

Developing Guiding Principles A Tool for Being Thoughtful Rather Than Reactionary

Thesis: The Lord has given us weapons, tools, or skills to disempower strongholds and default ways of being that hinder us from living life the way we were designed to live.

Text: Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; 1 Peter 5:5-7

A few weeks ago, I did a two-part sermon on *Dealing with Anxiety*. The Lord is actively at work in our lives to transform us and to change us in order that we might experience the wholeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord will finish what he has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

As we journey with the Lord, he will put his finger on places in our lives that need to change or that fall short of what he intends.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

The Lord has given us weapons, tools, or skills that are divinely powerful for disempowering strongholds and ways of being that are not according to the ways of the Lord. In other words, God gives us skills, weapons, or tools to help us think and live according to the nature of Christ who lives in us.

According to 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, the Lord wants us to partner with him in the power of the Spirit to demolish or disempower strongholds, arguments, pretensions, and thoughts not in accordance to the will and ways of God. The Lord wants us to take captive thoughts, values, and ideas that work against to his best for us. The Lord has given us weapons or skills to destroy default ways of being and thinking that hinder us from living and thinking the way we were designed to live and think in Christ.

Today, I want to talk about a skill, weapon, or tool that the Lord can use in our lives to help us experience the transforming presence of the Lord in the process of walking with God and others. It is a way of working out what the Lord is working within us (Philippians 2:12-13). Today, we are talking about developing guiding principles, which is a tool we can use in our spiritual formation process. When we get anxious or triggered, we want to be reflective and thoughtful rather than reactive.

The goals of Christian spiritual formation could be described as follows (Faithwalking 201 p. 130):

- 1) For your desires and practices to become increasingly aligned with those of Jesus
- 2) For those desires and practices to increasingly result in living into your guiding principles with integrity

The first goal refers to a person's beliefs, values, aspirations, etc. What are my core beliefs about God, myself, and the world? What do I want to give myself to in life? How do I want to "show up"? How do I want to spend my time? How do I want to relate to God, family, neighbors, strangers and enemies? What part do I want to play in God's restoration work in the world? As you see the values that are currently guiding you more clearly, you can begin to consider where those values are not aligned with those of Jesus in the way you would like them to be.

The second goal refers to capacity or maturity. Perhaps you have great intentions about how you want to live your life, but you often get stopped. So, clearly, wanting the things Jesus wants is only half the game. You also need to grow in your ability to live those things out. This is the journey of growing in self-differentiation. The more differentiated you are, the more you are able to act out of your core values and beliefs, even when anxiety is high and the emotional pressure of the system is against you.

If you focus on the first goal (values) and neglect the second (differentiation), you will become a person who knows all the "right" answers but is unable to live them in daily relationships.

Conversely, if you focus on the second goal (differentiation) but neglect the first (values), you may become a person who is able to live out what you believe, but those beliefs/values may have nothing in common with Jesus.

We define guiding principles as the deeply held beliefs, convictions, or values that help us make decisions in our day-to-day life.

Often, we are guided primarily by our emotions and those of others in the system rather than by clearly thought through principles that reflect our true self. But what would it look like to clearly articulate what you think, want, and believe so that you could call those convictions to mind in the midst of an anxious situation? We want to spend [time] working toward that goal, believing that gaining clarity around your guiding principles actually serves the goal of growing in differentiation (Faithwalking 201 p. 130).

Let me make this practical and give you an illustration.

Recently, Tammy and I were on vacation. I was concerned with getting a sermon ready for July 15, which came at the end of our vacation. Tammy and I had started our

vacation on July 1, late on Sunday night. We were on the road a lot and were super busy.

1. Before I went on vacation, I mentioned to Tammy that I was praying about my sermon on July 15. I had a whole bunch of ideas and a list of things that I felt like I needed to cover with Calvary over the next couple of months. And, I shared that I was having a hard time prioritizing those messages.
2. We were at dinner on Tuesday, July 3. We were having a great vacation, and were planning the next 10 days, talking about what we wanted to do.
3. In the midst of dinner, Tammy asked, "So what about you working on your message tomorrow while we visit with my mom and help her move into assisted living?" I told Tammy what I told you, that I had a whole bunch of ideas about what we needed to work on as a church in the next few months, and I couldn't figure out which order to share what the Lord was leading me to preach.
4. Tammy asked another simple question. What about asking the Lord for a dream tonight about what to preach, since the Lord has been speaking to you recently in dreams?
5. What great questions! I was thinking about a lot of things for Calvary in this season, but I had not practically thought about when during our vacation to start working on my sermon. I had journaled and was asking the Lord about the upcoming sermons, but I had not thought about asking the Lord to speak to me in a dream.
6. The Lord spoke to me through Tammy's question.
7. During dinner, I prayed and asked the Lord to speak to me, to help me plow through all the ideas, and to show me what to preach on July 15.
8. We had a great time and full house after dinner with lots of laughter and joy.
9. Right before bed, I prayed again and asked for the Lord to speak to me.
10. On Wednesday morning, I had a terrible dream. I woke up about 4:11am and was angry and frustrated. That rarely happens. I asked the Lord for interpretation. I felt like that negative dream was an attack or a distraction. So, since I was awake, I prayed and asked the Lord again to speak to me about the sermon and give me a dream.
11. After that dream, I didn't really sleep that well. So, I was attentive and attuned. I was actively listening.
12. Around 5:00am, in the midst of dozing and praying, I began to think about how I wanted to show up in this season. Tammy's question got me to thinking about developing a guiding principle to help me be attentive, attuned, and actively listening to the Lord.
13. Then, I was fully awake. The Lord had instructed my heart in the night.
 - a. *I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me (Psalm 16:7).*
14. At 5:00am, I got up and wrote down my guiding principle.
15. Then, I journaled and reflected on what the Lord was showing me.

16. As I was waking up and reflecting, I felt like the Lord wanted me to share with you what I was thinking and processing. That leads me to this message and what I am sharing with you today.

Here is the guiding principle that I wrote down on Wednesday, July 4, at 5:23am: **In this season, I want to show up attentive, attuned, and actively listening to the Lord.**

1. Attentive: paying attention

- a. I want to be alert, looking for the Lord and what he is doing in me and around me.
- b. I am aware that when I am in high stress season and situations; I can put my head down and move into task mode.
- c. When I get that way, I tune out other things. When that happens, I am not aware of what the Lord is doing around me.
- d. Illustration: I can be sitting at dinner with my family, but my mind is a million miles away rehearsing conversations I have had or need to have. My mind can jump ahead to my to do list and working on what is next. Rather, I want to be attentive to the Lord and to those around me.
- e. Jesus says, "Pay attention to what you hear and how you hear."
 - i. *And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Mark 4:24-25 ESV).*
 - ii. *Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away" (Luke 8:18 ESV).*

2. Attuned: practicing the discipline of reflection in journaling, reviewing my journal, taking time to slow down and spend time with the Lord

- a. My default during high stress periods is to kick into fix it mode and problem solving.
- b. I want to attune my heart to the Lord, believing that he is already speaking.
- c. By journaling, I slow down and reflect. I pay attention. I process with the Lord. I read scripture and pray it back to him in my journal.
- d. As an overfunctioner, it is easy to get in go mode and think that the more I do the more I can get done.
- e. *Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth (Psalm 46:10).*

3. Actively listening

- a. I want to listen to what the Lord is saying to me throughout the day.
- b. I believe that the Lord is speaking and wants to guide me. Our pace of life is so busy that it is sometimes hard to hear because of all the demands, voices, and noise.

- c. I believe that the Lord is speaking in the midst of the noise. I believe that the Lord is speaking through some of the other voices around me.
- d. So, by giving my attention to the Lord, by attuning my heart to the Lord, I engage in actively listening so that I can hear what the Lord is saying to me.
- e. **And, I want to get in action with what the Lord is saying.**

Guiding principle: In this season, I want to show up attentive, attuned, and actively listening to the Lord.

Application

When my friends share with me their guiding principles and what the Lord is showing them, it gives the Holy Spirit room to speak to me. As my friends have shared with me during the past 10 years, the Lord has used their sharing to stir my heart to listen to the Holy Spirit. The Lord has spoken to me about my default ways of being and stirred my heart to hope for a better way of showing up. Their stories have stirred my faith in the Lord to speak to me and to help me show up the way I want to—in the way that honors the Lord and loves people better.

As I have been sharing today, I wonder what the Lord is saying to you.

What guiding principle do you need to help you show up well in this season or in a particular situation?

Remember the definition of a guiding principles: deeply held beliefs, convictions, or values that help us make decisions in our day-to-day life.

Point: A guiding principle needs be worded in such a way that it **gives us courage** and **helps us to get in action** around our values, rather than giving into our default ways of being.

Practical advice: **A guiding principle needs to be easily accessible**, like on your phone, so that you can refer to it and rehearse it in the moments when you need it, when you are not showing up the way you want to show up.

Application: I want to close by pointing you to my online notes of this message, where I give you **three sets of action and reflection which are designed to help you develop your guiding principles**. I want to help you start the process of developing your guiding principles.

Action and Reflection Part 1: Developing your guiding principles

Take time today or this week to spend 30 minutes to an hour with the Lord. Ask him to speak to you. Ask him to bring to your mind a situation, a circumstance, or a relationship where you are anxious, stressed, or not showing up as your best self.

Then, ask the Lord to help you become aware of how you want to show up. Ask the Lord how he wants you to show up. Reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus, on the Scripture, and/or on how others you respect show up in such situations.

Work to get clarity and get it to one sentence or phrase if possible. Choose words that mean something to you personally and that help you get access to courage and to get in action.

Then, make sure it is easily accessible as a note you keep with you in your purse or wallet or on your phone.

Action and Reflection Part 2: Developing your guiding principles

Here is another way to get at your guiding principles that you want to live into right now.

Write a journal entry that explores the following:

1. What character traits in others do you most respect and admire?
2. What are your favorite passages of Scripture, and what guiding principles do those passages express?
3. What aspects of Jesus' life do you find most compelling?
4. What areas of your life do you most want to grow in this season?
5. What core values do you want to develop?

Spend time with the Lord this week in reflection. Focus on "integrity gaps" between your declared guiding principles and how you actually live in life.

Action and Reflection Part 3: Developing your guiding principles

1. Set aside a time to make a first draft of your guiding principle(s). Review your journal entry from last week and the feedback you received about what you can and cannot be counted on for. Then brainstorm a list of possible guiding principles. Write down whatever comes to your mind. Don't censor anything in this part of the process.
2. On another day this week, review your brainstorm list and begin to narrow the list down to focus on the areas you want to grow right now. As you are starting to develop your list of guiding principles, think about how God's missional heart is reflected in that list. You may have included some principles that embrace

missional living without even thinking about it. If that's the case, highlight those guiding principles in your list. If you do not see any principles that reflect a missional life, ask God to reveal to you any principles he might be calling you to that you've missed.