

Session 9: How God Guides Us

The Revelation of God's Guidance Follows Our Surrender

I. Opening Prayer (5 min.)

The passages that will be prayerfully read as part of the opening prayer are the Scriptural foundation for this teaching.

Allow participants to quiet themselves before reading from Scripture:

- “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Matthew 6:33
- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord. Proverbs 3:5-7
- “Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient.” (Philippians 2:5 – 8) *Jesus sets a prime example in His surrender to His Father's will to accomplish our redemption.*
- “Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).
- “I am Your servant. Give me the wisdom that I may know Your decrees” (Psalm 119:125)
- Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

II. The TEACHING for Session 9: The Revelation of God's Guidance Follows Our Surrender (30 min.)

Read the following teaching aloud or have the participants read the teaching silently.

Have you ever found yourself saying when making a decision, “If God would just tell me what to do”? Actually, He is more than willing. Like any parent that would want to guide their child in the best path forward, we know and come to experience that God **wants** to guide us, and that He wants what's best for us—both now and in the long run. It is reassuring to know that the Lord **will** guide us in all aspects of our life. For our part, we want to open our hearts and follow His direction as we come to understand the ways in which He normally guides us.

In considering a decision, and seeking God's guidance in this decision, we must initially do our part. It is good to undertake legitimate preparation, especially regarding big decisions: considering various possibilities, anticipating road blocks, weighing the pros and cons, etc. And all of this preparation needs to be done in the context of prayer.

Knowing that God wants what is best for us, there is a principle that is necessary to understand in order to receive God's guidance for the situation under consideration. The principle is: "**revelation follows surrender.**" In other words, when asking Jesus for guidance, we need to truly desire His will in the matter. We will not receive Our Lord's guidance until we come to Him "without our mind already made up" about the direction to take.

It is important that we don't discount the desires of our heart. If we already have a strong leaning as to what we want the outcome to be, we must be honest and tell this to Jesus. These longings are different from things we simply want out of selfishness. God has placed desires deep in our heart that He wants to fulfill. His direction, as we come to understand it and He confirms it, will help us know the difference between what we think we want and His true guidance. Remember that He really does want what is best and is good for us, what *we really do want* in the end!

God's direction will come to us after we express our willingness to follow His guidance in any given area. Therefore, what is needed is our surrender to God. Surrender is not being irresponsible or lazy, or having an attitude that we "don't care," or that we "could care less."

Surrender in this context of seeking God's guidance means having examined the possibilities with responsibility and a willingness to place the outcome in His hands, and to trust Him. We will ultimately come to a place of relinquishment, where we can say to Jesus, "I place this in Your hands, because I want what You want. I believe it is best for me."

We really aren't able to come to a place of surrender without first being convinced of God's goodness. In order to believe and trust God with a sure confidence in Him, we have to personally experience His benevolence, His perfect goodness. We open ourselves to identify and remember His goodness through times of quiet reflection, where Jesus gives us the grace to recognize how He has helped and guided us in the past, and His unchanging desire to faithfully protect and guide us now. With this, a firm conviction grows that He is truly worthy of our trust.

Having **trust in God's goodness**, and a willingness to **surrender** to Him, are necessary to receive Our Lord's guidance and follow Him. God *will* guide us. He cares about every detail in our lives. Ask the Lord to deepen your belief in His goodness and your desire to surrender to His guidance. Watch for the amazing effect it will have!

Remember the principle: Revelation follows surrender.

Discussion questions for small groups

From this teaching on "The Revelation of God's Guidance Follows Our Surrender," respond to the following questions.

Question 1. What stood out for you? or What resonated most with your personal situation currently? Why? Summarize below.

Question 2. Why is it essential to know that God will guide us when we come to Him without mind already made up?

If our mind is already made up, then we are not truly seeking God's direction.

Question 3. In considering a decision, and seeking God's guidance in this decision, what must we do as preparation as part of the process?

Spend time in prayer, consider various possibilities, anticipate road blocks, weigh the pros and cons,

Question 4. What does the word surrender not mean? What does the word surrender mean? What is another word for surrender?

Surrender is not being irresponsible or lazy, or having an attitude that we "don't care," or that we "could care less."

Surrender in this context of seeking God's guidance means having examined the possibilities with responsibility and a willingness to place the outcome in His hands, and to trust Him.

Another word for surrender is obedience

Question 5. Why is it essential to grow in trust in God's goodness?

We really aren't able to come to a place of surrender without first being convinced of God's goodness.

Question 6. Summarize in one or two sentences what your takeaway is from this section.

Question 7. If you were going to relate something from "The Revelation of God's Guidance Follows Our Surrender" to your family tonight at the dinner table, what would you tell them? Would you

- 1) share a personal remembrance of a personal story/incident related to "revelation follows surrender" principal with them or
- 2) mention something that was helpful to you from the teaching or
- 3) bring up something that resonated with you in connection with your own life experience?

III. The Revelation of God's Guidance Follows Our Surrender

(10 min.) Participants are to read this Scripture passage: Acts 13:1-5

The community of Antioch was seeking God's guidance.

Allow participants to answer the following questions silently and then discuss them:

Question 1. How did the church of Antioch surrender themselves to God in seeking His direction?
They worshiped the Lord and were fasting.

Question 2. What do you think is the most important point of guidance in this Scripture passage?
Asking and willingness

Question 3. What stood out for you? Why?

Question 4. Does this remind you of something or someone in your life?

Question 5. What word or phrase had special meaning for you from this passage?

(10 min.) Participants are also to read the Scripture passage: Acts 16:6-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy were seeking God's guidance as to what cities they should visit to preach the Gospel, the way of salvation.

Question 1. How did Paul, Silas and Timothy surrender themselves to God's guidance?

They surrendered themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then they were led to pass through the territory of Phrygia and Galatia, being forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia or Bithynia.

Question 2. How did the Holy Spirit guide Paul, Silas and Timothy to determine which city that they should travel to and preach the Gospel?

Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia, asking them to come and help the people there, by preaching the "Good News" of Jesus Christ.

Question 3. What word or phrase had special meaning for you from this passage?

IV. A true, modern-day story illustrating how God provided guidance as the person surrendered to His direction.

One modern-day story has been provided. This story reveals how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance when a person comes to Him without his/her mind already made up.

Conviction: Does the Heart Say Yes?

The final test of a decision is the inner conviction that this course of action is indeed the right one. Does the **heart** grasp it? Is there a sense of moral certainty that this direction is God's will? The first four tests emphasize the making up of the **mind**. Does that proposed direction conform to God's law? Does it bring us and others closer to Him through conversion? Is it consistent with the way the Lord has worked in our lives in the past? Is it confirmed by the counsel of others, by favorable circumstances, and by the fruit of the spirit? Conviction is the test of the **heart**. Do we "know" inside that this is the right way?

It is not unusual to go through a lengthy process of discernment, feel convinced that a decision is the right one, and still be plagued by anxiety and fear. The bigger the decision, the less likely we are to reach the point of resolution in a state of perfect calm. Often – perhaps most of the time – uneasiness is a familiar, instinctive reaction to change, we can go ahead despite it – as long as we have a sense of inner conviction beneath the surface turmoil.

But sometimes this conviction is not present. The mind is made up; the heart hesitates. The will is frozen.

I have counseled many people in this condition of “decision gridlock.” I often try to unblock the heart by leading them to examine past decisions that they believe were led by God or were right in the sight of God. We pay special attention to the difference between peace in the heart and the conclusion of the mind. The two should both be present in a major decision but they are not the same thing. We focus on assessing the condition of the heart. Does the heart feel the same way now as it did when you made decisions that you believe were right? If not, what is the quality of the difference?

Often I suggest that the person ask the Lord two questions. “Lord, is it your will that I do this?” And then, “Lord, is it your will that I **not** do this?” By comparing the internal response of these two questions, the person often finds the answer.

Gentle questioning like this can give focus to one's prayer. We often talk too much in prayer and don't listen. But when we try to listen, we can be plagued by distractions and unfocused silence. Putting a question to the Lord can break us through the fog of paralysis and uncertainty and allow our hearts to open up to the will of God.

A conviction in the heart was missing when I decided whether to accept the job of president of the college of Steubenville in 1974. And a gentle questioning and prayer helped me find it.

When the presidency of question came up, I was quite happy at my job as rector of the T.O.R. Seminary in Loretto Pennsylvania. My Superior asked me to interview for the opening, but without a sign that he thought this was the direction for me. “I need some qualified candidates to at least interview,” he said.

I agreed to be interviewed. I knew that the final decision would be left to me if I was selected. Then I began testing the possibilities.

I sensed God saying to me. “What if I want you to be president of the College of Steubenville? Perhaps this meant that God was asking me to reaffirm my vow of obedience to Him to go anywhere at any time, but He was not actually calling me to the presidency. Or perhaps He wanted me to be president of the college sometime, but not now, when things were going so well at the seminary. Or another thought: maybe the Lord just wanted me to give my opinions in the interview and leave it at that. I played with all these ideas. I discussed them with my closest associates. I prayed about them.

I interviewed, gave my views on what the college needed, and was soon informed that I was the first choice for the job. Now there was a real decision to make, not just the possibility. It was suddenly very serious.

I found the procedure I present here in this book. I consulted my brothers and my small fraternal group. I sought direction from my confessor. I weighed the pros and cons. There were many good reasons for staying as rector of the seminary, and some of my closest friend's favored that. They were also good reasons to accept the presidency of the college. It passed the

test for conformity, conversion, and consistency and it was confirmed in several ways. It seemed like the right step.

Yet I could not resolve the matter in my heart. Conviction was lacking. The decision was mine. The reasons for going ahead seemed compelling, but they were on the order of intellectual analysis. The sense of inner peace at the prospects simply wasn't there. I began to question the Lord in prayer: Is it Your will that I do this? Is it your will that I **not** do this?

As I struggled with my decision, I attended a conference where the speaker talked about his own struggles to give his life fully to God. He had always been afraid to surrender completely to the Lord's will, he said, because he feared that the Lord would send him to the jungles of Africa - and that terrified him. He had no desire whatsoever to be a missionary in Africa or any other place. So he withheld parts of himself.

"Finally," the speaker said, "I did make a full commitment to the Lord despite my fears. He didn't send me to Africa. I learned something - God never sends anyone to Africa without first putting Africa in his heart."

I was thunderstruck. I took these words as something that the Holy Spirit was directing me to in my own situation. *God never sends anyone to Africa without first putting Africa in their hearts.* Do you want to put the college of Steubenville in my heart, Lord? I asked. As the speaker went on with his talk I sat on the stage behind him, I opened – surrendered – my heart and responded to the invitation of the Spirit. I found the college of Steubenville already there. The conviction that this was the right direction settled on me. It has never left.

What Does God Want? A Practical Guide to Making Decisions by Michael Scanlon, T.O.R.
with James Manney, pages 71-74

Allow participants to answer the following questions silently and then discuss them:

Question 1. What did you find helpful from reading this experience?

Question 2. The bigger the decision, the less likely we are to reach the point of resolution in a complete state of perfect calm. Often – perhaps most of the time – uneasiness is a familiar, instinctive reaction to change, we can go ahead despite it – as long as we have a sense of inner **conviction in the heart** beneath the surface turmoil. Is there a decision that you have made that was accompanied by uneasiness and even fear?

Question 3. Two aspects of seeking to know God's will in making a decision are the conclusion of the mind and peace in the heart. The two should both be present in a major decision but they are not the same thing. What would you say is the difference between

- the conclusion of the mind and
- peace in the heart?

The conclusion of the **mind** involves intellectual deliberation by considering such things as the pros and cons regarding the outcome of the decision. **Peace in the heart** is the peace from God that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). This peace in the heart is deeper, bigger and more powerful than the external or surface turmoil, fear or uneasiness that might be present. This peace from God carries a greater power that allows us to move forward.

Question 4. In examining the condition of one’s heart, to see if indeed there is peace in the heart, the author suggests that the person ask the Lord two questions. “ Lord, is it your will that I do this?” And then, “Lord, is it your will that I **not** do this?” By comparing the internal response of these two questions, the person often finds the answer. Write down in one sentence a decision that you need to make. Now, ask the Lord these two questions and allow times in your prayer over the next week to listen to His response. Write down what you believe the internal responses to be from the Lord.

Question 5. What did the speaker at the conference mean when he said, “God never sends anyone to Africa without first putting Africa in his heart”? Has God put something in your heart of which you may, or may not, be aware? If you know what it is, write it down? If you are not sure, ask Him if there is something there?

Question 6. What is your takeaway from this principal: “The Revelation of God’s guidance follows our surrender”?

V. Closing Prayer: The 12th Grade Prayer Card (5 min.)

Pray using the “Seeking God’s Guidance” Prayer Card, at diolc.org/deeper.

Note to Facilitator:

Be sensitive to any person who seems to be troubled about something that surfaced in the teaching or stories, such as feeling challenged to go in a different direction or worrying that they “messed up” in the past, or if there seems to be something left “unfinished”. Please know that it is probably unlikely that this can be resolved in the setting of this group and we don’t want to just leave them “hanging”.

- Show appreciation in some way for their willingness to express what seems to be of concern to them.
- Encourage them to continue to pray about this matter.
- Encourage them to talk with someone outside the group that is a spiritually-competent person.