

# WHISPERS, WONDERS AND WHAT-IFS

**A self-guided journey of discovering  
God's will for your life**





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A self-guided journey of discovering God's will in your life

2026

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<https://tinyurl.com/58ypw6y2>



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# Contents

Introduction .....	6
1. Invitation to Prayer .....	8
2. Finding a Discernment Partner .....	9
3. God’s General Will is Clear .....	10
4. Invitation to explore Spiritual Gifts .....	12
5. Invitation to explore Scriptural stories .....	14
6. Invitation to explore Personality type .....	16
A digression on finding God’s Will .....	18
7. Invitation to explore Bible Verses .....	20
8. Invitation to Serve – go and try .....	22
9. Invitation to seek the wisdom of your community .....	24
10. The Place of Providence .....	26
11. God does not want to remove your agency .....	28
12. Finishing with your discernment partner/team .....	30
13. Finishing your journey .....	32
A Call to Ministry? .....	34



## **Acknowledgment of Country**

This is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present of the lands and waterways across many Traditional Custodian groups and nations, and we thank them for their continuing custodianship of Country.

We commit ourselves to walking in reconciliation to each other as peoples together, and to our Gracious God.

# Introduction

*'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'*

Jeremiah 29:11

If there is a God who sees and knows us, and sees the world from beginning to end, seeking to align my life with what God would want is a pretty sensible thing to do. To paraphrase Matthew 6:33, *If we seek first God's ways, all the other aspects of life will take care of themselves.*

Yet, how do we find God's will for our lives? Does God have plans for me in particular? Or is such a view to make the mistake of putting myself at the centre of the universe, and to miss the point of Matthew 6:33?

When we read Scripture, we find that almost everyone is on a similar journey: *seeking to find God's way for them.* Hoping to find themselves aligned with God's narrow way – for that is where the good life is found. When we read their stories, we learn from them. There are sober lessons to learn. As Annie J. Flint wrote:

*God hath not promised  
Sun without rain  
Joy without sorrow,  
Peace without pain<sup>1</sup>*

In this handbook we don't aim to supply the answers. Rather, we seek to offer you a pathway to discover how God may be leading you.

This handbook is designed for anyone: a student approaching the end of the academic year wondering what's next; a worker feeling restless in their current role feeling the call of God to something more; someone approaching retirement wondering what new opportunities may open to them.

It's designed to be done at your own pace, but not *at* pace. While you can read this handbook in an hour, aim to take a few months. We want you to linger with God. God might be calling you to something new or significant: a career option, a ministry or even *Ministry*<sup>2</sup>. A mission on the other side of the world, or harder, a missionary to your friendship circle. That's worth taking time over.

Discerning God's will is difficult. It is often only discovered in retrospect. We must remember that God's ways are not our ways (Isa 55:8-9). Are we even asking the right questions? Are we looking at the problem the right way around? Does God even have a *path* for me, or are there multiple ways through this forest called life?

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<sup>1</sup> From the poem, "What God Hath Promised" (1919). Public Domain

<sup>2</sup> See page 34

To begin with, the verse at the top of this section is a go-to verse, quoted and proclaimed whenever the idea of *God's plan for our life* is considered. Yet when we read that verse in context (go do that), we discover that God isn't speaking to an individual, but to the nation of Israel living in exile. God does not reveal what his plan is for his people in this passage, simply that God has a plan, a good plan, to prosper them and not to harm them: which is poignant for a people living through suffering.

The plan is not to prosper them as individuals, but as a nation. Many individuals won't make it, but as *a people* they will. Yet even this promised redemption won't occur for another 70 years. This verse is an invitation to trust God's good purposes into the unknown, not the revelation of a detailed plan.

That passage is operating at a different level than me understanding this as a personal promise from God to me: to give *me* a life of prosperity. If I've learnt anything, the phrase, '*God has a plan for your life*' is unhelpful. It's cheap rhetoric for lazy preachers. It sets us up for disappointment when we realise, we're not the centre of the universe and life is suffering.

I've found it more helpful to say: ***God has a plan for life: to seek the lost, restore the broken, to set the captives free***, and God invites us to be a part of that plan (Luke 4:18-21). When we join God's plan, that is where abundant life is found.

God has a plan for life: to seek the lost, restore the broken,  
to set the captives free, and God invites us to be a part of that plan

Nowhere are we more challenged about God's plans for our lives than in the life of Jesus. Surely God's own Son would have lived the privileged life: full of prosperity and praise, with passions fulfilled and cravings satisfied? Not at all.

Born in poverty and obscurity, living most of his life in anonymity. Finally, when his life reaches its zenith of glory and fame, he is maligned and insulted, denied and betrayed, and led out to die on a cross. Cancelled by crucifixion.

In Christ, we discover the road to glory is not through the paths we imagine; and glory itself is redefined. Self-giving love is what animates the universe. It is *the Way* we are looking for, *the Truth* we crave, and *the Life* we long to live (John 14:6).

We invite you into this discernment journey. It's a path you can walk many times. It's not supposed to be definitive but suggestive. Some parts will speak louder than others, but you reap what you sow. The more you put in, the more we believe you will get out.

God be with you on your way, as you seek to join God's plan for life.

# 1. Invitation to Prayer

*“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Jeremiah 29:13

It’s impossible to discover someone’s will for you without talking to them. If you hope to let God journey with you, you must develop a vibrant prayer life. This prayer life must include time, not only to pour out your heart to God, but also to listen to God’s heart and ponder what God might be saying to you. We can sense God’s responses in nature, circumstance, whispers, Scripture, the wisdom of others, and even silence.

There are many ways to pray: sitting on your own and talking; reciting the prayers of the past; reading the Psalms; walking and meditating in nature; silent contemplation; art; and pleading with others.

We encourage you to begin exploring God through prayer, asking God to walk with you in life. You want to make this an ongoing reality of your Christian identity: conversing with God.

Below we point you to a 6-session journaling course (online) for you to work through. It provides a simple process for writing prayers to God, then spending time thinking about what God might say back – praying for the Holy Spirit to be present in the process.

The course gives you guidelines. When we are seeking to hear God, how do we know that it is God and not our own desires, mental health, or something demonic speaking to us? This course seeks to put hearing from God in a Biblical framework. You can find the course here:

<https://tinyurl.com/5abj7kv9>



We hope you find more than just an answer to a prayer – but a sustaining and upholding practice for life, and a companion closer than a sibling. Don’t skip this step. Please take the time to work on your prayer life. You could begin this course and continue onto the next step.

## 2. Finding a Discernment Partner

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

1 Corinthians 12:27

Christianity is not a solo religion. Our God is an eternal community, a relationship: the Father, Son and Spirit in an everlasting relationship of love. We are not meant to do things alone.

The second step in the discernment process is to book a time to talk to someone who can be your mentor. Your first thought could be your Minister/Pastor, but you could also approach an Elder, a wise friend, or someone you look to for their spiritual maturity. The purpose of a mentor is to provide you with a reflection point. Someone who can hold a mirror to you and help you see yourself more clearly, and ensure you keep on the path.

Set up a coffee chat. Explain that you are starting a discernment journey. Explore this handbook and ask them to consider journeying with you.

All they need to do is sit with you every few weeks (depending on how quickly you do this), ask you how you are going, and listen intently to your answers; (You can do it via Zoom).

- Listening for what you are saying – and reflecting that back to you.
- Listening for what God is doing and naming that.
- Seeking to give you some encouragement and direction for the journey.

Your task is to find a discernment partner and let them speak into your life.

Another alternative is to do this process in a group. Gather a few friends, or your current Homegroup/Bible study, and do this together. It’s a great way to keep motivated and take others along on the journey.

Walking with God and wise friends sounds like a great place to be.

My Discernment Partner/Team: \_\_\_\_\_

How often we will meet: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. God's General Will is Clear

*“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.”*

Micah 6:8

Sometimes Christians can be quite frustrating. Have you witnessed skilled, passionate, gifted people sitting around doing nothing because they don't know what God wants them to do?

A desire to pause and seek God is wonderful, but prolonged inaction is unbiblical (see Matt 25:14-30). God's general will is very clear in Scripture. God has given us plenty to do. We should never sit around thinking *we don't know what God's will is for us*. We do!

Below are several passages we invite you to read and meditate on. Each one tells us what God's will is for some aspect of life, perhaps all aspects of life.

If God is not giving you a *specific* direction on something, trusting God's *general* direction is good counsel. Often, when we act on God's general will God's specific will becomes clear. In Acts 16:6-10, Paul is following Jesus' general command to, 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19). But something is stopping them from getting to Asia. They keep trying until Paul has a dream about a man from Macedonia. Now they find God's specific will, and it sends them in a different direction. Interestingly, though the dream was about a man, it is a woman who responds to Paul's message.

Share what you learn from these passages with your discernment partner or team.

1. **Deuteronomy 30:1-20** (Choose Life)
2. **Micah 6:1-8** (culminating in Verse 8)
3. **Matthew 5:1-7:29** (The 'Sermon on the Mount' is Jesus' transfiguration of the law of Moses. Jesus gives us lots of direction on how to live)
4. **Matthew 7:1-12** (culminating in verse 12, 'this sums up the law and prophets')
5. **Matthew 22:34-40** (echoing Matt 7:12, see; Rom 13:8-10, Gal 5:14; James 2:8)
6. **Matthew 28:16-20** (The Great Commission)
7. **Luke 10:25-37** (Luke adds an example to Matthew 22:36-40)
8. **John 13:2-17, 34-35** (John's version of Matt 7:12 & 22:36-40)
9. **Romans 12:1-8** (Living sacrifices)
10. **1 Corinthians 13** (If it's not love, it's nothing)
11. **Ephesians 5:1-20** (Lots of everyday advice)
12. **Philippians 2:1-13** (have the same mindset as Christ Jesus)

Space to jot down your discoveries

## 4. Invitation to explore Spiritual Gifts

*“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”*

Romans 12:6

Romans 6 informs us that we all have gifts, given to us by God. Romans goes on to say that if you have a gift, use it for its purpose! We encounter a similar idea in 1 Corinthians 12.

If we want to see what God might have for us to do beyond the general things we should all be doing as Christians, work out what your gifts are – spiritual and otherwise. If we have a gift, God wants us to use it! (See Matthew 25:14-30).

Below is a link to a SHAPE test, an online portal designed to help you discover your

**Spiritual Gifts**

**Heart burst**

**Abilities**

**Personality**

**Experience**

You will need to enter your email. Your results become something valuable to work through with your discernment partner/team. Sometimes other people can see who we are more clearly than we can see ourselves.

Go for it...

<https://tinyurl.com/yxu62mc7>



For some people, working out their gifts and talents is a game-changer. It gives them clear direction on what might be next for them.

For others, their gifts and talents are so generic that nothing seems to change for them. Don't despair. Some people have a clear sense of what God wants them to do. Others rarely get such a sense. They turn their hands to what is needed, or what is in front of them, and see God's hand at work in that. Different personalities respond differently. God works differently. We will see this in the Scriptural stories we are about to explore.

Space to jot down your discoveries

My Spiritual Gifts...

Heart Beats

Abilities

Personality

Experiences

## 5. Invitation to explore Scriptural stories

In the introduction of this booklet, we said that each major personality in scripture presents to us a character study of seeking the will of God.

We have the obvious ones like Abraham and Moses, who have clear call stories, but even minor characters like Hagar and Rehoboam seek to find their place in God's plan. We sometimes forget few of us will be the Moseses or Davids of our generation. Our part might be a bit-part in the drama of life, but that doesn't make it any less crucial.

Below we offer the stories of several Biblical figures to explore. We wish we had the space to unpack them with you. We trust you to read each story slowly, prayerfully, and in conversation with your discernment partner/team, to see how God works in the ups and downs of life. We hope you study at least three or four of these stories.

**Jacob** (Genesis 25:19-34, 27:1-33:20, 35:1-29)

Jacob is not a nice character. He's a scoundrel, yet God's hand rests upon him. Jacob's is a long journey to redemption. In the end the one who wrestles with God is called Israel.

**Joseph** (Genesis 37:1-36, 39:1-50:26)

One of the most moving stories in Scripture, the unfolding plan of God does not take an easy route. Suffering, injustice, pain, redemption. Could our story be like this?

**Jonah** (Jonah 1 – 4)

Jonah runs away from God's plan, but God does not abandon him (or the Ninevites). We often worry that one wrong move will destroy God's plan. It didn't in this story.

**Esther** (Esther 1 – 10)

The book of Esther is especially intriguing as 'God' and 'prayer' are never mentioned in this book. It could be a secular story. Yet we see God's hand through providence. Even in exile, when God was hard to see, God was there.

**Saul** (1 Samuel 9:1-11:15, 13:1-24:22, 26, 28, 31)

Saul's story is a tragedy. A man who had the favour of God and let it go.

**Rehoboam** (1 Kings 11:41-12:24, 14:21-31)

Another story of making a wrong call, yet still in God's big plan.

**Mary** (Luke 1:26-56, 2:1-52, 8:19-21; John 2:1-12, 19:23-27)

What a role to play, the mother of our Lord.

**Peter** (Matt 4:18-22, 8:14-17, 10:1-8, 14:22-36, 16:13-17:13, John 13:1-17, Matt 26:17-75, John 20:1-10, 21:1-25, Acts 1-5, 8:9-25, 9:32-11:18, 12, 15, 1 & 2 Peter)

What a journey Peter takes.

Space to jot down your discoveries

## 6. Invitation to explore Personality type

*“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has given you.”*

Romans 12:3

“Know Thyself” was inscribed on the temple of Apollo in ancient Greece. It aligns with Jesus’ words to ‘remove the log from your own eye before you seek to remove the speck from your fellow disciple’ (Matthew 7:3-5).

Self-knowledge is essential to live the good life, yet, as per Jesus’ aphorism, it is harder to gain than one would expect.

One way to seek to know ourselves is to explore some of the personality tests that have been developed in the human sciences. We encourage you to explore a couple and see how they help you know yourself, and therefore your possible future path.

We do this with a warning. Many of these tests are descriptive, not prescriptive. They describe things, they don’t define things. Don’t be held captive to their results, but don’t ignore the insights and wisdom they may bring.

### **The Big Five**

The five-factor personality trait model is one of the most rigorously tested personality models out there. It measures personality traits across – Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

<https://bigfive-test.com>



### **Myers-Briggs**

A less scientifically rigorous personality type indicator, but one that many people have found helpful to explore. It uses four indicators to create 16 personality types.

<https://www.16personalities.com>



### **The Enneagram**

Another less scientifically rigorous personality type indicator, but one that many people have found helpful. It describes nine personality types.

<https://tinyurl.com/5cuc26ks>



Space to jot down your discoveries

My Big Five Results...

My Myers-Briggs Results...

My Enneagram Results...

## A digression on finding God's Will

The format of this handbook can give the impression that finding God's will is easily achieved by following logical steps. *No way!* Finding God's will is not mechanical. It's messy, relational, emotional and resistant to captivity.

As you discover in Scripture, finding God's will is not formulaic. Sometimes what God wants is obvious: other times it's opaque. Often, it's both at the same time, it depends on where you are standing. Others can see it, but if you're in the middle of the whirlwind, you can't.

Jonathan Haidt's book *The Righteous Mind* follows the science to show that we are governed by our emotions and instincts more than our minds. This isn't a bad thing, it just is. We tend to feel or intuit things, then rationalise them to ourselves and others. It follows that we rarely think our way into God's will either. Rather, through the kinds of activities in this booklet, we feel it, and then rationalise our feelings. This might be a sobering realisation for the logically inclined, but it fits the Scriptural witness well.

When I came to the end of my second role as a Pastor, there were a series of events that happened that gave me this overwhelming feeling that it was time to move on. In many ways, it didn't make sense: I had pursued the vision of God for our congregation for over a decade and experienced fruitful ministry. I really couldn't explain it. I just knew it was time. Of course I *tried* to explain it. Eventually, I just owned that I *felt* it was time. Many were surprised at my decision.

I had no plan for what was next, a rarity for me. I sought to trust God in the unknown. Some days I did that well, other days I wondered what I had done!

In this *between* space, I applied for roles that I thought would be perfect for me – and didn't get them. I felt angry about some of these and questioned God, 'Where are you?' Other people encouraged me to interview for roles that, on paper, would be good – but just didn't feel right.

In the end I stumbled into a role that almost passed me by. Once I got that role – it felt right. I was able to see why I didn't get the previous roles. This role was not just a blessing to me, but to others too.

The story above describes what is called *liminal* space: the space between things. When we are discerning, we often find ourselves in this liminal space. We can be in this space for days, weeks, months, even years. It's a space of lostness, ambiguity and disorientation. It's a space you must embrace to move forward. William Bridges describes this space as

being 'lost enough to find ourselves.'<sup>3</sup> To remove all the noise and familiarity from your life, so that you can hear from God.

As the Exodus reading in the next section demonstrates, often we can only see God's plan in retrospect. Since God's will can be hard to find, we must do our best to discover it, then step out in faith whole-heartedly when the time comes to move forward.

Søren Kierkegaard posited what has become known as *Kierkegaard's Leap* to describe the above. It's illustrated in the famous scene in the film *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*. Seeking the Cup of Christ, Indy is following a bunch of clues when he comes across a great chasm in the path. There is a huge fall below, but he must cross this chasm to reach the Cup. Indie can't see a way across, but his father is dying, and the clues have been right so far, so he steps out into the chasm and his foot lands on a bridge across the chasm that was camouflaged against the rocky outcrop of the other side.

Kierkegaard says, facing uncertainty you must do as much investigation into a matter as you can (this goes for a scientific investigation or a theological one). Then, at some point, you must make a qualitative leap (a whole-hearted commitment based on the weight of evidence). You must cross over from doubt to belief. In the *crossing-over*, transformation happens. *I once was blind, but now I see!*

The greater the doubt, the greater the awakening  
C.C. Chang, *The Practice of Zen*

The big decision in life can have us paralysed by lists of pros and cons. Looking for enough information or certainty can stupefy us. At the end of the day, the only way to find the way is to leap. When you do, things transform.

The journey to faith is similar...

I remember in my teens coming to the end of myself. Realising that I couldn't save myself. I hadn't been good enough, and I couldn't be good enough. If God left me for hell, that would have been a righteous decision.

There was nothing left for me to do but fall into the loving arms of God. Was Christianity true? I would find out by leaping, and I did. God's hands caught me. All my doubts were met, not with facts but love. The truth was a person.

Finding God's will is not necessarily easy, logical, or *possible*. Sometimes God wants us to 'grow a spine and make a decision for ourselves!' God is there, waiting, longing to be able to say, '*See what my daughter just decided? She's a chip off the old block!*'

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<sup>3</sup> Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes; 2019. Hachette Book Group. p125.

## 7. Invitation to explore Bible Verses

*“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”*

John 14:23

We’ve invited you to explore the narratives of particular people, who themselves were seeking to find *the way* in their lives and situations. We now invite you to consider specific verses or passages that are suggestive of the idea that *God has a plan for your life*. Verses that might confirm that understanding or contradict it.

Scripture is larger than simply *chapter & verse*. Augustine wrote, ‘love God and do what you want’, believing that if we loved God with everything, our will would so align with God that we would walk in his ways. This aligns with John 14:23 above when we remember that the emphasis is on *love*. When you love Jesus, you will obey his teachings. That’s a freeing concept. Rather than straining to obey, we should be stirred to love.

Here are some suggested verses we invite you to meditate on...

**This will be the sign:** Exodus 3:1-12 (v12) – When Moses expresses doubt on God’s call (he does this 5 times), God says in effect, ‘you will know that it was I who sent you, when you achieve the goal’. Often, it is only in hindsight that we can see God’s plan. Before that, we must trust and step out in faith.

**Neither:** Joshua 4:13-15 – Joshua asks the angel, ‘Whose side are you on?’ The angel’s answer reveals he’s asking the wrong question. Are we part of God’s plan? Even the Israelites got things wrong.

**I know the plans:** Jeremiah 29:4-14 (v11) – It’s good to meditate on this passage in context and see how it is good news and encouraging for when things are difficult.

**For such a time as this:** Esther 4:12-14 (v14) – Interesting that an alternate plan is expressed; deliverance will come from another place. Time to have the courage to join God’s plan. (God is not even mentioned!)

**Do whatever your hand finds to do:** 1 Samuel 10:1-7 (v7) – Samuel tells Saul just to do whatever is in front of him; God’s favour is with him. A very freeing idea.

**Who are we to question God?** Romans 9:20-21 – What if we only have a bit-part in the story of God?

**As working for the Lord:** Colossians 3:22-25 (v23) – The context is tough: a word to slaves. Even Paul says they have a choice: to dedicate their work to Christ, and this will be rewarded. It was true for Joseph in prison.

Space to jot down your discoveries

## 8. Invitation to Serve – go and try

*“Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*

James 1:22

Sarah loved being around people. She loved talking and exploring things. She signed up for a pastoral care course, thinking this would be a natural fit for her. She was excited about the prospect of being in a group of people journeying together.

As the course went on, she recognised how important listening was to pastoral care and not filling the gaps with your own story. When they went out to put their learning into practice, Sarah became aware that she wasn't very good at listening. She enjoyed being around people but just didn't have the patience to listen deeply. She wanted to engage.

Sarah was quite heartbroken and defeated, until the course leader pointed out her exceptional gift of hospitality. People loved being around her and the community she created with her effervescence. Everything made sense now. By having a go, God had shown her where her sweet spot of service was.

The greatest test of what we believe is putting it into practice. You might feel a call to some role. In this step, we encourage you to try it out to see if it works for you and those around you.

- Where is it that you feel God might be leading you?
- How can you experiment in that arena to determine whether it fits? (Don't just do it once; seek to find a way to keep doing it.)
- Speak with your discernment partner/team about how you found that experience.
- Speak with those you volunteered with about how they think you went. Is this a good fit for you?

Maybe you're considering a few options. Try them all out!

A hobby you do occasionally and love, can turn into something you despise when you do it for a living. You might like some aspects of a job, but not others that are crucial to success in that field. Have a go at testing the options you are considering. Make sure you coordinate this with your church/activity leaders and fulfil all safety and training requirements.

Some roles or activities I am going to try out:

- 
- 
-

Space to jot down your discoveries

## 9. Invitation to seek the wisdom of your community

*“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”*

Proverbs 15:22

People from *communal* cultures seek the will of God differently to those from Western *individualistic* cultures. They rarely trust their *own* feelings, rather, they look to the wisdom of the community around them to discern what God might be doing.

It's intelligent. Why trust one set of eyes when you can have twenty sets of eyes looking for an answer? What is your lived experience and knowledge compared to that of the whole community?

As you consider where God might be leading you, why not invite the community around you to pray and contribute what they believe God may be saying to you? You may just invite a few close friends, perhaps the discernment is large enough for your whole church to be involved.

You don't have to take anyone's advice, but if six people tell you the same thing – something you couldn't see yourself – it is worth listening to. A group can still be wrong, so as with all shared wisdom, check that it aligns with God's general will that we see in Scripture.

You may want to limit your consulting to your partner or best friend, maybe a wise teacher/elder and your family. Don't do the old thing of seeking *everyone's* advice until someone tells you what *you* want to hear!

Let them know what you are doing and that you would love them to tell you what they see. You may need to reassure them you won't get upset with their feedback and then make sure you don't get upset if they tell you something difficult. There's nothing sadder than someone seeking to be on one of those TV singing shows, and none of their close friends or family has had the courage to tell them they can't hold a tune.

Who will you talk to?

What did you find out?

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## 10. The Place of Providence

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord,  
not for human masters.”*

Colossians 3:23

When we think back on our lives there are so many ‘coincidences’ that had to occur to bring us to where we are now. How your parents met, moving schools, a new friend coming to town.

So many of life’s discoveries happened because someone stumbled across a conundrum, took an interest and solved the problem, because it was in front of them. Such people often say, ‘This thing chose me, I didn’t choose it.’

What is before you right now? What opportunities stand in front of you? Perhaps they don’t have passion and glory written all over them, but if you work on them as if the Lord asked you to do them, who knows where they may take you! Success is not finding the most amazing thing and riding it to glory. Success is taking the most mundane thing and letting God do amazing things through it.

When you have made a list of the options and choices before you, there is nothing wrong with doing a plain old cost-benefit analysis (Luke 14:28). What are the costs of making this decision? What are the benefits? You’ll never have all the knowledge you need, so in the end you’ll have to trust, step out with God and take the first step. The life of faith cannot be lived without *faith*.

For most of human history we’ve had little choice about our career or life. Our futures were prescribed by birth and custom: following in our parent’s footsteps. The one choice we did have was whether we would be grateful or begrudging over the hand providence dealt us. It turns out, this is the most empowering decision we have.

In an era where our choices are endless, many are paralysed and miserable, so worried about missing out on *the right* choice that they miss out on life itself. Don’t succumb to ‘analysis paralysis’, waiting for the perfect. Just begin, and be grateful.

What are the choices before you?

What are the costs and benefits of each?

Space to jot down your discoveries

# 11. God does not want to remove your agency

*“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.”*

Psalm 25:4

People often wish God would tell them plainly and audibly what to do. “Send me a sign Lord!” If that happened life would be easy. Success would be guaranteed. Yet in Scripture God only seems to tell people what to do when the path ahead is very difficult!

We have a God who gives us autonomy (the ability to choose our own path) and respects that autonomy, despite the severe consequences of such decisions for others, ourselves, creation, and ultimately Himself on the cross. God does not want automatons or slaves, but friends: those who would choose to love Him of their own free will.

God is gracious in nature. God invites, gives, and comes to us in gentle whispers. God is no dictator barking orders: that cuts against God’s nature. The God we discover in scripture invites, woos, and partners.

‘God told me’ sounds spiritual, but leads to unintended consequences. When we declare *God told me...*, anyone who might query or challenge what we say is not questioning us and our discernment, but God. This shuts down conversation. It enables us to hide our issues and insecurities behind ‘God’. If I desire something I simply project ‘God’ onto my will and avoid all scrutiny.

Some people have said, ‘God told me to marry ...,’ or ‘take this job’. When it doesn’t work out, all that is left is confusion and resentment towards God. It is much more responsible and reasonable to say, ‘I feel God leading me in this direction...’ This enables those around you to journey with you in the discernment, and for you to own your decisions.

God does not want to steal your agency. Judas was responsible for his decision to betray Jesus, as was King Saul for his rejection of God.

We want to impress upon you the harder task. Not to blindly and naively seek God’s path for your life, but to listen for what God may be saying and, as an act of faith, decide yourself to follow in that path. To own your own decisions with their risks and rewards, and to partner with God in this adventure called life. Never shirk responsibility for who you are and where you are going.

Following this path will mean you will grow and mature and have a deeper, richer faith as you discover more of God’s goodness in your life and become more like Jesus.

To think about with your discernment partner/team

Q. Do I find 'acquiescing to God to absolve yourself of all responsibility' appealing?

Q. How do I be a willing partner with God, rather than a rebellious rebel or subservient slave? (Consider Luke 15:11-32)

Q. Did Jonah have much autonomy in his experience?

## 12. Finishing with your discernment partner/team

*“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:12

We hope you have developed a significant relationship with your discernment partner/team in this process. We pray that God has done something wonderful *in you* through this journey.

We encourage you to be intentional in how you end this journey with those who have journeyed with you. You are quite welcome to continue to meet, but it will take on a different form from here. This is for you to determine together. Remember, your discernment partner might want a break, so give them that option.

We encourage you to have one last meeting where you ‘complete’ this journey. It is important to finish these relationships well and consider what you will replace them with. It may leave a ‘hole’ in your life. Sometimes we can grieve such endings.

We encourage you to ask, ‘Who is discipling me, and who am I discipling?’ as part of your on-going commitment to Christian discipleship.

Here are some questions you could consider together. Ensure you express gratitude to your discernment partner/team for the time they have invested in you.

**For the discernment partner**

How have you seen me grow and develop during this time?

How have you seen and heard God at work in my life?

What is the one encouragement you take away from this journey?

What is the final thought you want to leave with me?

## For the one journeying

How have you seen and heard God at work in your life?

Do you have a clearer sense of where God might be leading you? What is your next step in this direction?

How has this time together helped you?

What is one encouragement you take away from this journey?

What is going to replace this relationship for you?

## 13. Finishing your journey

*“Here am I. Send me.”*

Isaiah 6:8

Strangely, just by writing your plans down you increase the likelihood they will happen. If you tell others about them, that increases the likelihood even more.

Following on from your time with your discernment partner – *or perhaps you might do this step first* – we want you to come to some conclusions, and put some plans into action, from this whole journey.

Look back over this handbook. Read again your notes. Be in a posture of prayer and openness towards God. Answer the questions below and covenant to share them with someone. Let them help you refine your answers.

Q. What are the central insights you have gained about yourself on this journey?

Q. What are the central insights you gained into the nature of God?

Q. How has this journey transformed your relationship with God?

Q. How do you want this journey to transformed you?

Q. Which Scriptures would you like to identify as foundational for your journey forward?

Q. Complete these sentences

I feel called...

At this point in time, my purpose in life is ...

I would like to pursue...

In twelve months, I would like to be...

From here, success in life looks like...

# A Call to Ministry?

This booklet has been developed by the Queensland Uniting Church as a stimulus to what should be a normal practice for all Christians – seeking God in our lives as we grow to be more like Jesus.

If, while following this booklet, you felt **a call to Ministry**<sup>4</sup>, there is a more formal process to follow to test this calling.

In the Uniting Church<sup>5</sup>, a call to Ministry is not simply an individual discernment but a community discernment. To use an illustration, when you go into Ministry it's as if you 'marry' the church. In any marriage, both parties need to agree to the arrangement!

So, the formal process is a chance...

1. for you to test – is this real? Do I have the required skills, character, competence and perseverance for the call? To try some ministry tasks and engage in some theological rigour. Ministry is rewarding but difficult. Is the call real?
2. for the Church to test your call: Are you demonstrating the right aptitude, wisdom, humility and persistence for the call? Do you exhibit the spiritual depth and theological breadth of the call?

We don't expect you to be a 'finished product' at the beginning, but we want to see the diamond in the rough.

Signing up for the next step is not signing your life away. The next step – called **Phase 1** or the **Period of Discernment** – is another discernment process. You can come to the end and decide; *I don't feel a call to Ministry!* That is a legitimate outcome.

If you want to proceed with **Phase 1**, talk to your mentor, Minister, or download the Phase 1 document from the following places...

You do not have to continue to work on *this* booklet if you start **Phase 1**.

<https://tinyurl.com/58ypw6y2>



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<sup>4</sup> A call to become a Pastor, Preacher, Minister, Deacon or Missionary.

<sup>5</sup> If you're not part of the Uniting Church, talk to your own Minister/Pastor to find out what the process is in your church.

Tell us your story! Did God meet you? Was this helpful? Follow this link to share your story.... <https://forms.office.com/r/CKB3uB9y9L>



**If there is a God who knows us and wants what is best for us, aligning ourselves with God's will seems like a pretty wise thing to do. Yet finding God's will for our life is not easy. God's ways are far above our ways, and our view of what is good might differ from how God sees things.**

**This booklet offers 13 practical steps that anyone can take to try to align their life with God's plan. Encouraging an exploration of the Bible; prayer; finding a discernment partner; and an exploration of their gifts among other steps, we pray this process is empowering for your life.**

