

Guiding Principles

A Tool for Being Reflective and Thoughtful Rather Than Reactive

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 in Christ.

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

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 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 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.

You who are younger, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:5–7).

We want to be a people who choose to relate to others with humility (1 Peter 5:5) and with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15), rather than being full of pride, rather than being a "know it all." As we deal with people, there will be times when we get anxious or triggered. When we get anxious or triggered, we want to practice being reflective and thoughtful rather than reactive. We want to show up the way God wants us to show up.

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. I want to share some guiding principles that I am living into right now.

1. **In difficult conversations, I am curious, a learner, and non-defensive.**
 - a. When I am going to have hard or challenging conversations, I remind myself how I want to show up.
 - b. Every word in my guiding principle means something to me.
 - i. Curious: ask good questions.
 - ii. Learner: pay attention to what I can learn from this person.
 - iii. Non-defensive: my default response to conflict or anxiety is to get defensive. So, I choose how I want to show up with the Spirit helping me.
2. **I want to listen to people and practice dialogue.**
 - a. There are two components to active listening: **active reflection** and **inquiry**.
 - i. **Active Reflection:** "Let me say what I heard in order to be sure that I got it." Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
 - ii. **Inquiry:** Once you are sure that you have heard the message, you ask the participant to share the data that informs the message.
 1. What in your experience leads you to that?
 2. What stories can you tell that would help me know why you see it that way?
 3. What is the data that informs that way of seeing things?
 - b. **Learn to dialogue vs debate / discuss.**
 - i. Discussion and debate involve winning and losing, right and wrong thinking, convincing and changing.
 - ii. There is a difference between discussion and dialogue.
 - iii. What is the definition of discussion? It is a mild form of debate. What is the goal of debate? To win, to be right. Discussion isn't the same as dialogue.
 - iv. Dialogue gives people a chance to be heard.
 - v. Dialogue starts with the premise that each person is a unique individual in Christ, and that who they are is very important to God and to true community.
 - vi. So, in dialogue, I listen to you– not to agree or disagree– but to deeply understand and be influenced by what you see and what

you are saying. In the practice of dialogue, I sincerely want to see what you see. I want to know the data, the stories, and the life experiences that cause you to see things in the particular way that you do.

- vii. Individuals who are well-differentiated can engage this exercise without giving up their view.
 - viii. While holding gently to their view of things, we allow ourselves to see what someone else sees. Usually, the result is that our view is enlarged (from Faithwalking 201).
3. **I want to be well differentiated and say what is so for me while staying connected and letting you say what is so for you.**
- a. With the Spirit helping me, I will individuate and stay connected.
 - b. I will speak up when appropriate. That means I will choose my battles. I will not show up to every fight to which I am invited, especially on social media.
 - c. In order to gage the willingness of someone to engage in conversation, I will say that “I see that differently.” If they want to dialogue, they will ask what I mean. Then, I will share gently and respectfully.
4. **I believe in the spiritual practice of discerning the voice of the Spirit through dialogue.**
- a. God is speaking to me frequently as the groups I am a part of share openly and honestly with one another, practicing authenticity.
 - b. We need each other and need what God has deposited in each person.

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 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.