

A person wearing a red hat and a large backpack is seen from behind, standing on a vast, white, snow-covered mountain peak. The person is holding a red rope. In the background, a large, blue, waterfall-like formation descends from the sky, creating a striking contrast with the white snow and blue sky. The sky is a deep, vibrant blue with some wispy clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and exploration in a high-altitude, snowy environment.

# Trekking Deeper

**GOD'S GUIDANCE**





## GOD'S GUIDANCE

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**First published 2007**

**This edition published online October 2015**

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## INTRODUCTION

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At some point in the life of every follower of Jesus, is going to grapple with God's guidance. This is right and good, because we want to please our Heavenly Father. However, our focus must always remain on our intimate relationship with God. We cannot separate guidance from our association with our Lord, so we must keep our eyes on our Saviour at all times.

These studies will give some guidelines and possibly introduce you to aspects of divine guidance you have not yet considered. However, guidance is an enormous subject and this booklet is in no way definitive.

There are twenty studies in this booklet. The course is designed to take one month, but you can do it at whatever speed you choose. There are two free days each week, but I would encourage you to use these extra days to pray and to look more deeply at anything the Lord has been speaking to you about. Alternatively, you may like to read and reflect on the Bible passages connected with guidance that are listed at the end of this booklet.

Most days I have given a relatively long Bible reading. There are two reasons for this. First, every verse must be seen and read in its context. Secondly, the Bible is the only perfect and pure word of God. Therefore the Scriptures are far better for teaching about guidance than these or any other notes could ever be! Don't rush the Bible readings but allow the Lord to speak to you through them. Please note all Scripture references are from the New International Version

This module is dedicated to my son Toby. His straightforward faith is a great challenge. May we also revel in an uncomplicated life with Jesus.

My prayer for you is that through your Trek experience, you will grow in your relationship with God, and learn more of how and when He guides you.



## DAY ONE: KNOW GOD TO KNOW GOD'S WILL

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### READING – JOHN 10:1-21

*Verse 14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me ...”*

Do you have a relationship with God? This is not a question concerning your salvation, but a question asking whether you know God intimately. Guidance comes from a close personal relationship with our Lord. In His majesty and mercy, God can, and sometimes does, break through and communicate with His children, even those who generally ignore Him. But communication with God normally takes place as we adjust our lives to Him and give Him opportunities to communicate with us. We must commit ourselves to building an individual rapport with God, and allowing Him to speak with us in whatever form He chooses. We need to take time to hear Him because guidance is listening to God. We must focus on our relationship with our Living God so that we are not so absorbed with what He wants us to do that we miss being with our Lord.

Today's passage is very helpful. The Lord is our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). The shepherds of the Bible knew their sheep individually. They led their flocks from the front; they didn't drive them from the rear. The Lord does not walk behind us, forcing us forward. He is not twirling a big stick, ready to strike any stragglers. He simply calls to us as He walks ahead. Our role is to listen and stick with Him. Verse 4 tells us that “he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Do you know His voice? Are you listening to what Jesus has to say?

We need to walk with our Lord, attentive to His voice and willing to obey what He says. The better we know God, the better we will hear what He has to say and the better able we will be to know what He wants us to do. As we begin this module, take some time to commit these studies to God and pray that you will both hear His voice and stay close to Him.

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**DAY TWO: CHARACTER AND GLORY**

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**READING – 2 PETER 1**

*Verses 10-11 “if you do these things ... you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord ...”*

When we think about guidance, we often focus on marriage or ministry. Unfortunately, this means we have already tripped over our feet before we reach the starting line. Why? Because God wants us to focus on Christ, holiness and obedience. God is far more concerned with the kind of people we are: our attitudes, aims and actions, than our profession, place or partner.

We must understand that the core of guidance is character. Whatever we do, we must do it in a Christ-like way. There are clear commands in the Bible on work ethics, how we treat other people, and how we live for God in every situation. In *Living Free* (p.84) Neil Anderson writes: “I’m not really sure that God’s will enters into the choice of whether we become an engineer, plumber, or nurse. But I am convinced that God’s will is concerned with what kind of engineer, plumber, or nurse we are.”

Today’s passage urges us to “make every effort” to mature in Christ. The idea is of exertion and energy. We should be training – even straining – to become progressively more like Jesus. The reason for this is clearly stated: to keep us from being “ineffective and unproductive.” We shouldn’t start with who, where and when, but rather with why, what and how. God is preparing us for eternity. When we enter glory, all we will take is ourselves; our careers, colleges or companions will be left behind and they will be of no importance. This does not mean that God is not interested in those details of our lives, but we must start at the right place or we will be running the wrong way round the track before we know it!

Have you ever considered that guidance is concerned with character? Commit yourself to holiness and faithfulness above location or vocation.

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## DAY THREE: GOD'S GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL

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### READING – LUKE 11:1-28

***Verse 11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?”***

Do you believe that the will of God is good, pleasing, and perfect for *you* (Romans 12:2)? Think about that for a moment: if you believe that God's will is good and perfect then you will be excited to know God's will and motivated to do it. But if you believe it is drudgery or disagreeable, then you will struggle to commit yourself to God's plans. Someone has said that the principal requirement to knowing the will of God is a willingness to do it. If we believe that God's will is perfect for us, we will enthusiastically hunt for it, and throw a party when we capture it!

Our God is not a tyrannical dictator, nor is He an overbearing slave driver. God is our loving Father, who enjoys giving good gifts to His children. As we can see from today's passage, if we ask for fish and chips, He is not going to give us a snake burger! God is pure goodness, so it follows that His will is also good. God's will is perfect ... all the time, even when we cannot understand the whys and hows.

We will look more at this later, but God knows every detail of who we are. He knows everything about our personalities and preferences. God knows that if we enjoy doing something, we do a much better job of it than if we don't enjoy it (2 Corinthians 8:16-17). This means we must rid ourselves of the ridiculous idea that God's will equals a grim and grotty life that cuts us off from everything that interests and excites us. In *Hearing God* (p.72) Dallas Willard writes: “Maturing Christians grow beyond the shallow concepts of discipleship that equate unhappiness with serving God.”

How do you view God's guidance? Do you truly accept that God's will is the very best thing for you or do you subconsciously question God's motives? Commit yourself to God's plan for you and know that it will be perfect!

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**DAY FOUR: PRAY AND PETITION**

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**READING – JEREMIAH 33:1-16**

***Verse 3 “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”***

When it comes to guidance, as with everything else, prayer is absolutely essential. If we want God to hear us and direct us, then we need to pray and listen. Our verse today is clear that God invites us to come and share with Him. James 1:5 also tells us that: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

How does the Lord want you to live? Where does the Lord want you to go? Have you asked Him? I heard someone recently ask how many of us who are concerned about the will of God spend five minutes a day asking Him to show us His will? We must take time and make the effort to pray!

God is interested in every aspect of our lives and He wants to be involved, but He may not give answers immediately. This could be for many reasons: the time is not right, the Lord wants to teach us things through our search, or even we already know the answer and the Lord wants us to get on with it and not just keep asking Him!

It is good to pray that the Lord would give us “eyes to see” and “ears to hear”. So often there are things happening around us that would help us with our guidance, only we are not paying attention.

It is a good idea to fast. We cannot manipulate the Lord by missing meals, but fasting does concentrate the mind and heart. It is also helpful to keep a journal and to write down anything that particularly strikes you from your Bible readings, from what is happening around you, and from what other people say. As you look back through your notes, you may notice a pattern emerging that helps to point in a certain direction.

Do you need to pray and/or fast?

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## DAY FIVE: CONSTANTLY LISTENING

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### READING – NUMBERS 7:84-89

***Verse 89 “When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him ...”***

I have already noted that we need to listen to God. This really is paramount. Many people long to hear God’s voice, but they fail to hear Him. There are no doubt many reasons for this, but often we fail to hear God’s voice because, actually, we do not want God to guide us except when we decide we need it. When we are facing a big decision we run to the Lord, otherwise we rarely look for God’s guidance in our lives. We need to correct this imbalance. We cannot turn God’s communication and God’s guidance on and off as we choose. Either we listen and obey all the time or none of the time. The Lord is looking for total commitment – not partial obedience.

One author notes that the visible world distracts us so much from the invisible realm that it can be hard to concentrate on “unseen” spiritual things. This can mean that there are few people who get up in the morning as hungry for God as they are for their cornflakes! And yet, all the time God is speaking but we’re not ready to react.

Today’s verse is a particularly interesting one. Let’s not get too technical, but the form of the verb “to speak” is unusual. It is a reflexive form. This means that God was speaking to Himself. We could say that the three members of the Trinity were chatting together, and when Moses entered the tent of Meeting, he joined in the conversation! God is speaking and He is waiting to be heard. Are you listening?

We need to set aside regular times for listening. We should pray that the Lord would speak and we would hear. We could echo Samuel’s words in 1 Samuel 3:10: “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Do you want the Lord to guide you? There is nothing better than giving time and space to listen to God.

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## DAYS SIX AND SEVEN: **EXPLORE DEEPER**

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How well do you know your Trek location? You may have just arrived, or you may have been there a while. Either way, why not go and explore? See who or what you can find. You don't have to go for miles; there are probably all sorts of things happening just around the corner!

Why not spend time reading and meditating on Psalm 25. What have you discovered? Is there anything you need to do? Take time to praise God and pray for His work in your life.

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## DAY EIGHT: **ACTIVE BUT UNSEEN GUIDANCE**

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### READING – PROVERBS 3:1-20

*Verse 6 “... in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight.”*

In all the many and varied aspects of our lives, God is at work. He never stops, but sometimes we neither realise nor appreciate what He's doing. God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing). God is involved in everything. He is the Divine Boss and He rules and reigns throughout the Universe! The Holy Spirit is the Great Counsellor. He never forces us, never tries to catch us out, but changes us and directs us. Sometimes His guidance is cloaked. We only “see” it as we look back on what God has done in our lives.

Today's reading makes it clear that if we trust God and acknowledge Him in every area of our lives, His promise is that He will guide us: we don't have to be aware that it's happening. One commentator points out that the Hebrew word for “trust”, in verse 5, originally had the idea of lying face downwards. This suggests a person should be dependent on God. So, also, with the Hebrew word “lean” which suggests “relying on” rather than “propping up”.

This passage is usually taken out of context. Many people turn to these verses in connection with choices concerning matrimony or locality. But these verses are all part of the first major section in the book of Proverbs. It clearly shows the advantage of wisdom over foolishness, and is concerned with moral and ethical guidance. We are dependent on God to live a life of goodness, and we rely on Him in everything we do. So, these verses are far more concerned with the choices we make to lead a right and faithful life before our holy God, than the choices we make for spouses and houses.

Do you pray that God would guide you in righteous living or just when a question arises concerning future options? Pray that your main concern will be knowing and serving God.

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**DAY NINE: BIBLE GUIDANCE**

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**READING – PSALM 119:97-120**

*Verse 105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*

God's living Word is His primary means of guidance. Someone has said that the vast majority of the will of God for our lives has already been revealed in the Bible. The Scriptures outline a number of Christian requirements concerning lifestyle, service, and worship. We may not have realised the fact, but a great deal of God's guidance is simply a matter of obedience. We don't need the Lord to instruct us in how to live and behave in a holy and proper way, because He already has!

Obviously, the Scriptures don't give specific instructions. They are filled with principles, not particulars. For example, the Bible reveals qualities for a future husband or wife; it doesn't give names and phone numbers!

Of course, God can, and sometimes does, give precise guidance through our regular Bible readings. We may find that a verse, or passage, stands up and waves at us. We must always be open to this more dramatic use of the Bible. At the same time, we must be careful not to take passages out of context; otherwise we can create some ludicrous interpretations. We end up twisting the Scriptures to fit some totally bizarre conclusions rather than allowing God's truth to transform and train us.

Our text today helps us to see that God's Word is a lamp to our feet, which helps us with the next step. It is not a searchlight illuminating the next five miles! Personally, I have found that uncertainty over my future has been like walking uphill in thick fog. God's truth has helped me to take the next step forward without falling off the edge of the mountain. Eventually, I come through the fog and, from the summit, I can see all I need to see. What enabled me to get there was the Bible.

Do you need to spend more time in the Scriptures? If so, make a commitment today to do just that!

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## DAY TEN: NATURALLY SKILFUL

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### READING – PSALM 139

*Verse 14 “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”*

When did God start His work in you? Many people believe that God became interested in them when they were born again, but God has always been fascinated with your life. God “knew” you before your conception, and every moment of every day since. God has formed and created us with our own unique personalities and abilities. There is still a place for the debate on “nature” and “nurture” but, essentially, we are God’s handiwork.

This is very important. In *The Contemporary Christian* (p.139) John Stott writes: “If we were musical, artistic, athletic, or intelligent, when God called us, we must not now disown these good things which a good Creator gave us.” God did not idly watch as you achieved sporting success or creative competence, and now discards those things as irrelevant. Our experiences and skills can be redeemed and transformed. Christ takes the old words and phrases of our lives but reworks them into a masterpiece. Our priorities, concerns and ambitions must undergo a radical shake-up after we trust in Jesus, but there is a vital connection as we are still the same person, but one who has been saved and made holy.

Of course, sometimes God will radically shift people and bestow them with new gifts and abilities. The founder of WEC International, CT Studd was a skilful cricketer, but this was put to one side when he left England for China and later Africa. However, I know of many others who have gone overseas and found that their “natural talents” with machinery, medicine, or music have been used by God to help communicate the love and truth of Jesus.

Do you have natural abilities? Maybe the Lord wants to use those skills in ways that you cannot even begin to imagine. Commit your talents to God and pray that He would use you as He decides.

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**DAY ELEVEN: SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

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**READING – ROMANS 12:3-21**

*Verse 6 “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it ...”*

What are your spiritual gifts? Let’s have no false modesty! God has blessed every believer with a set of spiritual gifts; what are yours? If you don’t know, it’s vital you ask the Holy Spirit, and Christian friends, what your spiritual gifts are. It has been said that ignorance of spiritual gifts may be a chief cause for delaying church growth. It may also be the source of much discouragement, insecurity, frustration, and guilt that troubles many believers and limits their effectiveness for God.

Today’s passage shows that the Lord Jesus has given the Church prophets, servers, teachers, encouragers, givers, leaders, carers, and others. Why? To bless one another and support all believers in God’s service, so that the Church matures and spreads around the world. (See also 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and Ephesians 4:7-13).

God has given us gifts for a reason; they are not to be neglected. Do you remember the parable of the servants in Matthew 25:14-30? The reaction, in verse 26, to the servant who buried his talent was “You wicked, lazy servant!” The Lord wants the gifts He has provided to be discerned, developed, and drawn on. He does not want us to be frustrated (because our gifts are lying idle) but rather fulfilled (because our gifts are being exercised).

One author refers to David: when David marched out to face Goliath, what did he do? He did not shoot an arrow; he did not throw a spear. David did what God had gifted, trained and equipped David to do – throw a stone! David was a shepherd and he slung stones.

God can ask you to do anything at any time, but if He has specifically given you a particular gift, you can be sure that He has given you that gift for a purpose.

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## DAY TWELVE: GUIDANCE BLOCKERS

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### READING – ACTS 15:22-41

***Verses 37-38 “Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, ... but Paul did not think it wise to take him ...”***

There are a number of roadblocks to guidance. First, impatience. God knows if we are working to a deadline, and if we aren't, it's wise to wait. One author wrote that God says to us what He said to Joseph and Mary when He sent them into Egypt: “Stay there until I tell you” (Matthew 2:13). Far more mistakes are made by acting too quickly than by waiting too long!

Secondly, subjectivity. I'm sure you have heard people say, “I feel led to ...”. This can be dodgy ground without other elements of guidance that also point in the same direction. In connection with this, we should realise that a need, on its own, does not qualify as a definite reason for us to respond. It maybe that we have a “burden” for a particular ministry, but there will always be other confirmations to back up the “burden”.

Thirdly, an unwilling heart. We must be prepared to obey God's purposes. If we are actively pursuing God's will, we must be ready to do anything and go anywhere. We cannot ask God to guide us if we hold a list of exceptions in our heads or hearts. Are you willing to do absolutely anything, or are you willing to do anything except ...? Let's follow Mary's counsel to the servants at the wedding at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

Fourthly, past disobedience. We should avoid believing that if we have deliberately disobeyed the Lord in the past, we are now unusable to God. We need to confess our mistake, but understand that we come to a God who is full of grace and mercy. Do you remember John Mark? Compare 2 Timothy 4:11 with today's verse! God often uses our disobedience to teach us and make us into the sort of people He can do something with.

Are you impatient or emotionally led? Are you unwilling to do certain things, or are you struggling with past disobediences? Bring it all to God, and submit your life to Him.

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## DAYS THIRTEEN AND FOURTEEN: **PRAY FOR THE WORLD**

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It is crucial we pray for Christ-less people throughout God's world. Wherever you are, how about interceding for India's Hindu millions:

- Every Indian home is associated with a number of deities, kept in a special room or corner. Temples are centres for astrology, exorcism, witchcraft, and especially the teaching of ritual.
    - Pray that Jesus, the light of the world, will shine through the darkness and evil.
  - Jesus is acceptable to most Hindus as they do not wish to offend any divine being. But He is considered to be one among all the other gods and goddesses.
    - Pray that people will understand that salvation is found in Christ alone.
  - The evangelical church in India is growing. However, believers are often disowned by their families and ostracised in the communities. Just finding someone studying the Bible can be taken as an insult.
    - Pray that Christians would stand strong in their faith and there would be an openness to hearing the Good News.
  - There are many universities in India. Due to their secular stance, there are many opportunities to share the Gospel.
    - Pray that many people will be involved in helping to shape the next generation of India's leaders and many would turn to Christ.
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## DAY FIFTEEN: **CALLING YOU!**

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### READING – 2 TIMOTHY 1

*Verse 6 “... I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”*

What are you called to or what is your calling? Most Christians use these terms wrongly. A “call” to a place or a person is not biblical. It is true that Paul writes that he was “called to be an apostle” (Romans 1:1), but the normal use of the word “call” has far deeper spiritual meanings than guidance. If we examine the New Testament, we find that our calling includes: called to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14), called to be holy (1 Corinthians 1:2), called to belong to Jesus (Romans 1:6), called to be free (Galatians 5:13), called to peace (Colossians 3:15), called to eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12), called out of darkness (1 Peter 2:9), and called to suffering (1 Peter 2:19-21). Undoubtedly, in this more usual sense, all are called!

There are three basic elements that you need to resolve to determine God’s guidance. If you can settle on these elements, then your route to knowing and obeying God will be much clearer: a conviction concerning ministry, a conviction concerning gifting, and a conviction concerning location. The first two are the most important as often these can be fulfilled in different settings.

Our passage today explains that God’s call is based in Jesus Christ, and was given to us before God created stars and starfish! We can also say that God’s call is given to each believer and covers every aspect of our life and ministry for Him. We are all Christian workers, whether we work in a café or in a church. While it maybe that some are chosen for specialised ministries, this is not because they themselves are anything special! It is the duty and joy of every Christian to serve God, according to His grace and His gifting.

Do you recognise that as a believer in Jesus you are called to all the wonderful things listed above? Do you have a clear conviction of your ministry, gifting, and location?

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**DAY SIXTEEN: THE GREATEST COMMISSION**

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**READING – MATTHEW 28**

*Verses 18-19 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...”*

Why are you on a Trek? Are you trying to discern the possibility of mission work longer term? If so, this is excellent because overseas mission is still vital. This is God's world, Christ died to save the world, and the Lord wants His message of life and hope to be taken to everyone, so that everybody has an opportunity to respond.

In today's text, as Jesus prepared to leave earth He gave His disciples their final instructions. We can be sure that the last thing He was going to say was going to be important: Jesus has all the authority so we can accomplish everything the King of the Cosmos tells us to do; and that is go! “Go” would actually be better translated “going”. There is one command in the Great Commission and it's not “go”, but “make disciples”. Jesus said: “while you are going” or “as you go, make disciples.” The assumption was that the disciples would go. It's the same for us: the Lord expects that we will go, and when we do, we are also to make disciples (not converts) who will make more disciples, who will make more disciples ...

We must go to all peoples, everywhere. In English, we read “all nations”, but the Bible text says “all ethnic groups”. An ethnic group is a people with their own distinctive language and culture. This is important, because the Lord wants us to reach every ethnic group, not just some people from every nation state. For example, Papua New Guinea is one nation, but it has over 800 ethnic groups and God is interested in all of them.

As long as there are people who are untouched with Christ's Gospel, then we disobey the Great Commission by refusing to go and make disciples. God doesn't expect us to conquer the world for Jesus, but He does expect us to do our bit. When we do, He will be with us until the very end.

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## DAY SEVENTEEN: CALLED OR SENT?

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### READING – 1 TIMOTHY 2

*Verse 4 “... God our Saviour ... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*

My challenge to you during your time with Trek is this: be open to the Lord about any future role in reaching the world for Jesus Christ. So many people have never heard the Gospel, not even once, so they remain ignorant of Jesus Christ. There are also many people who have never heard the true Gospel, and have been told a confused and contorted message. All of these people need to meet the only One who is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

Usually people wait at home until the Lord, in some spectacular fashion, “calls” them to something new. But the Bible is clear, God wants all men to be saved; that’s all people, everywhere. So, do we all need to pack our bags and head overseas? No! But, while not everyone should go abroad, everyone should be involved in world evangelisation. It may be that God wants you to be an encourager, a pray-er, or a giver to those who do leave home. If so, this is a crucial ministry and should never be regarded as second best. God may also have chosen you to reach out to your own neighbourhood. However, it may be that we should make every effort to go overseas unless God clearly tells us to stay at home, rather than the reverse. The word “missionary” comes from the Latin word “mitto” meaning “to send”. We have been commissioned several times in the Scriptures to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and God is waiting to send us out.

The remarkable truth is that the evangelisation of the world is a realisable task in this generation. There is still much to be done but in Christ’s love and power the Lord’s church will be completed and Christ will return. We have the privilege and responsibility of working with God to see men, women and children come to faith in Christ. What is your response?

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**DAY EIGHTEEN: SEIZE THE DAY!**

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**READING – MATTHEW 6:19-34**

***Verse 33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”***

I challenged you yesterday to consider a possible future role in world mission. However, a valuable counterbalance is not to make this an obsession – you should not sit around waiting for a sign from God. It is a wise move to give everything you have to your present assignment. It is easy for people to have their eyes fixed so far ahead that they completely miss what is happening right in front of their faces! This is particularly true on your Trek. While you very much need to be open to the Lord about anything He might want to say to you, you must also make the most of your mission experience *now!* Wherever you are, you may return there again some day, but then again you may not. It is always best to “seize the day”: revel in the new culture, delight in the new cuisine, enjoy the new customs, and learn all you can about God, about others and about yourself.

Our God is a guiding God. At every moment the possibility exists that God may guide you in some way or another. I believe the Lord prompted me today to contact someone. I wasn't thinking about him at all, when suddenly there was a thought with his name on it! The more obedient we are in the little things, the more obedient we will be when the time comes to wrestle with the big things.

Our text today is one that we should memorise and stand on at all times. If this becomes your mission statement, you won't go wrong! Constantly search for God's kingdom and righteousness *first* and then all the other things, whatever they are, will be given as well.

Are you committed to God's guidance in the “little things”? Are you giving yourself one hundred per cent to your present project? Do you need to seek God first and leave the “other things” to your heavenly Father?

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## DAY NINETEEN: CORPORATE DECISION MAKING

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### READING – ACTS 13:1-15

*Verse 2 “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul ...’”*

How did Saul/Paul and Barnabas decide to become missionaries? They looked at the needs and thought they should do something? No. They wanted to travel and drew up a plan of campaign calling it “*Saul and Barney: Boldly Going Where No Missionary Has Gone Before*”? No. The Holy Spirit commissioned them during a church meeting. They were together with a number of believers, worshipping and fasting, when they received their divine assignment. They weren't looking for a change in ministry, but the Holy Spirit clearly spoke and informed the whole church that they needed to set apart these two men to fulfil a new work.

The importance of corporate guidance is often overlooked. We are individuals, so many of the decisions we make are personal ones. But when we are looking for God's guidance it is vital we share our hopes and ideas with others. God usually guides groups of people, and He often instructs individuals through groups of believers.

It is important to seek advice from Christian friends, from Christian work colleagues, and Christian leaders. We must be careful that we not only consult with those who will agree with us, but those who will be far more objective and dispassionate. We also need to give people permission to ask hard questions to help us discern our true motives and priorities. When we talk and pray with others, we will find that they can bring added wisdom, experience, and insight.

All of this means that we must be humble. If we ask others for their help and input, we must listen to what they have to say! The Holy Spirit often speaks through others. In fact, a number of commentators state that it was the Holy Spirit, communicating through the church prophets, who commissioned our two heroes: so we must listen carefully to what people are saying.

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## DAYS TWENTY AND TWENTY-ONE: **REFOCUSING**

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**Space below for notes or questions.**

Why not step aside from the subject of guidance and simply spend some time focusing on the Lord?

How about:

- Reading from the Psalms or Gospels or ...
  - Writing home with testimony of what God is doing or ...
  - Going for a walk and revelling in God's creation or ...
  - Talking to someone about God's greatness or ...
  - Singing songs of worship or ...
  - All of the above!
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## DAY TWENTY-TWO: **PEACE BROTHER (AND SISTER)!**

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### READING – PHILIPPIANS 4

*Verse 7 “... the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds ...”*

People often talk about a sense of peace as a deciding reason for any decisions they've made. I believe we should not reach conclusions on this impression alone, but it can be an important factor. It would certainly be wrong to keep moving ahead with any idea or project if our spirits are fluttering uneasily.

In Colossians 3:15, Paul says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...” It is interesting that the word translated “rule” contains the image of refereeing a sports event and so means, “to judge or decide”. In other words, God's peace should govern our lives.

Today's passage tells us that the peace of God transcends all understanding. As we sit down wracking our brains for solutions and resolutions, we can come to the throne of grace and give ourselves to the One who knows us and cares for us. When we are clueless, God's peace will protect both our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus. So we can rest secure that God's goodness and love exceeds our limited human understanding.

In addition, we need to be very careful not to go against our consciences. The Holy Spirit often jabs our consciences to challenge and correct us. We need to ask ourselves: can I do “whatever” with a clear conscience before God? If we can't, then that option should be deleted. However, we do need to be careful because sometimes our consciences are punched by false guilt. We need to use our consciences along with other forms of guidance; otherwise our flawed consciences might actually draw us away from what God is saying! The more we soak up God's truth, the more our consciences will be immersed in what is good, true, proper and right.

Pray that, in your decisions, the Lord would grant you His peace and that He would work through your conscience.

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**DAY TWENTY-THREE: CIRCUMSTANCES**

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**READING – MATTHEW 1:18-24**

*Verse 18 “... Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child ...”*

There is no doubt that God uses circumstances. He can draw on our home, work, college, and Trek situations, as well as all our experiences of life and living.

Nevertheless, we need to pray for discernment when it comes to unusual circumstances. Some believers assume that it's God's will if circumstances are positive and it's not God's will if circumstances are negative. But believers should live above life's circumstances and be guided by God, not by situations. If we take the examples of Joseph (son of Jacob) and Joseph (husband of Mary – see today's passage), it would have been very difficult for them to have been guided solely by circumstances. We should not take circumstances on their own, but include them along with other forms of God's guidance.

Some people talk about circumstances by referring to “open” and “shut” doors. Once again, we need to be careful. We are not necessarily meant to go through every open door we come across. Conversely, when we run into a shut door, we need to discover who closed it. Was it God? Then stop right there. Was it ourselves? Then we need to examine our hearts before we open it. Was it Satan? Then we need to give the door a good kick!

We should realise that if a door is rightly closed to us that does not mean we have wasted time or energy. It also does not mean that we have failed. A door that is shut by God is an indication of His love and grace. We were possibly about to do something good, but God wants us to do something great! God wants what is best for us, not what is plausible. If one door is closed, we can be confident that the Lord will open up another door somewhere else.

Let's take note of our circumstances, but be careful!

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## DAY TWENTY-FOUR: **USE YOUR HEAD!**

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### READING – PSALM 32

***Verse 9 “Do not be like the horse or mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle ...”***

When we consider God's guidance, ultimately we have to use our heads. The Lord has given us brains and He wants us to exercise them. We are able to think, choose, and evaluate, and so we are in a position to take responsibility for our actions.

Our reading today shows that we are to be smarter than domestic animals; I'm sure you are! Whereas a horse has no understanding and must be steered by reins pulling one way or the other, we can think through various alternatives and then select one course of action.

When God is silent, it maybe that He is perfectly happy with what we are doing or the direction we are taking. He, therefore, has nothing particular to say on the matter. God respects decisions that we make with the intention of glorifying Him. God made man in His own image – with a creative, independent will – and He allows us freedom.

We do not serve God as slaves, constantly anxious in case we have missed something. We are sons and daughters, and it's God's will that we ourselves should have a role in discovering our future. Sometimes God tests our character by leaving us to decide. It may be His will that in certain situations we make up our own minds. It is said that children cannot develop into responsible, dependable human beings if they are always told what to do. This is also true for us as spiritual children of our heavenly Father. In normal circumstances, we are expected to use our heads, prayerfully. This does not mean that we can do anything and everything, but if we are praying, and God is seemingly not responding, we should move ahead while remaining open to being redirected.

Pray that you would love God with all your mind, and use your initiative as you make your decisions as a wise child of God.

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**DAY TWENTY-FIVE: SPECIAL FORMS OF GUIDANCE**

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**READING – ACTS 9**

*Verses 10-11 “The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ... ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for ... Saul ...’”*

We do need to balance what we looked at yesterday. As long as the Lord is renewing our minds, then the decisions we make are likely to be in accordance with God's will, but we must not ignore special forms of guidance – angels (Acts 8:26), words of knowledge (Acts 8:29), visions (today's text), and prophecies (Acts 21:10-11). Most of the biblical examples of these kinds of guidance are found in the vitally important book of Acts which connects the Gospels with the New Testament Letters. However, we always need to ask if the experiences of the early church are *descriptive* or *prescriptive*. (**Descriptive** experiences outline history as the church is established and are not the norm, as for example, the supernatural events which occurred on the day of Pentecost. **Prescriptive** experiences outline principles that are applicable to everyone in every age. These will include the believer's devotion to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.)

I believe that the Lord can and does use all forms of special guidance. He is not limited in any way, and if He chooses to send an angel or give a vision, He knows what He's doing! But special guidance is special, because it is not the usual form of guidance. If we flick through our Bibles, we discover that special guidance is actually very rare. The Scriptures give very few examples, and there are hardly any instances of God blocking someone's plans and presenting different directions. Take Paul as our example: it has been estimated that his ministry lasted roughly thirty years, but on only six occasions did God tell him to change his plans and on none of those occasions was Paul specifically seeking guidance.

Let's allow for the possibility of special forms of guidance, but be open to the more mundane as well as the supernatural.

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## DAY TWENTY-SIX: **SHAPE UP!**

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### READING – JEREMIAH 29:1-23

*Verse 11 “For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you ...”*

Here are a few final thoughts: God treats us all in an individual manner. He does not stereotype the way He guides us. We should not just look at how God guided others and assume that's the way it will be for us. We should humbly commit ourselves to God and discover how He wants to guide us.

We should not consider one way of guidance more spiritual than another. If God chooses to use one of your friends rather than a Bible verse, that is His choice and there is usually a good reason. In connection with that, you will have read several times in these notes that we should be looking for several aspects of guidance to connect together and not simply hold onto one revelation.

However God has guided you in the past is not necessarily the way He will guide you in the future. God loves variety of every kind and He may decide to choose a way that is completely different from ways He has used previously.

Remember that whether God “opens a door” or remains silent because He wants you to think for yourself, He loves you! God is more interested in your relationship with Him than in commanding you to do certain things. Whatever you encounter or experience, God's ultimate aim is to remodel you to be increasingly like His Son.

Why not pray through and reflect on your SHAPE? This can be really useful in discerning what might come next!

*Spiritual Gifts –*

*Heart's Desire –*

*Abilities –*

*Personality –*

*Experience –*

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## DAYS TWENTY-SEVEN AND TWENTY-EIGHT: **FINISH ALONE?**

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### **Think about and/or meditate on this account from Brett Blair:**

John Beck (once Chaplain of the US Olympic Teams) watched the young Olympian men and women train for the events in which they competed. He decided that this was a picture of what Christianity really ought to be. Here were people who were sincere and fervent and dedicated to the task before them. They were willing to pay any price, regardless of how much suffering or pain they had to endure. They were willing to undergo anything to be number one, to win.

Then one day John Beck was invited to visit the 'Special Olympics'. Special Olympics are made up of special athletes. All of them suffer from some kind of mental or physical impairment. He watched as eight runners lined up for the 100 metres sprint. They all took off when the starting gun fired, and he was amazed at how good they actually were. But as they reached halfway in the race, one of the boys fell down, hurt his knee on the track, and started to yell in pain. He said that what happened next was both beautiful and amazing.

All seven of the other runners stopped, and all seven of them turned around and went to the boy who had fallen. Together they helped him to his feet. And the eight walked to the finish line together. Beck said that he then realised that he had seen the true meaning of Christianity, not in the Olympics, but in the Special Olympics.

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## FURTHER READING

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We can learn a lot about guidance by reading and studying portions of the Scriptures. Below is a small selection, but do not be limited by the ones listed here. Read the passages and discover what you can about how and when God guided His people. How do these accounts help you in your own search for God's will? Praise God for His Word and be ready to obey!

**Genesis 24:1-53**

**Exodus 13:17-22**

**Deuteronomy 32:1-43**

**Psalms 5**

**Proverbs 1:1-19**

**Isaiah 14:12-27**

**Jeremiah 23:16-32**

**Luke 22:39-46**

**John 6:25-59**

**Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12**

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## NOTES

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**Trekking Deeper** is a devotional discipleship programme specifically written for short-term volunteers. The aim of the Course is to help “Trekking Deeper” keep their focus on Christ and to grow spiritually during their placements

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**Trekking Deeper consists of a series of nine booklets:**

**The ABC of Preparation**  
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**Exploring God’s Word**  
**God’s Guidance**

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“Refreshing, stretching, packed with helpful insights, I found the Trekking Deeper booklets an excellent tool for personal discipleship.” **Glenn Myers (author of the Briefings series)**

“I learnt a lot about prayer and it was good to have notes with short-termers in mind.” **Gillian Thom (Mexico)**

“I learnt stuff I didn’t know before.” **Jeremy Estabrook (Senegal)**

“The questions made you analyse and pray about your feelings rather than just pottering on.” **Lindsey Hale (Mexico)**

“I learnt things that I could apply and think about and they weren’t boring!” **Alison Davey (Sierra Leone)**