

## 9. A Guiding Word

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Date: 05 February 2012

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] But we're going to turn now to our Bible readings this morning, and you'll see from the sheet we're looking at two places. First of all, can I turn you to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, and we're going to read some verses there in chapter 4, and then we'll turn back to Moses, to the book of Deuteronomy, and chapter 29.

And just one verse there, but a very important verse, Deuteronomy 29, at verse 29. But first, let's look at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 4.

Finally then, brothers, says Paul, we ask and urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus, that as you receive from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, your holiness, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God.

That no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand, and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

That indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more. And to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

And just look down to chapter 5, verse 16. Rejoice always, says Paul. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances.

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Well now just turn back with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 29, and verse 29.

That's page 171, if you have one of the church Bibles. Just one verse. The secret things belong to the Lord our God.

[ 2 : 4 3 ] But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Well, we'll come back later on to think a little bit more about that verse in particular, and some of these other verses that we've read together. Well now this morning, I want to add an appendix, as it were, to our series on the Bible.

I want to do that in order to say something about guidance for Christians. This is an area of great confusion among many, this business of finding God's will. But really, if we've taken seriously all that we've been saying so far about the Bible, then that just shouldn't be.

Because the Bible is God's guiding word for us all. It's a word of very practical revelation for us, so that we may live our lives before God in peace and with certainty.

Certainty that we are walking in his will as his people under his care. But clearly, often that seems not to be so for many Christians. Many Christians are anxious and worried, sometimes even to the point of inertia and absolute paralysis, because they feel they're not clear about God's will on something in their life.

[ 4 : 04 ] They feel they've got to wait for some special guidance from God, some special confirmation from God before they're acting, before they are able to make a decision about something. And sometimes they're very, very afraid of making a wrong decision and getting out of God's will and therefore losing God's blessing on their life.

I'm seeing some smiles around, and I'm recognizing that that's obviously an issue. Friends, let me say this. If we take the Bible seriously, then that just shouldn't be.

That's not really a way of Christian thinking at all. It's not the way of biblical faith. In fact, it's the very essence of anti-biblical paganism.

Read Matthew chapter 6 when you go home, and you'll see that that's precisely what Jesus says, that kind of anxiety-driven approach to life. Even if it's dressed up with constant prayer and vocal prayer, that's what the Gentiles do, says Jesus.

That's what the pagans do. That's not the way for God's children to be. Now, the problem is that we are by nature rebellious pagans in our hearts, aren't we?

[ 5 : 17 ] And the truth is that even as Christians, we constantly battle that drift back to our old self, to that sinful desire to use God and even to control God, so that we can get what we want from God, not what God wants for us.

Now, we can dress that up in very pious language. Of course we can, about wanting to serve God and wanting to be sure about God's will for our life and so on. But in fact, that is actually the very opposite of the kind of trusting obedience that we've been singing about and that God calls us to.

The kind of trusting obedience that acknowledges God as God and us as not God's, but God's creatures who are under his sovereign care and under the care of a God who does reveal to us everything we need to know, although not necessarily everything that we might demand to know or think we ought to know.

So the real truth about the problems that we so often have about guidance and about God's will is not really that it's an intellectual problem, but actually that it's a spiritual problem and a moral problem.

And we may say that we're concerned with finding God's will for our lives and even think that we're concerned with that, but in fact, often, we're really more concerned with our lives, more concerned with fitting God's approval into our lives and onto our decisions in the things that we're very concerned about rather than perhaps being taken up much more with the things that God majors on and the things that God has made very, very plain to us, the things he wants us to get on with regardless of, well, all kinds of dilemmas about particular questions that might, in fact, be on our mind a lot of the time.

[ 7 : 05 ] That's why that verse we read in Deuteronomy 29, verse 29 is such an important verse for this whole area of guidance. Let me read it again. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed, they belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

There are secret things with God, things that are above and beyond our creaturely knowledge and our understanding. Now, sometimes theologians talk about God's decretal will in that term, his secret will, things that he has decreed, his infallible purposes for the world and the future and so on.

How inscrutable are his judgments, how insatiable are his ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord, says Paul in Romans 11. Well, yes, God has revealed to us some amazing things that he is doing in the world in the future.

Read Ephesians 1 to 3 and you'll see that. He tells us he's revealed the mystery of his will of what he's doing in Christ Jesus, things that weren't known to former generations, but have been marvelously revealed to us in the gospel.

But nevertheless, there are still lots and lots of things that we just do not know. We know as Christians, don't we, the ultimate future of this world that's been gloriously revealed to us.

[ 8 : 30 ] But we don't know what's going to happen next week, do we? We don't know if the Eurozone is going to survive. We don't know if there's going to be a war with Iran. We don't know if there's going to be a terrorist attack at the Olympics.

We don't know if one of us is going to be diagnosed with cancer next week or next year. We don't know any of these secret things that belong to the Lord our God. But we're to rejoice as Christians that we do know that a sovereign God is in control of all of these things.

And we're to leave God to be in control of these things. That's what it means to trust God. But God doesn't just leave us to trust his secret will like that.

No, in his mercy there are many, many things he has revealed to us. Sometimes called his preceptive will, the commands, the things that he's made clear, the things that he wants us to know and the things that he wants us to have clear guidance on for all of our lives so that we're not to speculate about what God's will is but we are to do as Moses says all the words of this law that he's plainly revealed to us.

And that's what it means to obey God. Trust and obey. That's what walking by faith as Christian people really means. Trusting God in what he hasn't told us and obeying God in what he has told us.

[ 9 : 56 ] Very simple, isn't it? And that's the heart of all we need to know about God's guidance really. We assume that what he has revealed very clearly is actually what is very important to God and what he wants us to be taken up with.

That should be the thing that takes up all of our energy and our focus. And things that God hasn't made clear to us, well, we trust that perhaps they're not so important after all. But that's the problem, isn't it?

Because usually with us we think it's the other way around. Isn't that so? We're taken up with seeking God's will about all sorts of things that seem to be of primary importance to us. Lord, I need guidance on this, you see.

Should I marry Jane or Jemima or Juliet perhaps? Or should I work in Glasgow or Inverness or Timbuktu? Or should I buy a house, Lord, in Clarkston or maybe in Clyde Bank or in Cumnock?

Where should it be, Lord? I need guidance. Come on. I must know your will. And God says in answer, well, read 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and 5.

[ 11 : 03 ] I've laid out my will there for you in black and white. Have you, Lord? That's terrific. Yes, I have. Verse 3, for this is the will of God. That's great.

That's my answer. So what is it? Let me read. This is the will of God, your sanctification, your holiness, that you live purely sexually, that you live in brotherly love, that you live quietly and decently working hard not to be dependent and being a good witness to outsiders.

In chapter 5, verse 16, I've put another bit there for your guidance. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

There you are, my child. I've revealed my will for you clearly and plainly. So on you go. But that's not what I meant, Lord. That doesn't help me.

But that's what's most important to me about your life. It really is. Follow this guidance, my child, and it will gladden your heart with joy and your life will be fulfilled abundantly.

[ 12 : 10 ] Well, I know all that, Lord, but I want to know about these other things. That's important to me. I need to know. You need to know? Yes, I do. I mean, you don't trust me to organize the world without you being in on it?

No, it's not that. It's just that it would be better if your eyes were opened and you were like God, knowing good and evil. Well, that's it, I suppose.

Oh, dear. Haven't you read Genesis 3, my child? Don't you see what you're doing? Don't you see that what you want isn't to know my will and to do it?

What you want is to be in control, isn't it? What you want is to be me, to be God. You see, that's the essence, isn't it, of rebellious unbelief.

It's the very antithesis of godly trust and obedience to think like that. My friends, be honest. Isn't that often the way that we actually do live our lives?

[ 13 : 20 ] We live just like the pagans, just like Adam, craving for the tree of knowledge that God has told us is not for our consumption, while ignoring the plain and the clear word that God has given us to obey, to live so that he wants us, in the way he wants us to live, trusting obedience.

In practice, we so often doubt the sufficiency of God's word that he's revealed to us in scripture. We want something more by way of guidance because we don't really trust God.

And in our hearts, we rebel secretly against the authority of God's word. We don't fully obey God. At heart, you see, you and I would rather actually be pagan.

We want to find out God's secret will so as we know what's coming in the future and we find the answer that will lead us into the way of blessing, an answer that has nothing to do with trusting obedience, rather than the Christian way, which is simply obedience to God's clearly revealed will, which God says is the way of blessing.

Now, I know that that is my biggest problem, if I'm honest. It's not the bits of the Bible that are unclear to me or a mystery to me or obscure to me that are a problem. The bits of the Bible that are problematic to me are the bits that are clear and plain, but I do not want to obey.

[ 14 : 48 ] And I rather suspect that that's probably the same for most Christians. We don't want to admit that, though, do we? So we want to sound pious and spiritual. So we talk about seeking God's guidance for this or that or the next thing.

But really, we're acting like pagans. All the things the Bible clearly forbids and warns against, seeking to divine the future by astrology or by divination or by omens or any of these sort of things.

We put a pious-sounding cloak on these very same things. We talk about looking for guidance, special feelings or texts or signs or something else.

Maybe we have a special half-night of prayer and fasting, seeking God to reveal His secret will about something or other. I wonder if anybody has ever had a half-night of prayer and fasting about applying God's clear will about living in brotherly love or living quietly or working hard so as not to be dependent on welfare.

Have you ever been asked to a half-night of prayer about that? I haven't. You see, according to Deuteronomy 29, verse 29, and the whole New Testament, we're not to be taken up with trying to prize out of God His secret will, but we are to be devoted to knowing and doing His revealed will.

[ 16 : 08 ] The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do, that we may obey all the words of this law.

And the reason that we're so often much more interested in pursuing the former while we ignore the latter is simply because our hearts are sinful.

I'm afraid it is. It's because we're so often taken up with ourselves and with our earthly things, not with God and with the heavenly things that He wants us to be taken up with. It's what Jesus says in Matthew 6, isn't it?

Our minds are full of worries and anxiety about what we'll eat and drink and what we'll wear and who we'll marry and where we'll work and all these sorts of things. And all these things are the things that fill our prayers with endless words just like the pagans, says Jesus.

Instead of trusting your heavenly Father who knows that you need all of these things and filling your prayers instead with the concerns of His kingdom and His righteousness.

[ 17 : 13 ] Seek for these, says Jesus, and all the rest of these things will be added to you. Don't worry. So how do we do that then? How do we walk the way of trust and obedience?

What does it actually mean in practice to do all the words of this law? To live by the guiding word of revelation that God has given us and that He means us to live by rather than by all the things that He doesn't mean us to do?

I just want to summarize it briefly really under three headings. You could very simply say that we do all the words of His revealed will as God's commands constantly shape our consciences in all of our circumstances.

That's three C's, but let me express it differently in the three R's as I call it, the absolute basics of God's guidance as we think about it in practical terms. God leads us and guides us in all matter of life by His revelation to us, by His reformation within us, and by His regulation all around us.

That is God's preceptive revelation, His will, His precepts, His commands as we find them in all of Scripture and the personal reformation that His Spirit works in our hearts as that word is applied to our lives to change us so that we do walk more and more in obedient trust knowing God's providential regulation surrounding us in all our circumstances.

[ 18 : 47 ] Let me say something briefly about each of these three things. God's preceptive revelation to us. The revelation of God's Spirit comes to us in His Word. The Spirit breathes it out into all Scripture.

The same Spirit opens our minds and our hearts so that the external clarity of God's Word in Scripture becomes real internal clarity in our own minds and our hearts.

Now we've spent most of the whole series on the Bible speaking really about these things. God's preceptive revelation, what He reveals in Scriptures. I just want to be very brief.

Let's remind ourselves of one or two key things. 2 Peter chapter 1 has been a key text, hasn't it? The issue that Peter is addressing there is the source of authority and sufficiency for us in the era after the apostles have died.

Who are we to turn to when there are no apostles anymore in the church to give us authoritative guidance on all things? Well, the answer is not to the Pope, not to the Bishop, not to the preacher, not to anybody, but to the words of Scripture that God has given.

[ 19 : 54 ] The words of the Old Testament and the New, as Peter sums it up so succinctly in 2 Peter 3, verse 2. The words of the Holy Prophets and the commandment of our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

That is the word of God's God-given authority that we are to obey, that we are to trust because it is sufficient for us. In the Scriptures, in the Bibles, we have God's abiding word, His covenant word to His people.

We've seen it's a clear word. It's a commanding word. It's a coherent word. We can know it. It's complete. We don't need anything else. It is powerful and it is utterly trustworthy.

All those eight characteristics we've been thinking of. Another key text has been 2 Timothy 3 where Paul says the same thing. All Scripture is God-breathed and it's powerful, powerful to lead us to salvation in Christ Jesus and powerful to equip us for every good work.

Does that as our whole thinking is revolutionized, as we are transformed, as Paul says in Romans 12, through the renewing of our minds so that we can test and prove in our life's experience the good and the well-pleasing and the perfect will of God.

[ 21 : 13 ] That is, God's revelation to us changes and shapes our thinking. So it's less and less conformed to this world and more and more in line with the good and the well-pleasing and the perfect will of God.

God's not interested in a never-ending process of guiding us on one issue and another issue and another issue so that we make a whole series of right decisions. God wants to transform us so that godly decision-making becomes natural to us.

You see, if that weren't so, we would never grow, would we? I have a friend who sometimes comes to visit us and every time he comes, he puts our address into his GPS in his sat-nav in his car and he finds his way to us.

But he needs it every single time. He's never learned the way to our house. I remember when I first moved to Glasgow, I found it terribly difficult to find my way around. But I didn't have a sat-nav to help me.

I just had a map and I just learned to drive and read my map and get to know the places and make mistakes and correct them and get to know my way around. You see, many, many Christians, they want that sat-nav GPS view of guidance.

[ 22 : 24 ] They want a special silky voice telling them at every turn exactly what to happen. But that means there'll be no growth, no development, no transformation.

William Stowe once said, God doesn't want to have a heaven populated with infants. He wants to have it full of mature believers in Christ. And you see, the Bible, God's preceptive revelation to us in all its parts, it's like a map, if you like.

Of course, it speaks specifically to us in certain situations by way of rebuke and challenge and so on. Just like a map, it tells us when we're on the wrong road and we have to change.

But you see, the thing is, the more you know the map, the more you use the map, the more you apply it to your navigation, the more you get to know the way, don't you? And when the crisis comes, you don't have to look at the map, you know the right way.

Who would you rather have with you if you're completely lost in the middle of a strange city? A sat-nav device? Or somebody who says to you, oh, I live here. I know the place like the back of my hand.

[ 23 : 27 ] I'll take you to where you want to go. That's obvious, isn't it? And that's why we need our Bibles. It's why we need God's revelation to us, not to dip in for directions in a crisis, but to teach us the way of the Lord so that we know it instinctively more and more and more.

And that will never come, will it, just by superficial or chance inquiry. Labor, Paul says to Timothy, labor to show yourself one who rightly handles the word of truth.

And that's the way, isn't it, to the transformed thinking of the renewed mind that knows the will of God and does it. But notice, that is not just an intellectual thing.

In fact, though it does involve our mind, it's not primarily an intellectual exercise at all. It's a spiritual exercise because God's word isn't just information. It's revelation with power.

It's for our spiritual transformation. So that leads to the second thing, the vital thing about God's guiding and it's his personal reformation in us.

[ 24 : 36 ] As his spirit applies his word to our hearts. Now God guides us and leads us above all things by shaping our hearts. The heart in the Bible isn't just the seat of our emotions.

We tend to think of the heart in that way, Valentine's hearts and that sort of thing. But the heart in the Bible is the very center of our being. It's the seat of our affections, of our desires, of our loves, of our conscience, of our will, of our volition.

It's the control center, if you like, of the whole being. It's the inner man that Paul speaks about where Christ dwells in us by his spirit. And God's spirit transforms us from the heart outwards as he applies God's word to our lives.

He wants our hearts to be yielded to him in loving obedience. He wants it more and more. And as that happens, God's word will be shaping our hearts to possess us more and more and more.

That's actually what Proverbs 3, verse 5 means. It's so often misquoted about guidance. Trust in the Lord in your heart and lean not to your own understanding. He is not saying there, don't bother thinking about it, just trust the Lord and make a decision.

[ 25 : 50 ] Of course he's not. What he is saying is think about it God's way. Meditate on God's word. Let that word penetrate your heart.

That's the key to finding ourselves in the will of God and living in his will. It's living in a right love relationship with the Lord himself more and more and more.

So that we can sing with the psalmist, I desire to do your will, O God. Your law is in my heart. I can think about this a number of ways because the heart is the whole of our control center.

So yes, it does involve developing godly minds. Not just Bible knowledge, of course that's vital, but true Bible wisdom, Bible thinking. It's not an intellectual thing.

It's a spiritual quality. It's the spirit shapes the attitudes of our hearts. It's a right fear of God, the Proverbs writer tells us, that is the very beginning of wisdom.

[ 26 : 52 ] And so we don't read the Bible to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. We read it out of a hunger for God himself as he feeds our minds. It involves developing a godly conscience.

We've all got a responsibility to think through the full implications of the gospel for every aspect of our daily lives. What things are right because they're in line with the gospel and what things are wrong because they're not in line with the gospel.

And we will mature at different rates as Christians. We're not to force issue of conscience on one another. Paul says that, remember, in Romans 14. But each is to be convinced in his own mind.

We have a responsibility to apply the gospel to everything. But as our conscience is honed by God's word, we will increasingly be guided in all things by that.

God's reformation within us involves developing a godly prayer life. And that doesn't mean when a decision is to be made, you go away and say, well, I'll pray about it. If what you mean is, well, I'm going to stop thinking about it clearly in line with the gospel and I'll just pray and maybe God will zap an answer into my mind.

[ 28 : 02 ] That's not prayer. That's magic. That's turning God, isn't it, into the genie of Aladdin's lamp that you rub it and call it up and pray and God will appear and tell you the answer.

Nowhere in the New Testament do you find that kind of thinking about prayer except in Matthew 6 where Jesus condemns it as pagan. Now, become a person of prayer.

That's what we're being asked to do. Seek understanding of God's word in a spirit of prayer. Real prayer for guidance prays a daily I owe you.

As I once heard John Piper say, I, Lord, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Psalm 119, verse 36. Oh, open my eyes to see you wondrous things in your law.

The same Psalm, verse 18. And you, unite my heart to fear your name. Psalm 86, 11. How very different that is, isn't it, from the frantic prayers for answers in terms of signs or special leadings or promptings from the Lord.

[ 29 : 09 ] Above all, personal reformation that God works in us must develop a godly obedience in our lives so that we present our bodies as living sacrifices.

In reality, not just in theory. Don't you find it so much easier to obey God in theory than in practice? I certainly do. So often, my problem, you know, is not knowing God's will.

It's just doing it. You see, in all these ways, God's preceptive revelation to us must be working personal reformation in us as the Holy Spirit shapes and molds our hearts.

And that must happen, friends, if we are ever going to be people who are truly guided by God. We can't expect God to guide us if we're not guideable people. It's the heart that is the chief organ of ethical and moral knowledge.

It's only a right heart that is ever going to be capable of thinking and doing right and deciding rightly in accordance with God's will in any given situation. And what that means is that the most important thing that you need to know about Christian guidance is this.

[ 30 : 25 ] If your heart is not right with the Lord, if it's not right with your Christian brothers and sisters either, then your thinking and your decision making is going to be totally off track with the will of God.

But delight yourself in the Lord, says the psalmist, that he will give you the desires of your heart. Well, he must do because your desires will be becoming his desires.

Now, finally, must also recognize that we're led by God's providential regulation around us. We can trust God we can trust that he is invisibly and nevertheless intimately, providentially ordering everything around our lives.

He is shaping everything all of the time in his love. Our times are truly in his hand and he does know and he does care what happens to you tomorrow and next week and next year.

And we can go forward and trust, content to let God be God, not secretly trying to be the all-knowing God ourselves. We walk by faith, not by sight.

[ 31 : 39 ] We can be content that God knows our needs and that if we do seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, then he will see to it that we have all that we need.

Can you trust God on that? We can trust in God's providential regulation around us and we can press on without being crippled by uncertainty until we get some special green light or sign or something like that.

Some Christians are needlessly paralyzed just because they don't have a high enough view of God's sovereign providential ordering around their lives.

They don't have a high enough view of God's sovereignty. I think I've told you before a story that Dick Lucas tells of a man who was determined in his heart to serve Christ abroad but he was utterly crippled.



He had agonies because he just could not work out exactly which country it was that God was leading him to and he was desperate for a sign and he prayed fervently for days and weeks and months and years and still he couldn't be clear about which country God was to send him to until one day he went down to his local news agent to buy his newspaper and he opened the door and went in and the man in the shop was just finishing an enormous display just before Christmas of boxes of chocolate Brazil nuts and he ran to his pastor and rang the doorbell and threw himself upon him and said it's wonderful God's given me the sign it's Brazil that I have to go to and the wise pastor just looked at him and said well wasn't it a great thing it wasn't a stack of Mars bars that's not the way that God wants us to be looking for guidance or being crippled until we find something like that we can trust

[ 33 : 33 ] God's providential regulation around us in shaping our circumstances in weaving things together so that we can see much much more clearly than that and in God's providential care he's given us at least three things that he does make clearly known to us for our help and our guidance in practical decision making three C's I think we do well to pay attention to first is the church we're not alone and we're not to be loners in our decision making and applying the Bible to our lives God's word comes to us as his church corporately to all of us that means that it's in congregation with other believers that we will grow and mature and that we'll learn how to think and how to pray and how to make wise decisions so for example if you want to learn how to pray and grow in your prayer well that will happen as you grow in prayer with other people in the church and especially above all with church prayer gatherings that's part of God's providential ordering to help you you ignore that well you're depriving yourself of God's guidance aren't you you need the church to help you learn how to pray same thing if you're thinking about spheres of service for your life it's the church that recognizes

God's gifting God's call on somebody's life not just the individual of course you might have a strong inner desire and there's nothing wrong with that to go abroad and serve God as a missionary to be a pastor to serve in a particular vocation whatever it might be but it's part of God's providential regulation around your life that the church has primary responsibility to recognize these things and to act on these things and that's something that we ignore at our peril of course we're never to elevate these kind of things above the clear teaching of scripture the church sometimes can pervert the scriptures no it's never to be that way around the church is guided by the scripture not that other way around but nevertheless the church the corporate guidance of God's people is part of God's providential ordering around your life to help you as are secondly our circumstances sometimes God opens doors of possibility and other times he just plainly closes them and that can be part of our guidance can't it

Paul had times like that he wanted to go to a particular place to Rome and he was prevented sometimes our heart's desire is prevented isn't it by circumstances that we have no control over and that's our guidance we mustn't become bitter about that we must trust God's providential hand not to be mistaken not to be powerless another door opens up and we take that again we've got to be careful we never elevate guidance from our circumstances above the clear word of scripture so if I find myself alone and in a deserted place late at night with a woman who's not my wife I don't conclude that God has providentially ordered things so that it's right for me to commit adultery I obey God in my mind and in my body but nevertheless God's circumstances do help us that leads us nicely to the final C common sense and if only Christian common sense were a lot more common

I often say to somebody who's perhaps quite a new Christian and is worried about guidance I say well how did you decide things and make decisions before you were a Christian they'll say well I thought everything through and I took advice and I made the best judgment I could God doesn't want you to jettison your intelligence and your common sense and all of these things and replace that with some kind of weird voodoo guidance when you become a Christian of course not it's just biblical wisdom at work God wants to sanctify your common sense and make it more Christian it's true that some decisions are just a clear matter of obedience to the Bible should I or should I not lie in this situation well it's obvious you don't need guidance the Bible says don't tell lies but other matters are the application of wise and sober judgment sanctified common sense you could call it if you're assessing your own gifts and abilities don't be divorced from reality you need to exert common sense don't you no good saying well I really want to teach in Sunday school if you can't stand kids and you can't control kids common sense tells you that's not the place for you nor is it any good believing that God has called you to be the organist in a church when you've never played the organ in your life and you can't play the piano but somebody came into this church and told me that was what God had told them common sense same about your future your career you need to think with common sense what are the things that animate you what are the things that give you energy what are the things that you love to do rather than what are the things that sap your energy and you hate and you despise it's just common sense isn't it again sometimes it's just what's possible in an opportunity no point in planning a strategy for mission that humanly speaking is clearly impossible the apostle Paul never did that he planned and strategized what's possible and what seemed wise in the circumstances of course

God can sometimes surprise us and totally change our course but we're not to be paralyzed waiting for doors to open we're to plan sensibly with common sense and get on with things it's really not so difficult is it there are lots more that can be said but let me finish by just saying two things first a word of comfort God is good you can trust him he's not going to confuse you and unsettle you and upset you with all kinds of bolts from the blue to confuse you about all the decisions you have to make that's not the hallmark of our Lord Jesus Christ it's the hallmark of the devil isn't it to sow confusion and lies God may challenge you of course on matters of obedience he may say to you very clearly that is wrong but he'll be clear and he shows you the way of repentance he doesn't leave you in a fog of confusion and God is not vindictive don't worry he's not going to guide you and lead you to have to marry somebody you can't stand he's not going to do that fear not he's not going to call you into a life of misery doing something you hate and you can't do and kills you he's not going to do that and nor is he going to thrash you to death for making some wrong decision and getting it wrong he's not going to put you out of his will and out of his blessing and consign you to a life of second best for the rest of your life just because you've made a wrong decision friends you love the Lord

[ 40 : 42 ] Jesus and you're trusting him and following him that is impossible that is impossible you are free and liberated to trust him and launch out with him God is good not waiting for you to make a wrong turn and then batter you forever but lastly a warning there is a sense isn't there in which a crucial decision can change the course of your life either for good or for ill that can happen but that is not a matter of guidance these are matters of obedience that's always the hardest thing not discerning God's will it's doing God's will that's the really difficult thing and we mustn't presume on God we flagrantly go against him do something we know is against his commands in scripture we can't ever say well I'll just do this now and I'll repent later that is the presume upon God no trust and obey that's always the message that's always

God's will for our lives it's as simple as that God's preceptive revelation is plain to us so live it that work in us to personally reform us to make our desires his so let it do that work in your heart and his providential regulation his sovereign care is all around us and he loves us and he's good and he promises never to leave us or forsake us until all that he has promised has come to pass so rejoice always pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you let's pray Lord how we thank you that you are a God who is good so we pray as we humble ourselves before you open our eyes we may see wonderful things from your law incline our hearts to your testimonies not to selfish gain and unite our hearts we pray we will be wholehearted for you in the gospel of your son for we ask it in his name

Amen