



How disciples grow

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think it means to “walk with God” on a day by day basis?

Knowing where to go (guidance)

2. Explain the difference between God’s “revealed” will, and his “secret” will. Can you give an example of each.
3. How do we learn about his revealed will? How do we learn about his secret will?
4. Does God explicitly guide us in all our decision making, when the Bible is silent – for example, on which house to buy, which car to buy. How do you go about making such a decision?
5. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path”. Does this mean that all of our decisions will be easy if we study the Bible? Why/Why not? How does this verse help our decision making?
6. Discuss: What if your decision turns out to be a bad one (for example the house you prayed about before buying turns out to be riddled with termites) – has God not guided you? Have you made the wrong decision? What can you learn from the outcome? Did you not pray hard enough?

Knowing what to ask (prayer)

7. What is the role of prayer in our decision making?
8. We were given 4 reasons for why we should pray as we make decisions: can you list them. Will they guarantee we will always make good and wise decisions? Why not?
9. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus prays “*Not my will but yours be done*”. What does this mean for our prayers?
10. What role do fellow Christians play in our decision making? Do we ask them to pray for us? Is there anything you need to decide and would like prayer about?

Date: 24 November 2019
Services: Sunshine Beach and Tewantin
Series: We exist to glorify God by making disciples
Title: How disciples grow
Passage: 1 John 1:1-7
Outline:

1. **Knowing where to go (guidance)**
2. **Knowing what to ask (prayer)**

The answer lies in the frequent Biblical term *'walk with God'*. God wants his people to walk with him. So we read *"Enoch walked with God 300 years"* (Genesis 5:22) ... and *"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God"* (Genesis 6:9) ... and (king) *"Jotham walked steadfastly before the Lord his God"* (2 Chronicles 27:6). The New Testament intensifies this theme. The only two alternatives are to walk with God or walk away from him:

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7). In the words of Paul: *"I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling"* (Ephesians 4:1).

But what does 'walk with God' mean (on a practical daily basis)? Two things are basic to 'walking with God' ...

1. Knowing where to go (guidance)
2. Knowing what to ask (prayer)

1. **Knowing where to go (guidance)**

Where should we step in life in order to walk with God? What is his will for me? Where is he guiding my feet? There is a more complete answer in my book *"Guidance – The Big Picture"* but a key factor is the distinction between God's **revealed will** (*"up front"* guidance) and his **secret will** (*"behind the scenes"* guidance).

So long as you obey the 'up front' guidance (the Bible) you are walking with God! He is pleased for you to walk anywhere within the boundaries set by Scripture. In some areas of life the boundaries are very tight. There is no decision to make. Behaviour that involves any form of idolatry, lying, stealing, immorality, or coveting is walking away from God. So is any motive, belief, or activity contrary to Christ and the gospel. God has told us plainly what doctrines to believe and the ethics to uphold. Anything contrary is walking in darkness. The road is narrow that leads to eternal life and few are they that find it. That's where you must place your footsteps if you walk with God. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"* (Psalm 119:105).

But not all issues are as clear as those *theological* and *ethical* matters. There is a large area of freedom for numerous decisions in life. In themselves they are 'things indifferent'. *Will I change my old car yet? What career path should I choose? Should I expand the existing house or buy a bigger one?* There is not just one right answer to those questions. It is not as if 'walking with God' means hitting on one particular answer, while every other choice is disobedience. No! **Enjoy your freedom.** Rejoice that God leaves you 100% free to choose *what you want!* So long as it is consistent with what he says 'up-front' (in the Bible) you are free! Use your common sense to weigh up the options - and then do it!

But remember ... every step of the way you will be guided from behind the scenes! God is at work causing all his wise purposes to be achieved. *"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Rom 8:28). God works 'behind the scenes', bringing about good results that would not naturally occur. His purposes will stand as he rules and over-rules in our lives. Of course we are usually unaware of it happening. What we do experience can be very unpleasant. It can feel like nothing is working for our good. Job (covered with terrible sores) didn't know what God was doing behind the scenes, nor did Jeremiah in the pit, nor Joseph in an Egyptian prison. We call this *the mystery of providence*. There is no rule for predicting *how* God will guide 'behind the scenes' as he governs the course of history at every point in time.

Recognize that the right road can get rough! Walking with God is not all smooth travel. Ask Job, or Daniel, or Abraham, or Jesus. Don't assume that hardships imply you are not walking with God. Of course we should all examine ourselves and, if we have made mistakes, learn from them. But get over it! Don't beat yourself up over the unpleasant results of legitimate decisions. Don't become negative and introspective. Even if you can now see things you could have done better (and who can't?) remember that hindsight is a good teacher but a very harsh master. God never expects us to know today what can only be seen tomorrow. None of us can see how God makes *"all things work together for the good of those who love him"*. Neither the pleasant nor the unpleasant life experiences happen in isolation. Under the hand of God they are "together" working for our good. Keep walking in the light of Scripture. Don't beat yourself up in the shadows of providence. Hang in there!

2. Knowing what to ask (prayer)

What is the role of prayer in our walk with God? Prayer is **not** for seeking new information from God. As children of the Reformation, we are committed to the sufficiency of Scripture. We have all we need to know in his 'up front' guidance, the Bible. God has no more to say. There are no updates. There is no extra guidance. Word revelation has ceased. God sends no Emails or text messages! He does not spoon-feed us like infants. He expects us to show maturity and wisdom, applying Biblical reasoning to every situation.

But that doesn't mean our walk with God is simply a clinical matter of rationality, leaving no place for prayer. But what is faithful prayer? What assistance should we ask God for in our walk with him? Since 'walking with God' means knowing your Bible well and acting accordingly, we have some obvious answers to the question. We should we pray for:

- (1) A right interpretation of Scripture. *"Lord, help me to see the Biblical teachings in context and proportion. Give me a right understanding of Scripture as it relates to my steps today and the decisions I make"*. We pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit so that we will interpret each part of Scripture in harmony with the whole. This would be a good and urgent prayer for Israel Folau! We don't want to twist or distort God's word by ignoring the context or literary genre. We don't want to be a victim of ignorance, so we pray for a teachable spirit that will listen to teachers with proven competence in Biblical theology. We must avoid the trash which is so abundantly available (on-line and in bookshops).
- (2) Wisdom and discernment to correctly assess the things happening around us (e.g. the circumstances surrounding a decision we need to make). We need wisdom to keep things in proportion, to set correct priorities, and to avoid majoring on minors. We need wisdom to deal with the opinions and reactions of others, and to know how to handle the possible consequences of our decision. We need wisdom to know which of any valid alternatives will be the most expedient, useful, and practical.
- (3) Humility (and spiritual discipline) to be submissive to Scripture, especially when it goes 'against the grain'. And pray for God to give us the grace to know when self-denial is appropriate. Valid options for us will sometimes have a detrimental effect on others. So each of us needs to ask questions like: *"What is the best decision for my family? How will it affect my usefulness and availability in the church?"* We also need humility after any decision is made. Even for a wise Biblical decision, the results may be very different to our expectations. God is not bound to 'join the dots' according to our mental projections.
- (4) To recognize God's sovereign right to bless or hinder our plans as he sees fit. We need to pray like Jesus, *"Not my will but yours be done"*. Therefore we pray for grace to love God no matter what he does with our decision. Should he prosper it, let us give him all the glory. Should he bring it to nothing, or even bring affliction along with it, let us respond with the humility of Job ... *"The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away: blessed be the name of the Lord"*. We pray, in other words, so that we might let God be God. We pray that the master of the universe might do what seems good to him with everything in this universe ... including our decisions and plans.

God says he will never leave or forsake his faithful people, and that he will rule and overrule in every situation. But he nowhere says we can *feel* it. **Don't confuse faith with feelings.** Life's issues can feel very mysterious to us. You cannot *feel* that everything happening to you is being worked for your good. Did Daniel feel that his path was straight in the lion's den? Did their hot breath and terrifying roaring feel like all things working together for good? But faith rises above feelings! Faith embraces what is not yet seen!

Faith believes that God is true to his promises (regardless of how we feel). May these truths help and encourage you in your walk with the Lord.

That's how disciples grow!

The words of our hymn summarize it well:

*When we walk with the Lord, in the light of his word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will, he abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*