaper feature but succeeded only in staring at the impatiently blinking cursor.

I had hoped the old fears would not plague me this Christmas. All my life I had been beset with vague apprehensions and the awful depressions that followed.

The roots weren’t hard to find. Born premature, forty-nine years ago in the village of Styal near Manchester, I spent the first three months of my life fighting to survive. I had been born with a shortened and twisted right leg that, later, made walking difficult. In my first week at school a girl pointed at me. “You’re a cripple!” she said. She hobbled off in a perfect imitation of my limp that set the other kids laughing.

Being lame of body was not half as bad, though, as being crippled in spirit. My mental woes may have been inherited. My granddad suffered from free-floating fears and so did my father. Dad was so tense that he and Mum were in constant rows, yelling at each other, slamming doors, hurling crockery, then continuing the battle with silence that could last for weeks.

My first serious depression occurred in my early teens. Dad was the village bobby and on his salary we couldn’t afford psychiatric help, even if he had believed in it. Antidepressant drugs were in use by 1960, but I was wary of trying these early experimental medicines.

There were glimmers of hope. I became a Christian at eighteen, and for a while I believed this commitment might help me get better. It didn’t – not for more than thirty years. Of course I prayed about my anxieties, always in private because I was far too shy to bring up my needs at church.

When I married Alison I hoped I was beginning a new, healthier chapter. But along with the

joy of a wife and a growing family came responsibilities that made the problem worse. Six weeks was the longest I could go without suffering an acute anxiety attack. Little things set the explosions off. A bill coming due. A Christmas carol. The family was ready to leave for church one summer day when I realized my cuff links were missing. It didn't matter because I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt, but I held us up until the cuff links were found.

I was spoiling things for everyone. The best I could do was keep out of the way while depressed. Soon I was spending days on end in my room, as my family waited for me to come around again.

Then on the fifteenth of December, a few days after the renewed battle with Christmas carols, I was putting my good foot, the left one, on a step when I stumbled. Searing pain shot through my leg. Within an hour I could not use the leg at all. It was just the kind of incident that usually sank me into a depressive state. Ali offered to pray not only for the leg pain but also for the funk that would almost certainly follow.

*What good would prayer do?* We had asked God to help us so often. But this time He was about to answer, and in a fashion I could never have anticipated.

Ali prayed for me and my leg did get better, but not the signs of oncoming depression. That evening, just ten days before Christmas, as we were getting ready for bed, Ali remembered that because of the cold weather she had not opened the windows as she usually did to freshen the room. She picked up what she thought was an air-purifying spray and sent a mist all over the room. But the spray turned out to be sore-muscle balm with a dreadful menthol smell that I've always hated.

"Whew!" I said. "I'll have to sleep in Daniel's room if I want to get any rest." Our oldest son Daniel was in London and his room was empty.

I kissed Ali goodnight, walked to Daniel's room and turned down the spread on his narrow bed, which was right up against the wall. I climbed in, turned out the light and lay there staring into the darkness. I was unusually warm and comfortable but still fretting about sorts of things . . . bills, a close friend in the hospital, an assignment that was due.

At first, the way you can sometimes sense a person looking at you, it seemed to me someone was in the room, focusing attention on me. I thought Alison had stepped in. "Ali?" I whispered.

There was no answer, not a rustling of clothes, not a stirring of air, and yet I knew beyond doubt I was not alone. A friendly presence was near me, at the head of the bed. Had Daniel come home unexpectedly? I whispered his name. Nothing. Maybe it was one of the younger children. "Matthew? Caroline?" No answer.

Slowly I became aware of a second unseen being in the room, this one at the foot of the bed. It seemed to me the two creatures were facing each other. And then I knew there was a third presence too, and a fourth one, these last two facing each other on the left side of the bed . .

impossible since there was no space between the bed and the wall.

I wanted to call Ali, but there was something so benevolent, so full of promise about the four lively presences that I didn't want to do anything that might risk driving them away. I lay perfectly still, strangely warm and expectant.

And then – how did I know this, since I could not see them? – the four creatures began to move toward one another, two on each side of the bed. Their progress was slow and deliberate. They passed one another, turned and repeated the traverse three four, maybe five times. Every time their paths crossed I felt as if I would burst with joy.

Then abruptly the room was empty. I knew it was as surely as I had known a few minutes earlier that angelic creatures were there. The room was back to normal and I was alone again, yet still filled with ineffable joy. *Should I go tell Alison? But tell her what? That I had been visited by four beings I couldn't see?* Still debating, I fell into a deep sleep, the best I had had in years.

By the time I surfaced, the children had already left for school. “You’ll never believe what happened last night,” I said to Ali. I told her as best I could about the mysterious visitors God had sent me. Alison did believe it and was delighted at my newfound joy and peace, though perhaps wondering, as I was, if this calm would last for more than a few days.

Our doubts were misplaced. I enjoyed every minute of the Christmas season. December was followed by a long gray January and February, two months that in the past had been times of distress but were filled with an exultation new to me. The joy even survived a devastating bout I had with the flu. Winter gave way to a spring, a summer and then an autumn of freedom.

Though I can't be sure how long this freedom will last, I am beginning to believe the victory is permanent. It's not that I've shed pressures like bills and problems at work. But today I confront these issues with a positive attitude unlike my past fearfulness.

Christmas is once again just around the corner. Thanks to my heavenly visitors, I'm anticipating another joy-filled season and I am going to make a statement to that effect. This year I have bought a present for the entire family, a small but very special gift I hope we will use a lot . . . a CD of the world's best-loved Christmas carols.

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## **Story 2**

### ***'Prisoner of Silence' by Shirley B. Bard***

My husband and I were sitting on the couch watching television. But my mind was on something else. I grabbed my pad and pencil and scrawled a quick, pleading note: "How much longer will I have to go on like this?" After months of living with a postoperative trachea tube in my windpipe, unable to say a single word out loud, I was beginning to give in to despair. My husband, no stranger to my impatience and frustration, could only pat my hand.

It's hard for anyone who's never been left voiceless to realize what it means to be reduced suddenly to writing down all your thoughts and feelings, especially if you have three adolescent children who need you. You can't use the phone. Even Terri, our little fox terrier, looked baffled when I snapped my fingers for her to come inside. I lost my sense of smell. At restaurants I was embarrassed to have to point to what I wanted on the menu. My whole life was off-center.

This was not my first go-around with a trache tube. My throat trouble began with diphtheria at age two, when my life was saved by an emergency tracheostomy. A hole was cut in my windpipe at just above the spot where a top shirt button would be, and a short metal breathing tube was inserted. Again, when I was five, complications from measles made another trache necessary. Each time the tube was removed after a few weeks. But the pain and fear of being unable to speak or breathe naturally never left me, and as I grew up through the years of hoarseness and recurring throat infections, I lived in dread of another tracheostomy. By the time I was forty-three, the scar tissue had so thickened that my breathing passage was reduced by sixty percent. And so it was that my last reconstructive surgery had been unavoidable. Now if all went well I would never need a trache again.

A few days later I was back in my surgeon's office for a follow-up. I knew by the look in Dr. Thawley's eyes after he'd examined me that all had not gone well.

"Shirley," he said gently but gravely, sitting on the edge of his cluttered desk, "the surgery has not been what we'd hoped."

My eyes widened. What did he mean? I wrote on my pad, "The trache will have to stay in longer?" underscoring "longer" and battling back tears.

"You have an infection. You'll have to go back in the hospital for a while," he told me. But then he went on to explain how my rebuilt trachea, made of grafted skin and bone splinters, had not healed properly. Dr. Thawley paused. "Shirley, I'm afraid you will have a trache for a long time – probably the rest of your life."

A verse from Job shot through my mind: The thing I greatly feared has come upon me. I wanted to scream, yet no sound could come out. I was a prisoner who, expecting a reprieve, had suddenly been handed a life sentence – in a dungeon of silence.



I spent the following days and nights doing jigsaw puzzles in my hospital room, as if I were trying to fit together the scattered pieces of my life. And I prayed, but the tone of those prayers had changed. They were tinged with bitterness.

I believe prayers are more than just thoughts. I feel prayer is fully formed communication with God, and so with the trache I'd gotten into the habit of not just thinking my prayers but actually writing them down. Now I found myself writing prayers like, *Lord, how could You do this to me? I thought You loved me. But You've taken away my voice so I can't even praise You! Why won't You heal me?*

Yet no answer came.

One night I looked up from my puzzle and watched listlessly as the other bed in my room was rolled out. Then a nurse pushed in a high-sided crib with a sleeping child in it. She explained that my new roommate was a two-year-old girl who'd had a trache put in after surgery. "You two will get along fine," she said, smiling. "Her name's Amy."

I watched Amy sleeping before I drifted off myself. Her heavy, silent breathing soothed me. But it also dredged up memories of my childhood struggles with a trache. At least hers will be coming out, I thought.

The next morning Amy played forlornly with her toys. Every so often she'd stare into space. Finally, she stood up in the crib, curled her small fingers around the bars and looked out at me. Big, sad tears rolled down her cheeks. Her little shoulders quaked and air sputtered through her trache tube. If ever I yearned to hear the wail of a child's cry it was at that moment.

I slipped from my bed and went over to the crib. Reaching through the bars I put my arms around Amy and pulled her close. I wanted to tell her that she would be all right, that her trache would come out in a few days. But we were two people trapped in silence.

I began to cry. Not just for little Amy but also for myself, maybe mostly for myself. *God, how could You do this to me? How?* My arms fell away from Amy and my head leaned limply on the crib, as if a huge weight pushed me down. My tears splashed on Amy's bare feet.

Suddenly I felt the gentle touch of a hand on my head. Amy. With childish awkwardness she'd reached over the crib rail to soothe me. And all at once I knew that no words could ever have conveyed such tender comfort.

I went home not too long after that, as did Amy. One day I was leafing through my notebooks when I came across some of the prayers I'd scrawled in the hospital. It's one thing to cry out to God. But my angry words were actually written down on a page in black and white: "God, how could You do this to me?" I wanted to tear it up. God had heard my prayer, and answered. He'd sent a little girl who showed me that sometimes even words are inadequate to express our deepest human needs.

"Lord," I wrote hastily, "forgive me for blaming You. I give myself to You now, trache and all."

From then on, each day, God taught me a new language: how our marvelously expressive eyes can command attention, laugh, tease, cry, rebuke, empathize and sparkle with love. He showed me that my voicelessness forced me to be a listener, to care about what people were saying. I wrote down my words; I measured them more carefully, more kindly. And I found that simple human touch can be the most powerfully reassuring communication of all.

One day about eight months after surgery I felt cool air in my throat. I placed my finger over the trache hole, forced air up through my vocal cords and discovered – I could speak. The next day in his office, Dr. Thawley shook his head in amazement. “I’ve never seen anything like it,” he said. Contrary to the doctor’s expectation, my trachea continued to heal slowly and was eventually strong enough for me to breathe without the tube. Yet I knew that an even more amazing healing had taken place deep inside my soul.

Today I no longer need my pad, pencil or trache. But certain things – my children’s eyes, my husband’s touch, my friends’ voices – all mean so much more to me now. I still write down one thing, though. My prayers. And every day I thank our loving God, who always hears us, even when we can’t speak.

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**Question 1:** Underline the place/places where the person received guidance. Briefly describe how the person received guidance from God.

**Question 2:** How did this story affect you?

**Question 3:** Does it remind you of something in your own life?

**Question 4:** Did you find it consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

**Question 5:** In reflecting on one of these true, modern-day stories, what is the take-away for you?

## V. Praying Psalm 25 each day

As we learn the ways that God offers us guidance, it is necessary that we set aside time in prayer to be with the Lord each day. Psalm 25 is a prayer that speaks of God guiding His people.

The Prayer Card is located on the webpage with Session 1. Place the prayer card in a plastic sleeve to be used every day.

### The meaning of the Words of Psalm 25 (verses 1, 4-5, 8-14)

- **To You, I lift up my soul, O my God.** We need to lift up our soul to God because He is our Creator and Lord. It is the desire of our heart to take refuge in God and address Him in a most personal way as “my God.” We want to offer Him our praise, worship and thanksgiving.
- **In You I trust.** We trust God because He loves us perfectly and only wants what is best for us.
- **Your ways O Lord make known to me, teach me Your paths.** We ask the Lord to show us His ways and teach us His paths because Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). He is the only Way to Heaven and, if we choose to be committed to Him, He saves us from Satan, sin and death. Jesus is the fullness of Truth itself and He makes it possible for us to inherit eternal life through the great cost of His Passion and Death, and ultimately His Resurrection.
- **Set me in the way of Your truth, and teach me, for You are the God who saves me and my hope is in You all day long. Good and upright is the Lord, He teaches the way to sinners; in all that is right He guides the humble, and instructs the poor in His way.** The Lord is perfectly good and loves us completely. Therefore, we can place our hope in God. As a loving Father, He wants to show His children, who frequently wander away from Him, the way to stay close to Him. God will guide people who want and are seeking to be guided. These are the poor in spirit (the humble), those who recognize their need for God and His guidance. This way to our eternal Father, even though there will be struggles along the way, is where we will experience interior joy, peace and freedom.
- **All the paths of the Lord are love and truth for those who seek His help to keep His covenant and His decrees.** A covenant is a sacred family bond; a promise that God will never break, even if we choose to break the covenant with Him. When we live united with Jesus in the sacred covenant of prayer and the Sacraments, we recognize that following His paths are always about love and truth.
- **For Your name’s sake, O Lord, forgive my guilt, for it is great.** We acknowledge our many sins of selfishness in daily life and humbly ask pardon from the Lord. We do not deserve forgiveness, but we ask the Lord to forgive us of our many sins for His name’s sake – simply because of who He is. “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.” (Psalm 145:8) God will forgive us if we turn to Him with a humble and contrite heart.
- **Everyone who fears the Lord will be taught the course a person should choose; his soul will live in prosperity; his children have the land for their own.** A holy fear for the Lord means having reverence, awe and respect for the power of God, Creator of the Universe. This is not about being frightened of God. Everyone who has a holy fear for the Lord and seeks to know Jesus through a committed daily time of prayer will be guided on the right path. The

resulting consequences will be: he will live a life of prosperity, most especially with a heart filled with joy and peace; his children will have the land for their own.

- **The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and His covenant, for their instruction.** Those who have this holy fear for the Lord will develop a close friendship with Him. Out of this sacred family bond – this covenant – they will grow more and more in their understanding of His personal instruction for their life.

Why pray Psalm 25 each day? Why learn specifically how God guides in every situation?

- 1) To develop / deepen communication with the Person of Jesus
- 2) To be aware that God's guides us and to open our hearts to this great gift
- 3) To learn how God guides and directs us in every situation, specifically described in the 16 sessions available online
- 4) To understand that for a time, throughout periods of our lives, there will be difficulties and trials but that as we continue to pray and listen for His guidance, we can with assurance through life experiences, learn to trust in the ultimate goodness of God.
- 5) To come to realize that even more important than understanding God's guidance, we want to know the Guide – Jesus Christ – Himself. Learning to listen to God and recognize the different ways He gives us guidance every day (see the 16 sessions online) helps us to develop a growing friendship with Him.

Let us pray the prayer card each day and ask for guidance with a situation, or a problem or an issue with which we need help and guidance.

## **VI. Closing Prayer: The 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Prayer Card**

Using the "Seeking God's Guidance" Prayer Card, pray the front side together as a group.