

# Steps for Guidance in the Journey of Life - Chapter 2

## Six Biblical Steps for Guidance

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‘Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day’ (*Psalms 25.4-5*).

The last chapter refuted the new, unbiblical teaching that there is no point in seeking God’s blueprint or plan for our life, because he does not have one. All we can do (so this teaching says) is to make sure that our decisions are morally right, and in line with the general principles of the Bible, but in every case the choice, the executive power of decision, is ours.

This chapter, by contrast, presents a more traditional view, namely, that we are to seek real guidance from the Lord in all the major decisions of life, and he will certainly clarify our thinking, or overrule our circumstances. What are ‘major’ decisions? They are, as we have asserted, the ‘road and route’ decisions which concern the direction and journey of life. Career, life-partner, location for home and work, and which church to join, are all obvious examples of these journey-of-life decisions, whereas the brand of toothpaste we choose, or what we eat for breakfast, or the choice of everyday clothing, can hardly be regarded as having any influence on the direction of life’s journey.

The consequences of cutting loose from God’s specific will were outlined in the previous chapter, and now we turn to the biblical steps for seeking the guidance of our glorious Lord.

### **Step 1 – Prayer and Submission**

*Psalms 25* has been consulted for centuries by Bible believers as a psalm about guidance. It is also a psalm of repentance, but David’s need of deliverance and guidance is the uppermost theme, and we shall focus on the stages of divine guidance wonderfully delineated in its petitions. David begins by submitting his life to the keeping and rule of God, and praying for protection: ‘Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.’

The first rule of guidance is to be learned from these words, and it is this – submit yourself entirely to God, and pray fervently for guidance and protection. Do not rush along the highway of life making brisk, self-confident decisions. The new view of guidance tells us the opposite, saying, ‘God treats you as an adult, so go ahead and use your God-given wisdom to take your own decisions. There is no special person designated by God to be your husband or wife. As long as you make sensible and ethical decisions God will bless you. The choice is in your hands. Be responsible; but be free!’

David, by contrast, states his utter reliance upon God. Soon he will ask to be shown God’s ways and paths, or routes and roads, demonstrating that the business-like approach to the spiritual life is not his way. To conduct our lives as though there is no higher will to seek, is to return to our pre-conversion policy of self-determination, and that is clearly wrong. We see too much of this in the evangelical world nowadays, even in the organisation of Christian witness and evangelism. Some who are supposed to be leaders of God’s people plunge into new techniques and gimmicks without a thought as to whether these are in line with the rules of the Word. Sadly, it is the same with many Christians in their personal lives. They switch jobs easily, choose careers or college courses entirely

on the basis of what they enjoy most, or move to some different region of the country just because they like the scenery. Whatever they choose to do, in matters great or small, the rule and lordship of Christ does not seem to operate much in their lives. They may often sing the words, 'Take myself, and I will be, ever, only, all for thee,' but they forget them as soon as the next major decision comes along. It is vital for us to learn early in the Christian life the glorious experience of being guided by the Lord in great decisions. The thought that the mighty God of Heaven and earth has the way mapped out for us is an overwhelming honour and privilege.

The first step always in the seeking of guidance is to submit ourselves wholly and sincerely to God, acknowledging our weakness, vulnerability and need, and in that spirit to pray sincerely for God's direction.

In *Psalms 25* (verses 4-6) David uses several different expressions as he prays for an understanding of the Lord's pathway for him. He pleads to be shown, and to be taught, and to be led. He asks particularly to be led into a greater understanding of the Truth, a matter we shall amplify in due course. For the present it is enough to notice that David's prayer is full of terms of submission. A genuine desire to obey God, no matter what he may direct, is often lacking in us, yet this is the first requirement in the quest for guidance. Pray over the matter in hand, also praying for deliverance from selfish or wrong motives (this will be Step 2), for eyes to see the teaching of the Word on the subject (Step 3), for mental clarity in thinking the situation through (Step 4), and that the Lord will intervene and overrule if necessary to bring about his will (Step 5). Pray also that good counsel will be given to you by others.

Praise is also an important part of prayer for guidance, because praise and gratitude for past instances of guidance build up trust for, and readiness to submit to, God's present guidance, therefore David bows his head and exclaims, 'Thou art the God of my salvation . . . Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.' We should praise God for the way he led the heroes of faith in the Old and New Testaments, and for the guidance of his people throughout the subsequent centuries. Then we must praise him for our own experiences of answered prayer, remembering significant experiences of deliverance, or other clear evidences of his overruling hand. Then we must entirely submit to his rule, and pledge our utmost diligence in seeking to discern his will through the biblical steps for guidance, believing and accepting with all our heart that the believer should seek –

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,

*However dark it be!*

*Lead me by thine own hand,*

*Choose out the path for me.*

*I dare not choose my lot;*

*I would not if I might:*

*Choose thou for me, my God,*

*So shall I walk aright.*

Horatius Bonar

## **Step 2 – 'Clearing the Decks'**

The second step in seeking the Lord's guidance is the crucial one of 'clearing the decks' to identify and dispose of all wrong desires, attitudes and motives. To neglect this stage is as disastrous as building a house without a foundation, and in *Psalms 25* we see how David calls to mind his weaknesses and vulnerabilities, being acutely aware of his past failings, and praying, 'Remember not

the sins of my youth,' and, 'Let me not be ashamed' (or put to shame, through foolishness or failure).

We too have numerous weaknesses, and many spiritual enemies within us, including foolish desires, selfish ambitions, and covetous aims, all of which influence us greatly. How can we know God's guidance unless these are recognised and cleared out of the way? It may be, for example, that even as we ask for guidance, we have made up our minds to do what we want, and have set our heart upon some course of action. Why, then, do we pray for guidance? Because we want to fool ourselves into believing that God agrees with us and is supporting us. We want our way and the blessing of the Lord as well. As Christians we are not immune from determined self-seeking, and we can be amazingly headstrong and hypocritical, so, to be guided by the Lord, a number of possibilities must be identified and set aside.

Have we recognised and rejected any tendency in us to want something because it will bring us status and a reputation in the eyes of the world? In career decisions, for example, such desires can render us incapable of seeking God's guidance sincerely. What about covetous desires? Are we already 'hooked' by some longed-for possession? The imaginations of the heart must be honestly confessed before the Lord if we seriously want his guidance.

The writer has known occasions when true Christians have asked advice about some future step, when they had clearly already made up their minds. The pastor was meant to sympathise and agree, but seeing a significant flaw in their scenario, he felt compelled to gently point this out. It was to no avail, because the consulting friends obviously intended to go ahead anyway. Of course, a pastor is not the one whose views finally matter, but it is a shame when believers use pastors as well as other friends only as sounding-boards to confirm their plans.

Some people, though they seek guidance for the future, are inclined to seek the easy option, opting for the most manageable route through life. Others recoil from the unknown, ruling out anything which takes them into unfamiliar surroundings, or confronts them with some new field to learn. Do we know our particular weakness, and make allowance for it? Some see the Lord's will in any attractive escape route which promises to deliver them from their present burden of hardship, or of frustration or boredom. Some spend their lives on the run from one perceived hardship after another, insisting that each move is 'of the Lord'.

It is not unusual for young believers to find their hearts turned towards full-time Christian service after a few months in their first job, and in a way this is wholesome, because every believer should want the opportunity to serve the Lord. However, after school and university life the harsh realities of paid work often produce a desire to escape. Are we ready to examine our hearts, and patiently accept a period of being proved in secular work and in voluntary service in the local church before considering the Lord's work? Seeking guidance calls for self-honesty, and the hibernation of hurriedly formed ideas.

Some believers dream about a desired goal so much that they become incapable of objective thought, and are eventually convinced it is God's will for them. To project the mind into a fictitious situation to obtain pleasure or comfort is a foolish mental game which is certain to destroy honesty and objectivity in the seeking of guidance. This warning may sound harsh, but it is meant in kindness, to deliver readers from a snare in decision-making. Some believers, for example, spend time imagining themselves married to a particular person (we refer to this in a later chapter), or working in a particular profession or form of ministry, or possessing a particular kind of car or other possession, or living in a particular kind of house, and so on. All this obscures guidance and delivers the fantasiser over to fleshly desires.

To focus on a specific enemy of guidance – does our desired goal involve personal selfishness? When we trace the movements of the apostle Paul we find that his guidance often began with the great needs of lost souls, or the needs of the churches. His heart was tuned to needs, and he would be moved to respond to those needs. ‘We thought it good,’ he said, to send Timothy to visit the Thessalonian church, even though it would deprive him of a member of his team. Christians, however, sometimes make decisions which take no account of those who are in need of their presence and care. In seeking guidance, do we keep in mind the spiritual and emotional welfare of our families? We may have to clear the decks of selfish thinking in order to obtain the guiding help of the Lord.

Another problem of attitude which can ruin the seeking of guidance is the tendency to want to know all the details of our future life, and its course. This may be a feature of personality, for there are some people who cannot rest until every part of any project is fully planned and provided for. They are great organisers, but not good at trusting the plan of God, and they must learn not to demand all the details of the future. The Christian life is a life of faith in which we are being trained to trust the Lord increasingly. He guides his people in mysterious and remarkable ways, and we are not to expect a clear view on every future step. There are practical reasons why the Lord does not reveal to us all the details of our future lives, including the fact that we simply would not understand his purpose, and our constant question would be, ‘Why does the Lord think that I need this experience?’ Furthermore, if the Lord showed us the future events of our lives, we might run in the opposite direction like Jonah of old. If we could see the toughening phases, the humbling stages, or the chastening portions, would we submit to them? As we seek guidance, the Lord may overrule our circumstances in such a way that we come into a situation we do not like, but nothing has necessarily gone wrong. He knows what is good for us, how he will further our sanctification, or how he will refine our gifts to improve our service for him. So let us rid ourselves of any tendency to want everything to be known in advance, and completely to our liking.

Another impediment to guidance is the failure to recognise where we have gone wrong in the past and acted foolishly, bringing about the very problems which we now wish to resolve. We have produced the problems, so before the Lord will guide and deliver us, we must accept our mistakes and learn our lesson. God would be guilty of spoiling a wayward child if he led us forward without serious faults and foolishness being regretted, confessed and forgiven. So we must ask, ‘Why am I in this situation from which I need deliverance and guidance?’ Pardoning mercy always comes before guidance as we learn from *Hebrews 4.16* – ‘Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.’ Mercy, it should be noted, comes before grace.

*Psalms 25* deals with this aspect of seeking guidance, for David’s past actions are much in his mind as he prays: ‘Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.’ Why does he repent concerning the sins of so many years before? Has he not repented of them long ago, and have they not already been forgiven and blotted out? They surely have, but David still recalls the foolish things he had done in the past, remembering his capacity to take the wrong course, and to evaluate matters from an entirely fleshly and even selfish point of view. Now he knows only too well the snares of self-delusion and obstinacy and calls on the Lord to be his guide in his present trial.

To summarise, the second step in seeking the guidance of the Lord consists of genuine heart-searching and honest clearing away of self-delusion, self-seeking, predetermined decisions, wrong attitudes, and sinful actions. David’s prayer of self-examination in *Psalms 139* may well be applied to the seeking of guidance – ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me.’



### Step 3 – Using the Scripture

The third step in guidance to be derived from *Psalms 25* is that of being shown God's way through the 'truth', or the inspired Scriptures. Many major decisions, it is true, are not completely decided by the Scriptures, such as which particular person to marry, which firm to work for, or which university to attend. The text of the Bible obviously does not name present-day names. For this reason the new teaching on guidance says there is no specific will of God in these matters for the believer, but there is, and the procedures to be followed for decisions not directly determined by Scripture will follow in Step 4, and later chapters.

Scripture, however, pronounces on far more matters than we often think, spelling out principles concerning the use of time and money, principles by which we decide every large purchase, and even the leisure pursuits we adopt. Passages such as *1 Corinthians 6.12* and *10.23* are essential tests in such decisions (as we shall see in chapter 4), and it will never be the will of God for us to act contrary to his Word.

On the question – 'What church should a Christian join?' – rules for identifying acceptable churches are set out very clearly in the New Testament. Some years ago a well-known but seriously mistaken Christian leader expressed the opinion that God guided some believers to be active within the ecumenical movement, and others to remain outside, but we may be certain that if God's Word teaches against co-operation with false teachers, then he would never guide anyone to worship and serve alongside such teachers.

Some believers make decisions without any effort to find out which principles of God's Word bear on their situation. This writer has known of some who bought immensely expensive homes, way above their needs, rendering themselves unable to obey God in faithful stewardship. Young men sometimes apply to seminaries to train for the ministry without checking the scriptural principles which should guide them. We remember a man who applied to a college thinking that his acceptance or rejection would be a definitive sign of the Lord's will. In his case, however, the Bible spoke clearly against his suitability for ministry, firstly because he was very recently converted (whereas Scripture says, not a novice); secondly, because he had so far exhibited no appropriate abilities (Scripture says, apt to teach); thirdly because he had not yet shouldered any task in service, nor proved himself reliable (Scripture says, to faithful men, and, let these also first be proved ); and fourthly because he did not have his local church fully behind him (Scripture says, being recommended by the brethren). In fact, not even his personal friends supported him (Scripture says, in the multitude of counsellors there is safety). The Bible college accepted this young man, as Bible colleges tend to do, because it needed students, and in due course he served as the pastor of a church. His work, however, was unsuccessful, and after several years of strain and unhappiness he gave up the ministry.

To check the Scriptures is an indispensable stage of guidance, and one which may involve help from pastors and reliable friends to ensure that we are aware of the biblical principles and passages which bear on the case. Which job offer should a seeker after guidance accept? In which firm would the Lord place him? Are there texts for such situations? There usually are – for example texts which urge loyalty to the church in which God has set us, and these texts may weigh against a job which involves heavy and prolonged overtime. Many texts urge us to make our service for the Lord a priority [see endnote 1], and these will obviously apply. It may be that an advertised post involves a degree of additional travel that will greatly disrupt our service in the church. From time to time this sort of difficulty is likely to affect any job, but for some it may be a regular distraction.

If people are fortunate enough to be confronted by a choice between companies, such texts may serve as powerful, perhaps conclusive, factors in discerning God's will. The light streaming from

the Bible is far brighter than we often expect, and fuller treatment of how the Word speaks to different situations will be found throughout the subsequent chapters of this book. To be fair, promoters of the modern view of guidance also advocate some of these principles and passages, but only as helps, as we make our very own choices. The traditional view of guidance is quite different, saying that these principles and passages do not merely assist us, but that they combine to show what God's will for us is, according to his choice, calling for our obedience. In the light of this, we use these passages very conscientiously, because they may proclaim the precise will of God.

#### **Step 4 – Weighing Pros and Cons**

The fourth stage in the seeking of guidance covers those decisions which cannot be resolved by the principles of Scripture, or which require careful weighing of them. This is the stage for the exercise of discernment. In *Psalms 25*, David says: 'The meek will he guide in judgment,' the word meaning here, verdict or decision. He then adds that the person who fears the Lord will be taught by God concerning the way he has chosen for him, although it is clear that David is not talking about direct revelation to the mind. While he, as a prophet, had been frequently blessed with direct light from God (being inspired to pen so many of the psalms for example), yet he speaks here of a form of guidance which is available to all sincere believers, and not just prophets. He refers to the meek, and those who revere the Lord, who will be helped and guided to discern the divinely chosen path, not only by studying the principles of the Word which apply to their case, but also by being helped to arrive at a sound judgement as they use their minds to weigh the situation. In the New Testament, James says, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.'

In matters for which there seems to be no decisive word in the Bible, we weigh the issues carefully, praying for the help of God, and as we do so, he graciously sharpens our minds and increases our wisdom, in accordance with his promises. As we weigh the pros and cons of any situation (providing we have prayed, submitted to God's will, and 'cleared the decks' of selfish desires) we will see factors which might otherwise have escaped us. This is how God's guidance works.

Some believers want to opt out of thinking through their decisions, seeking instead a direct word from the Lord. They want to 'feel led', partly because it is easier, and partly because it suggests to them that they have superior spirituality. However, we are not exempted from the thinking process in our decisions, and the faculty of the mind is not to be bypassed. God gives his people the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound (or safe) mind (*2 Timothy 1.7*).

In thinking through a decision we will obviously consider how the conflicting choices before us will affect our work and service for the Lord, our worship, our stewardship, our testimony, the spiritual welfare of our family, and our own sanctification. David asserts that service for the Lord is a primary issue in seeking guidance, saying that the meek will be taught the chosen way of the Lord, the Hebrew word meaning the lowly, particularly describing people who possess a servant-spirit. In *Psalms 25* it is servants of the Lord who receive the privilege of guidance, not self-pleasing, self-indulgent Christians who chiefly seek their own comfort, ease and prosperity. Such are perhaps more likely to be candidates for chastisement. David also prays that he will not be ashamed, and in saying this he is concerned above all to protect his testimony, and if we have the same concern we may be sure that our discernment will be sharpened by the Lord, who will guide us in our decisions.

This stage of guidance will also involve taking advice from reliable people, not just people we can count on to approve our ideas, for 'he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise,' says Solomon, and 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety' (*Proverbs 12.15, 24.6*). When believers become mysteriously secretive and quiet, keeping their decisions entirely to themselves, it usually means they are pressing forward with objectives they know their friends may strongly challenge.

To summarise, the fourth stage in guidance is the work of diligent sifting and weighing of the issues, while praying to the Lord for blessing upon our thinking. Once again we stress that we consider our decisions not in the spirit of people who have the right to choose for themselves, but as those who long that the Lord's will should be followed. To secure his guidance, meekness, or a servant spirit, is an essential attitude.

### **Step 5 – The Overruling of God**

The fifth step in the seeking of guidance is that of watching for any circumstantial overruling by the Lord, and it is necessary to emphasise that this is the fifth step, and must not be placed any earlier. Many Christians have brought the traditional view of guidance into disrepute by omitting the preceding steps and leaping directly to this stage, looking for signs. This certainly is a form of mysticism, to be avoided. God does at times overrule but we dare not leave out the stages already reviewed.

How kind is our God! If we are sincere in our prayers for his direction, obedient in our application of the principles of the Word, and diligent in our weighing of the issues, and still come to a conclusion which is not his will for us, then he will point out the right course by a circumstantial intervention. This does not mean that the Lord will speak directly to our minds, but that he will firmly shut one door and open another, by his special overruling. This is to be seen in *Psalms 25*, where David uses two entirely different words for teach. One of his chosen words is the Hebrew for goad, which means train or teach. (This is the word used in verses 4, 5 and 9.) Another word (used in verses 8 and 12) refers to throwing, or shooting an arrow, or pointing to something. In *Psalms 25* it means to guide by firmly pointing out the right path. These two Hebrew words reflect two different methods of the Lord's guidance: in one case the 'seeker' is trained to understand, in the other the right way is pointed out, the former engaging our reasoning powers, the latter being more directive and practical.

Thus, David prays for two different modes of guidance, asking for understanding (firstly of the Word, then for wisdom to grasp his situation, Steps 3 and 4 just considered), and then, in addition, he wants the Lord to point to the right path by circumstantial overruling. In verse 8, David says, 'Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach [point or direct] sinners in the way.' In verse 12 he says, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach [point or direct] in the way that he shall choose.' Here is the intervening direction of the Lord, or his circumstantial overruling, seen so often in the life of David, and also in the life of Paul who once wrote: 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me.' How reassuring it is when everything seems confusing, and often at the last moment, the Lord overrules so that only one way is possible. We thought a particular course of action was the right one, but then it was no longer possible for us; or we thought a particular house or flat was right, but we were gazumped or gazundered at the eleventh hour.

To bow to the overruling of the Lord does not mean that we take alarm at minor setbacks, or read significance into coincidences, for this would be a superstitious approach to guidance. When Paul's 'great door and effectual' opened there were many adversaries, but he paid no attention to the latter. Some Christians clutch at the smallest coincidences regarding them as 'signs' from the Lord, but we are not talking about 'signs', but about irreversible circumstantial overrulings.

Overrulings are often used by the Lord to lead us into situations for which we would never have considered ourselves suited, and our most careful reasoning might well lead us away from the Lord's intended goal. We think again of the experience of the apostle Paul, who would never have thought that he, the only apostle to be trained in the Hebrew university for leadership in the Jewish 'church', would be called by God to be the apostle to the gentiles. If Paul had been given the

responsibility of deciding his own future, would he ever have thought himself suited to gentile ministry?

To summarise, the fifth stage of guidance is to recognise substantial, definitive circumstantial overrulings of the Lord. The sincere seeker after guidance may rest secure in the fact that if all diligent reasoning leads in the wrong direction, the Lord will intervene and overrule in some way, because 'none of them that trust in him shall be desolate,' and 'he will be our guide even unto death' (*Psalms 34.22 and 48.14*). The committed believer will experience many instances of unexpected divine overruling during the course of life.

### **Step 6 – Assurance or Unease**

Our sixth and concluding step in the seeking of guidance is that of being sensitive to any operation of the Spirit of God in our hearts or consciences, either warning of a wrong decision, or assuring us that we are on the path of his bidding. In Psalm 25, David says of the person who is taught the way of God's choosing that 'his soul shall dwell at ease.' For generations God's people have valued an inner peace confirming a right course, or, by contrast, they have been cautioned by a burden of unease and uncertainty as a possible warning against a wrong one. It must be acknowledged that Christians have often brought this stage of guidance into disrepute, like the previous one, by making it virtually the only aspect of guidance. They have taken their decisions without heart-searching to 'clear the decks', without serious application of the principles of Scripture to their situation, and without diligent weighing of pros and cons. These wayward friends have gone directly to the final stage, which is certainly the most subjective stage and the most vulnerable to self-manipulation. Inevitably, their feelings have given a favourable answer to whatever they wanted.

This last stage of guidance is strictly for the person who has proceeded carefully and prayerfully through the other steps, whereas for superficial and casual seekers for guidance, it will most likely lead to disaster. The most precious spiritual benefits can be destructive in the wrong hands.

Out of these six steps or stages for seeking guidance, the last two are those in which the Lord may sound a warning if his people are sincerely mistaken in their conclusions. At the fifth stage he may circumstantially overrule to close a wrong door or open a right one, while at the sixth stage, he may give us no peace about a mistaken choice. However, the warning must be repeated, that if we claim to 'have peace' about something when we have not sincerely followed the previous steps of guidance, then we behave foolishly, if not arrogantly, forgetting Jeremiah's words – 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' If we rely solely on a feeling of peace to confirm a right decision, then we may be certain that the heart will confirm whatever we want. Nevertheless, for diligent seekers after God's guidance, the contrasting emotions of peace or disquiet are either a valuable confirmation, or a possible warning.

It is not surprising that David should say – 'Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net' (*Psalms 25.15*). If, after honest effort, we come to wrong conclusions and head off into trouble, God will rescue us, either circumstantially, or by severe inner disquiet, whereas if we are headstrong and self-interested, then it may be God's will that we should make a bad decision and proceed into trials and discipline, for our future spiritual good.

David uses a fascinating phrase in *Psalms 25.14* when he says – 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.' The Hebrew word translated secret refers to a confidential session; a closed council where people sit down together in consultation. What a powerful way to describe the deep sense, often given at the end of the guidance process, that the Spirit of God has helped us to know his way! The 'secret of the Lord' is a special privilege of peace and communion, but it is only for those who fear the Lord; who want his way and not their own.



Here, then, are six biblical steps from *Psalms 25* for seeking divine guidance. First, we submit ourselves wholly and honestly to the Lord, and pray earnestly to be shown his way. Secondly, we clear out all preconceived aims, and all wrong desires and motives. Thirdly, we honour and use the authoritative Word of God, seeking to do justice to all the biblical principles which bear on our decision. Fourthly, we exercise personal discernment, specially weighing carefully the practical issues in decisions not directly addressed by Scripture, and praying that the Lord will help us to see matters clearly, and to judge wisely (something that has been called ‘sanctified common sense’). Fifthly, we acknowledge decisive circumstantial overrulings of the Lord. And sixthly, we desire and pray for an assurance from God about our decision, or we take very seriously any unease or disturbance of conscience we experience.

These steps are essential for all major decisions – the ‘ways and routes’ issues of life. For the remainder of this book it will be taken for granted that readers appreciate these steps, and they will not be reiterated. Most of the following chapters focus on specific areas of life in which God’s guidance is needed, amplifying Step 3, and showing how particular scriptures apply. Chapter 4, for example, sets out the biblical principles governing activities and possessions. Though not always major decisions, such matters may take a large proportion of our time, commitment or money, and heavily shape our lifestyle. Failure here may turn us into worldly or self--interested Christians who will never be particularly open to being guided by God for his service and glory. It is essential to know and follow the principles of conduct provided by the Lord, however contrary this may seem to the ‘do-whatever-you-want’ mindset of modern culture.

## **Endnote**

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