

Christian Spiritual Disciplines



Confession

- a. Confession leads to **forgiveness** in Christ. It always accompanies **conversion** (Acts 2:38). This sorrow for sin does not need to be an **emotion**; it is an act of the will (although often accompanied by great emotion).
- b. If we claim to be a Christian and do not confess our sins we are **liars** (1 John 1:9).
- c. There is no forgiveness without the confession of sins! (Prov. 28:13; Lev. 26:40-42).
- d. Even in the OT confession was expected to lead to forgiveness of sin (Psalm 32:5).
- e. Confession to another believer is often **necessary** (James 5:16). Christ has given them the power to forgive our sins (John 20:23). This can be of extreme psychological aid and makes the truth of God's forgiveness palpably real to us.

Confession

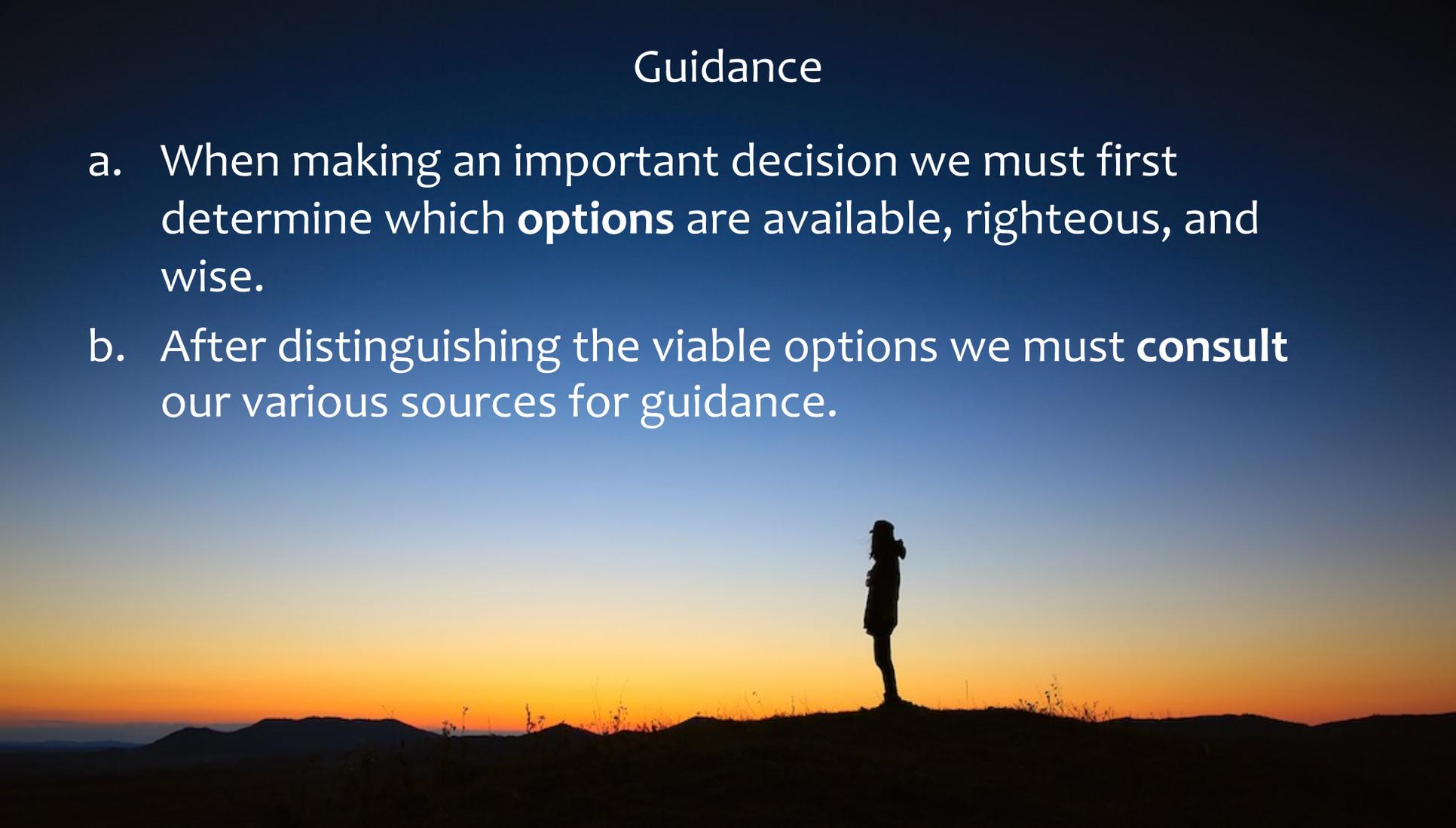
- f. Sometimes an entire **community** of God must confess publicly (Neh. 1:5-6).
- g. Confession is both **inward** and **outward** (Romans 10:9-10). Confession has both a **divine** and a **human** component. God gives us the grace to confess through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3); we must react with our will upon the conviction and confess with our mouths.
- h. Confession can lead to **healing** (James 5:14-16). Confession and forgiveness transform us. An **objective** change in our relationship with God and a **subjective** change in us.
- i. Confession always involves turning away from the sin. Prove your repentance by your deeds! (2 Tim. 2:19; Acts 3:19; Acts 26:20).

Confession

- j. Confession often includes **restitution** to those we have wronged (Num. 5:6-8). Traditionally called “**penance**” this practice shows we are not fooling ourselves and that we understand the serious social implications of our sin. It often involves pain, shame, and even monetary loss (Acts 19:18-20).
- k. Fasting is often a way of expressing the sincerity of our confession (1 Sam 7: 6).
- l. Examine yourselves. Deal with definite, concrete sins; not a general “I am sinful” confession (2 Cor. 13:5).

Guidance

- a. When making an important decision we must first determine which **options** are available, righteous, and wise.
- b. After distinguishing the viable options we must **consult** our various sources for guidance.

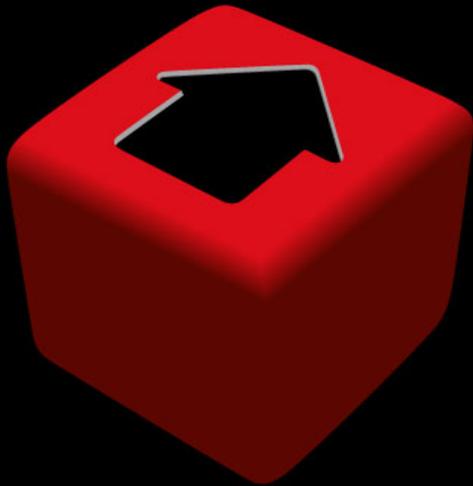
A silhouette of a person standing on a hill, looking out over a landscape at sunset. The sky is a gradient of orange and blue, and the horizon is dark. The person is standing on a small rise in the foreground, with rolling hills in the background.

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. Proverbs 15:22

Guidance

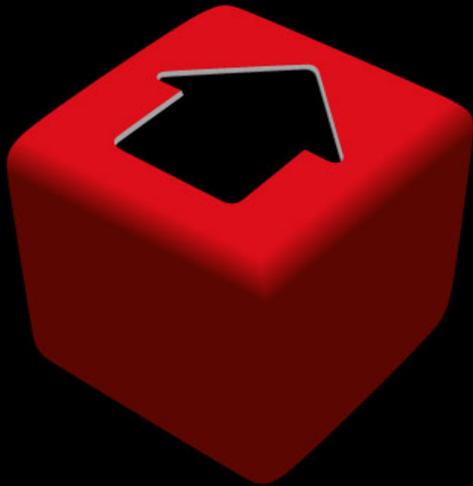
c. Sources of Guidance:

- i. The Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).
- ii. The Holy Spirit (John 14:16).
- iii. Church leaders (including preaching).
- iv. A Spiritual Advisor.
- v. Experts.
- vi. Fellow believers.
- vii. Friends and people who know us well (Prov. 27:9).



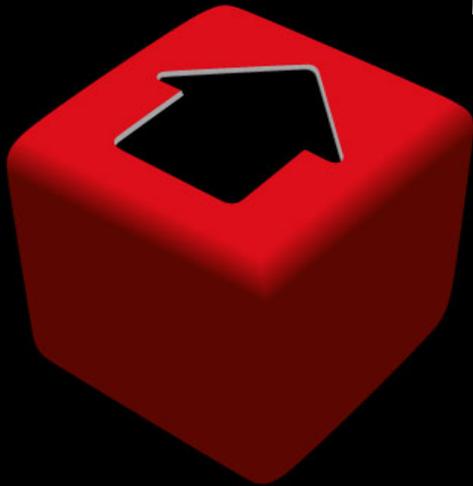
Guidance

- d. Much **personal** prayer is required, as well as intercessory prayer from fellow Christians.
- e. The popular idea of “**Confirmation**” is often a legitimate and necessary step before taking an action.
- f. However, if you do not get a special “**feeling**” of where you are to go, this does not mean you should not make a decision. Sometimes God allows us to choose between two equally **viable** options (Acts 1:20-26).



Guidance

- g. A spiritual advisor or **mentor** is a great way of making sure you are continuing to deepen your relationship with God. Make sure they have great personal **holiness** and have a lengthy **experience** of the Spiritual Disciplines. They need to help turn your daily experience into a God-centered climb towards holiness. Everyone needs to pray that God reveal to them who can play this important role in their life.
- h. When your church or another group you belong to faces difficult decisions bring them to God as a **community**. Such communal guidance often involves fasting, prayer, and worship (Acts 13:1-3).



Warning: depending upon a Spiritual Advisor or on making group decisions through “agreement” can often be subject to abuse by leaders. Pastors, teachers, and so-called “prophets” may sometimes say “God is telling you this” in order to get what they want (often they don’t even realize it). The subjective realm is open to **manipulation**, but this does not render it invalid.



Return to Holiness

Therefore, as God's chosen people, **holy** and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Col. 3:12

It is surprising how often the Word of God uses the term holy to speak about God's creatures. "The holy prophets", "holy apostles", "holy people", "holy angels", "you"!

(Cf. Matt. 27:52, 1 Cor. 1:2)

So Why Aren't We Holy?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Cor. 5:17

- Why then do so many of us struggle to be holy?
- Why is the average Christian living in defeat?

Jerry Bridges Cites Three Main Causes Of Unholiness

1. First, our attitude towards sin is more self-centered than God-centered.
2. Second, we have misunderstood “living by faith” (Gal. 2:20) to mean that no effort at holiness is required on our part.
3. Third, we do not take some sin seriously. We must be willing to call sin what it is because God forbids it, and not because of how society looks upon it.

Sanctification

¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:15-16

Sanctification: First meaning is "to be set apart." 1 Peter 2:9 says we are a chosen people, a holy nation, God's own people. 2nd meaning is "moral goodness" or "spiritual worth." This second definition effectively means "to be without sin." Justification is a once and for all event; sanctification occurs over a lifetime. You can be more or less sanctified. (1 Thess 4:3)

Sanctification

1. Sanctification is an act of God. “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).
2. Sanctification is progressive. (Phil. 1:6).
3. The aim of sanctification is to be like Jesus. “... to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Rom. 8:29) Jesus was without sin, so that is our aim regardless of possibility (1 John 3:2).
4. Sanctification is an act of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5; Rom. 8) “The fruits of the Spirit” are the key components to a holy life.

Sanctification

5. Sanctification includes a human involvement. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his God pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12-13) We are exhorted to live in line with the spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).
6. Sanctification is not exclusively concerned with actions. Thoughts and attitudes are the source of unholy activities (Matt. 5:21-28). A transformation of our thought-life is paramount (Rom. 12: 2).
7. Sanctification most likely is never complete in this life, yet we must aim for it. Matt. 5:48. “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Will anyone be perfect in the present life? (1 John 1:8-10).
8. Holiness is not an option. Heb. 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Bridges Identifies the Essential Elements Of Holiness



Conviction:

Holiness begins with Bible-based convictions about what we believe to be true. To be holy we must first come to believe that our minds need to be renewed, cleansed from the list of vices and saturated with the Fruit of the Spirit.

Bridges Identifies the Essential Elements Of Holiness



Commitment:

Convictions aren't simply mental assents but involve committing one's whole life. Holiness must become a total way of life. We must commit to abhor ALL sin, no matter how great or small. Beyond this broad commitment we need to commit to specific areas of temptation we are facing right now.

Bridges Identifies the Essential Elements Of Holiness



Discipline:

We must become daily abstainers from sinful activity. We must “beat our body” and become able to resist those temptations we face on a regular basis. “Put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Like learning a martial art, this takes time and sacrifice. Daily scripture intake and prayer are the two most fundamental practices we can adopt to begin a life of discipline.

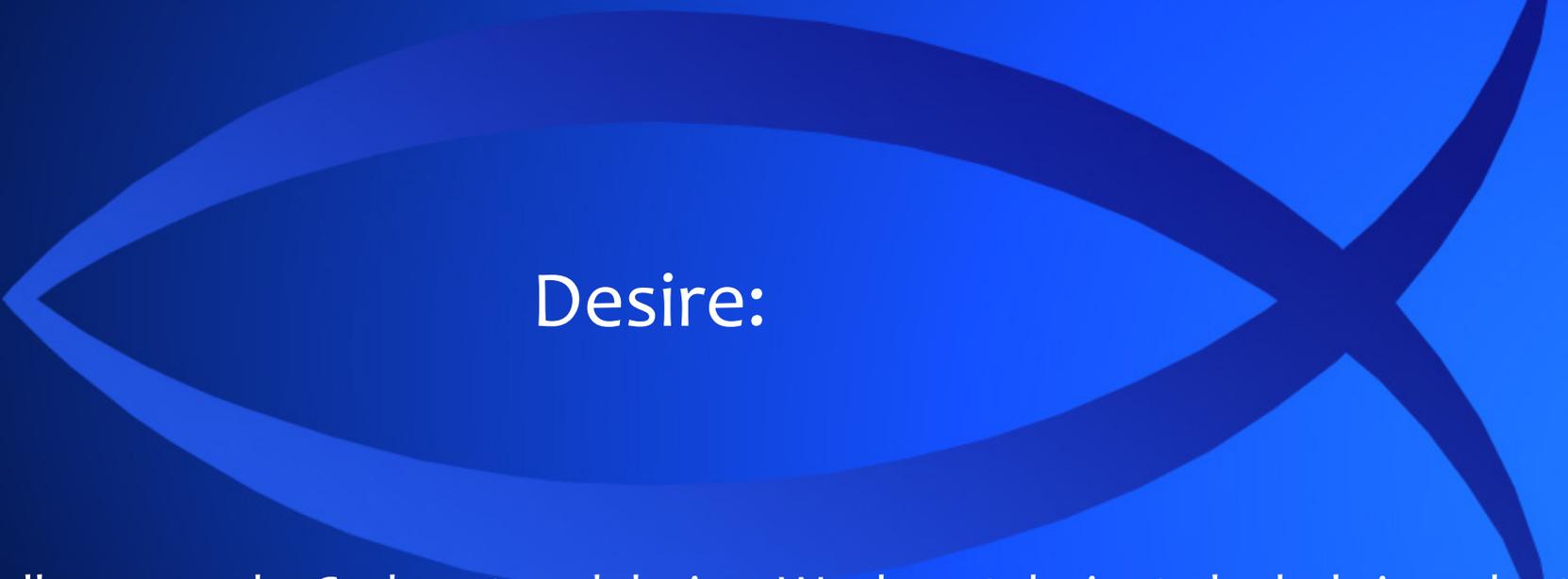
Bridges Identifies the Essential Elements Of Holiness



Dependence:

We are personally responsible for our holiness yet we are *totally dependent* upon the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works on our inner being; we must not resist the Spirit but allow Him to work within us.

Bridges Identifies the Essential Elements Of Holiness



Desire:

Finally we need a God-centered desire. We do not desire to be holy in order to feel better about ourselves. Holiness is not a self-help fix. All our desire is to be focused entirely on God, and becoming closer to Him. It is not so much about Victory as it is Obedience. Feeling good about a more Christ-like life will be a natural byproduct, but it is not the focus. Our central concern is a desire to PLEASE GOD. Getting rid of the self-centered motivation for holiness requires practice and training.