

“How Can I Get Guidance from God?”

Now there's a question I've asked about a hundred times myself, and heard others asking even more. Ever since I was in high school, I've been looking for books that answer the question clearly and accurately from the Bible. Finally, I've found some. One of them is *Guidance and the Voice of God*, by Philip Jensen and Tony Payne. These two authors tackle the issue with a breathtakingly simple, but utterly scriptural look at the question. Their answer hinges on five obvious observations, born of careful study of the Bible's clear teachings. We'll look at them together briefly.

“1. God, in his sovereignty, uses everything to guide us ‘behind the scenes.’” That is to say, God is constantly at work in the lives of His people, orchestrating events for our good (Romans 8:28), preparing good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10), and moving in our hearts to lead us to want and to do what He wants us to (Philippians 2:12-13). He is our Maker, and our Shepherd, and the Architect of our lives. For those of us who are His, He is constantly leading us and guiding us and showing us the way – whether we realize it's happening or not. One of the things this means is that I cannot mess up His plan for my life. Even if I try, I'll find that that, too, was part of the plan all along. If I make stupid or sinful choices, I will suffer the consequences, without a doubt. But I cannot derail God's ultimate plan for my life; both the choices and the consequences were mapped out by my Maker long ago. Even when I'm not even conscious of it, God is busily guiding me. This is a staggering truth, and a world of comfort.

“2. In many and varied ways, God can speak to his people, and guide them with their conscious cooperation.” Or, as the authors also put it, “God's guidance is not only of the ‘behind the scenes’ variety. He does tell us which way to go, and calls on us to hear and obey.” Hebrews 1:1 is very helpful here: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” There can be no question that God has spoken and will speak to people wherever, whenever, and however He pleases. And yet, we should go on and read Hebrews 1:2: “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” That directs us to the next two points.

“3. In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son.” Specifically, He has told us who He is (Father, Judge, Holy One) and what He's doing (reconciling all of creation to Himself by His Son Jesus Christ). In other words, in Jesus God has answered for us most of the truly pressing questions in life, and laid the groundwork for us to discover the rest. It can well be said that once we really know Jesus, we know what God wants us to know – about everything.

“4. God speaks to us today by his Son through his Spirit in the Scriptures.” Do we realize what we have in our Bibles? We have the word and the will of our Lord written plain, and translated into our own language. One of the most

urgent tasks we'll ever have is just to learn what that book teaches.

“5. Apart from his Spirit working through the Scripture, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect him to.” Here is a startling and strangely liberating thought. It's not that God can't give me a peace or a fleece or a voice or a vision or a dream or a desire or a friendly chat with a farm animal if He wants to. It's just that He has not promised me anywhere in His Word that He will speak to me in any of those ways, nor told me that I should expect Him to. (In other words, He has not promised to speak to me through the same channels He has used to speak to others; indeed Hebrews 1:1-2 seem to say that Jesus Himself is the final word from God.) He has told me to know His will from what my Lord's written word says for all to read, and then put it to the test in my life (Romans 12:1-2). And He has given me both the freedom and the responsibility to make wise, sensible choices in those areas where His Word is silent, unclear, or unspecified. He has set me to the adventure of living with the consequences of the choices I make, and He has called me to do all this as part of my ongoing relationship with His Living and Eternal Word, Jesus Christ.

The authors apply this simple approach (know and love Jesus, know and love what His Spirit says in His Word, and then take responsibility for yourself) to three classic choices that face most Christians: church, job, and marriage. In each case they show that there is plenty of scriptural truth to make a well-informed decision, and also show that a decision still must be made – then lived with. Take the issue of marriage, for example. A Christian young man can know with certainty that, if God wants him to marry at all, He wants him to wed (1) a woman who (2) is not a close blood relative and who (3) is a sister in the Lord and who (4) is not already married. There is really no question at all about God's will on any of these counts. Add to those absolutes a few specific qualities that God thinks are precious: if the young man wants what God wants, he'll want a faithful, devoted, frugal, self-controlled, pure, passionate woman who is committed to the biblical teaching on the difference between a husband and a wife. Do you realize that most young Christian men will only meet a woman like that a very few times in their lives, if at all? Then you also realize how knowing what God says and desiring what He desires will simplify decision-making about marriage.

If the average American Christian would stop looking for mystical “words from God” or “signs from on high,” and start learning, listening to, and living by the Word we've already received, the Kingdom of God would be much better served – and we ourselves would be more ready to hear from God when He communicates in more unusual ways, as well.

The book is *Guidance and the Voice of God*, by Philip Jensen and Tony Payne, published by Matthias Media. Get it. Read it. Think about it.