

## Guidance

### Use the Force?

One of my favourite movies is the very first **Star Wars** film and the scene where Luke Skywalker is part of the attack on the Death Star is a top moment! At the bidding of the disembodied Obi-Wan Kenobi, in mid-attack, Luke is told, 'Use the Force!' He turns off the guidance computer and has just one shot at obliterating the enemy's mega-weapon... you know how it ends!

If only guidance was that easy! (My brother and I once played a very interesting game of cricket where I decided to bat with my eyes shut and 'trust the force!'). The fact is that in wanting to serve God, follow Him and be in His will, we need to learn to hear from God.

There are important decisions to be made in life – significant relationships and marriage, having children, allocating time where demands are increasing, career and job development, where to live, spending money, buying possessions – among others. *In leadership, the consequences of our decisions can be even more far-reaching, both for ourselves and also for the churches we serve.*

One of my greatest leadership decision moments was related to the first building project we undertook here at King's in year 2000. It was whether we should sell an old church building to the Jehovah's Witnesses!

### Disagreements and closed doors

*God's promise is that He will guide us (Psa 32:8) and an examination of the book of **Acts** shows us how this happened at **significant times in the life and development of the early Church**. The prelude to Acts 16 was a **disagreement** between Paul and Barnabas that led to them going their separate ways. One result of this is that the young Timothy joined Paul's apostolic team – *a significant addition came from a negative situation*. As they travel on, reversing the itinerary of the first missionary journey they had made previously, they seem to meet nothing but 'closed doors'.*

Their travels appear to have been governed by a balance of two things – **strategic thinking and prophetic input**. It was not just one or the other that prevailed. When Paul went to any region, he always went to the provincial capital – that was a *strategic decision and meant that their mission had maximum impact*, with people flowing in and out of such towns. As a result of this particular development the **gospel comes to Europe for the first time**, through Macedonia.

They met 'closed doors' to moves to certain towns. We aren't told how they perceived this to be – it may have been prophetically revealed. It's unlikely that they were physically unable to travel to these places, at any rate. **Their response to this situation is important**. *Often when doors close (or slam!) in our faces, we find ourselves frustrated, angry or depressed*. We all have times when we feel that more doors are closing on us than are opening.

**John Stott, quoting Pierson**, says "We too in our day 'need to trust Him for guidance and rejoice equally in His restraints and constraints.' "

## **It's a moving ship that gets steered!**

As leaders, when our wishes and God's guidance coincide we are quick to rejoice and praise Him! When we are thwarted we can become downhearted and can attribute events as signs of opposition and/or 'the enemy's work'. Truth is – **it's more likely to be God's activity** and we need to maintain *an attitude of praise and worship in all circumstances*.

Great missionaries of old learned this lesson. **Livingstone** wanted to go to China and ended up with a significant ministry to Africa. **William Carey** was heading for the South Seas and Polynesia – he found his home in India. In my own case I have lived to thank God that at age 21 plans for me to travel with a particular ministry leader, to follow a particular training course and a significant relationship with a beautiful girl all fell apart at around the same time. (Although I'm really glad that I did end up later marrying the fantastic girl!) At the time I was devastated!

How God guides us:

### **- It happens on the move!**

It's easy for us to 'get stuck' in what we see as a temporary state of affairs, whether it be a particular ministry or a certain church. **Because we are looking for a future change, we refuse to commit to the current situation and so miss out** on all we can receive from God and all we can give to Him and His people at that time. The short stay then goes on for years and this suspended state hardens into habit. *Don't miss out by reserving options! Wholehearted living in any situation is the best way to hear from God and receive guidance for the future.*

### **- It takes time!**

We are an instant society that wants instant access and guidance that comes with the speed of our broadband – or better! This is where we learn patience!

## **Principles**

Looking at Acts 16, John Stott encourages us again, '*some important principles of divine guidance are, in fact, exemplified in the experience of Paul and his companions*'.

### **1. Through the circumstances of our life**

Paul and the team ended up in the port of Troas – which faced west! It faced toward Macedonia.

What port are you in at the moment? What life circumstances are you facing? We need to recognise that we are where we are – **what we do as a result of our present placement is the key thing now, not necessarily how we got here...** although there will be those for whom this is also a key consideration. *The truth is that God will use our circumstances now to shape us and to shape our future.* Personally, as I prepared this subject, I was able to rejoice in the path God has led me and receive faith for His plans for the future!

### **2. Prophetic leading**

God can speak through **dreams and visions** as well as prophetic words given to us or to others. While some can be too cautious about placing weight on such revelations, others can want prophetic input for every venture. It's important, in processing the prophetic to

- receive the **revelation** (picture, Scripture, word)
- discern the meaning, find the **interpretation**
- work out what to do as a result – the **application**

*The bigger the decision, the more prophetic input we are looking for.* And when receiving such input, look at the character and experience of the one offering that prophetic input.

**Prayer** is vital in hearing and discerning God's voice and there's nothing like a big decision that needs to be made to bring us to our knees before God! Reading the record of the early church in Acts, the importance of **prayer and fasting** is inescapable.

### **3. The counsel of others**

The team *concluded together* (:10). Having taken all the indicators into account they came to a decision. Prov 12:15 and Prov 15:22 give good advice about advice!

I have **my own range of advisors** on a whole range of areas. I often speak with my Dad; Deb is another invaluable source of wisdom; experts in various specialist fields come to mind, not to mention my fellow Elders and the Trustees of Kings. It makes sense to draw on the *wisdom and experience of others* – God did not intend that we should be isolated as leaders and we can help each other avoid unnecessary pitfalls.

### **4. Common sense**

Not to be discounted in our spiritual considerations! It's **basic life wisdom!** Paul and the team came to the conclusion that it made sense to move into Macedonia at that time – and the gospel came to Europe. The first step to us receiving salvation here in the UK!

### **5. The Word of God**

Paul's life was soaked in God's word. He applied it to himself and it was a source of continual reference and his compass for ministry. In Psa 32:8 God says 'I will instruct you...' – *we must put ourselves in a context where we can study and hear the word of God, both in our personal reading and in listening to biblical preaching.* There's no way to short-cut through this important process! Paul drew on his knowledge of God's word for guidance on leadership and ministry decisions.

Some years ago, at a time when I was considering the possibility of coming to **Catford**, I wondered if I should become a church planter. I went to a day conference and heard Titus 1:5 read. *'The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.'* **God spoke** to me through that verse and confirmed that my path was to Catford. I followed that direction and have not regretted it.

Since then I've had some major decisions to make. At the moment we are thinking about the possibility of going to a **fourth Sunday meeting, going multi-site or purchasing another building – or all three!** These strategic decisions will be the basis for many others, with consequences for the elders and staff team and for all our committed members as we budget for these decisions. *We proceed in faith – confident that God has called us to this work in this place and that where He guides, He provides!*

And in case you're still wondering - we didn't sell the building to the JWs...

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