

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members:

1. to believe that God wants them to know and obey his will
2. to practise seeking God's will

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to subject yourself to God and his guidance.

Theme: Do not be obstinate and unmanageable

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Psalm 32:6-9

⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

⁷ You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

Proverbs 1:23-33

²³ Repent at my rebuke!

Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

²⁴ But since you refuse to listen when I call and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,

²⁵ since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke,

²⁶ I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—

²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

²⁸ “Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me,

²⁹ since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD.

³⁰ Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke,

³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways

and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

³² For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

³³ but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

Isaiah 55:6

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

¹¹ 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. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity (or: restore your fortunes). I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

- When can God not be found anymore? When does he not allow someone to find him?
- When can God be found again? When does God allow someone to find him?
- What should be your attitude when you desire God to guide you?

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship (in one or two sentences) God as the One who likes to be found and gladly guides you.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: Seeking God's guidance

Read or explain in your own words.

1. God's will

God is almighty. He reigns over and manages everything. He knows everything, but does not reveal everything to man. We may know his revealed will and learn to obey it. But his secret will is not our business (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9). God's secret or hidden will demands our trust in his character, not our questioning. God's secret or hidden will always works for the good of

those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

2. God's specific and general instructions

God's revealed will consists of his specific instructions and his general instructions. His specific instructions are his commands, prohibitions and teachings. And his general instructions are principles that help us to make sensible choices and wise decisions.

3. Our responsibility

We Christians have the responsibility to not allow the world and its culture to press us into its mould or to drag us to and fro into its life style. We have the responsibility to let God transform us with his truth.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

*Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.**

Theme: God's guidance

Day 1	Psalm 32:1-9 God guides a person whom he has forgiven
Day 2	Psalm 119:97-105 God guides a person who loves his Word
Day 3	Psalm 143:7-10 God guides you by means of your quiet time – by means of your daily reading of the Bible and prayer
Day 4	2 Timothy 3:14-17 God's guidance through his Holy Spirit is never in conflict with his guidance through his Word (the Bible) (cf. Ephesians 6:17)
Day 5 ^{BS}	Jeremiah 23:16-32 God does not guide by means of every prophet, vision or dream. He guides through his Word
Day 6	Isaiah 30:1-5,9-22 God does not guide a rebellious person. He guides a person who waits upon him
Day 7	Proverbs 1:20-33 God does not guide a person as long as he neglects God's previous guidance
Day 8	Judges 6:11-21,36-40 God guides Gideon first by speaking to him and then confirms his guidance with a sign Gideon asked
Day 9	Deuteronomy 18:9-22 God never guides by means of occultism. He guides by means of his Prophet (singular: Acts 3:22).
Day 10	Isaiah 8:11-20 God never guides by means of the spirits of the dead. He guides by means of his Word.

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: Seeking God's guidance

- Why is it important to first seek God's special instructions (commands, prohibitions and teachings) in the Bible?
- In which cases does God give Christians the freedom to choose or decide what they want?
- How do you make a wise decision or sensible choice based on the Bible?
- What kind of peace can you experience when you discover and do God's will?
- How do you know for certain that circumstances contribute to knowing God's will?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- "In which very clear way has God guided you in the past?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

GOD'S GUIDANCE Psalm 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you
in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you

Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

**Theme: Seeking God's guidance from the grain,
not the straw**

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step method and study:

Jeremiah 23:9-40

⁹ Concerning the prophets:

My heart is broken within me;
all my bones tremble.

I am like a drunken man,
like a strong man overcome by wine,
because of the LORD
and his holy words.

¹⁰ The land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse (or: these things)
the land lies parched
and the pastures in the wilderness are withered.
The prophets follow an evil course
and use their power unjustly.

¹¹ "Both prophet and priest are godless;
even in my temple I find their wickedness,"
declares the LORD.

¹² "Therefore their path will become slippery;
they will be banished to darkness
and there they will fall.
I will bring disaster on them
in the year they are punished,"
declares the LORD.

¹³ "Among the prophets of Samaria
I saw this repulsive thing:
They prophesied by Baal
and led my people Israel astray.

¹⁴ And among the prophets of Jerusalem
I have seen something horrible:
They commit adultery and live a lie.
They strengthen the hands of evildoers,
so that not one of them turns from their wickedness.
They are all like Sodom to me;
the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah."

¹⁵ Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says
concerning the prophets:
"I will make them eat bitter food
and drink poisoned water,
because from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has spread throughout the land."

¹⁶ This is what the LORD Almighty says:
"Do not listen to what the prophets
are prophesying to you;
they fill you with false hopes.
They speak visions from their own minds,
not from the mouth of the LORD.

¹⁷ They keep saying to those who despise me,
'The LORD says: You will have peace.'
And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts

they say, 'No harm will come to you.'

¹⁸ But which of them has stood
in the council of the LORD
to see or to hear his word?
Who has listened and heard his word?

¹⁹ See, the storm of the LORD
will burst out in wrath,
a whirlwind swirling down
on the heads of the wicked.

²⁰ The anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he fully accomplishes
the purposes of his heart.
In days to come
you will understand it clearly.

²¹ I did not send these prophets,
yet they have run with their message;
I did not speak to them,
yet they have prophesied.

²² But if they had stood in my council,
they would have proclaimed my words to my people
and would have turned them from their evil ways
and from their evil deeds.

²³ "Am I only a God nearby,"
declares the LORD,
"and not a God far away?"

²⁴ Who can hide in secret places
so that I cannot see them?"
declares the LORD.

"Do not I fill heaven and earth?"
declares the LORD.

²⁵ "I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies
in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!'

²⁶ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying
prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own
minds? ²⁷ They think the dreams they tell one another
will make my people forget my name, just as their
ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. ²⁸ Let
the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let
the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what
has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. ²⁹ "Is
not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a
hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

³⁰ "Therefore," declares the LORD, "I am against the
prophets who steal from one another words supposedly
from me. ³¹ Yes," declares the LORD, "I am against the
prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare,
'The LORD declares.' (i.e. they think that everything
they say is a divine declaration) ³² Indeed, I am against
those who prophesy false (devised) dreams," declares the
LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with
their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them.
They do not benefit these people in the least," declares
the LORD.

³³ "When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you,

‘What is the message (Hebrew: oracle, burden)¹ from the LORD?’ say to them, ‘What message? (The Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations: “You are the burden!”) I will forsake you, declares the LORD.’ (i.e. You are pressing on my shoulders as a burden and am going to cast you off!)³⁴ If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, ‘This is a message (oracle) from the LORD,’ I will punish them and their household.³⁵ This is what each of you keeps saying to your friends and other Israelites: ‘What is the LORD’s answer?’ or ‘What has the LORD spoken?’³⁶ But you must not mention ‘a message from the LORD’ (oracle) again, because each one’s word becomes their own message. So you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God.³⁷ This is what you keep saying to a prophet: ‘What is the LORD’s answer to you?’ or ‘What has the LORD spoken?’³⁸ Although you claim, ‘This is a message (oracle) from the LORD,’ this is what the LORD says: You used the words, ‘This is a message (oracle) from the LORD,’ even though I told you that you must not claim, “This is a message (oracle) from the LORD.”³⁹

Therefore, I will surely forget you (or: pick you up) and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your ancestors.⁴⁰ I will bring on you everlasting disgrace—everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”

2. Emphasis

God does NOT guide by means of the devised dreams and oracles of the false prophets!

The test of true prophecy:

- The prophet’s prophecy must really take place (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; 1 Samuel 3:19-21).
- The truth of his message is more important than his miraculous signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).
- His obedience to the truth is a more important test than his prophesying in Christ’s Name (Matthew 7:21-23).

The test of a true prophet:

- A prophet is someone who speaks forth (proclaims, preaches) God’s Word. A prophet who speaks against the Bible is a false prophet!
- A true prophet testifies about Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12; Luke 24:25-27,44-45; Acts 10:43; 26:22).

¹ Burden or oracle. The Hebrew word ‘burden’ and ‘oracle’ is the same. The Greek and Latin translation from the Hebrew original use only the word ‘burden’. The intention is as follows: ‘the words (pronouncement, oracle) made by the false prophets laid a burden on the people. But God says, “It is not my words that lays a burden on you, but you are a burden to me!”’

He testifies that Christians receive forgiveness from all their sins (Isaiah 53:11). And he testifies that God takes from the Gentiles a people for himself (Acts 15:14-15).

- He proclaims God’s words in the Bible to people (Jeremiah 23:18,21-22,28-29; Numbers 12:6,8; 1 Samuel 3:7) without distortion or deception (2 Corinthians 4:2). A prophet who distorts the words of the Bible is a false prophet!
- He turns people away from their evil ways and deeds (e.g. lying to people, sexual immorality, economic corruption, bribery of judges and government officials, revenge killing, wars including so-called religious holy wars, etc. A prophet who does not speak against these things is a false prophet!
- He does not go beyond what is written in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6; Mark 7: 7-9,13). A prophet who goes beyond what is written in the Bible (either by adding to the Bible or taking away from the Bible) is a false prophet!

3. Explanation for the group leader

The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed God’s Word from 627 to 586 B.C. in Israel and to about 550 B.C. in Egypt. The words in Jeremiah 23 are from before the exile in 586 B.C.

23:9-15. Recognise false prophets

God does NOT guide by means of everyone who claims to be ‘a prophet’! Throughout history there have been many false prophets (Matthew 24:11,24). You recognise false prophets by their fruits (lives) (verse 13-14). When they do the following, the LORD has NOT sent them:

- when they proclaim a god who is NOT the God of the Bible
- when they falsely claim that their messages come from God
- when their messages keep changing and contradicting each other
- when they transgress God’s marriage laws and live in sexual immorality
- when they receive bribes or demand money for their religious services
- when they lord it over people’s lives
- when they fight religious wars with worldly weapons (the sword) (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
- when they do not turn people from their evil ways and evil deeds

23:16-24. Do not listen to false prophets

Do not listen to false prophets and what they prophesy. They do not speak under inspiration of God's Spirit, but under inspiration of dreams and visions that originate in their own sinful human spirit. They fill people with false hope by proclaiming that there would not be a judgement (the exile).

True prophets do not occupy themselves with future events that rouse false hopes, but with the words of God that bring people to repentance!

23:25-32. Characteristics of false prophets

- They proclaim what they devise themselves (verse 26). They exchange God's words with their own inventions (fabrications). Jesus Christ says, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions" (Mark 7:7-9).
- They copy one another's sayings and repeat the same old stale and outworn platitudes (verse 30).
- They arrogantly hold that their own fabrications are 'God's words', 'an oracle of God' (verse 31).
- They lie and mislead God's people (verse 32). They cause lots of damage among Christians.
- They have never been sent by God, even when they claim that God sent them (verse 32)! They have never received a commission from God.
- God regards the oracles of the false prophets as useless 'straw' (verse 28)!

Characteristics of true prophets

God regards the words of his own prophets as useful 'grain' (verse 28)! God's words bring people to repentance from their sins and to transformation of their lives (verse 22). God's words are like 'fire' that burns up the lies of the false prophets. They are like a 'hammer' that crushes hardened hearts and arguments of liars (verse 29). They are like 'a two-edged sword' that penetrates to the deepest level and analyses human thoughts, motives and attitudes (Hebrews 4:12).

The genuine or true prophets end with John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13). After the first coming of Jesus Christ, God speaks his words through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). After the ascension of Jesus Christ, God continues to speak through the Spirit of Jesus Christ to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13-15).

ToDay God guides Christians through the Bible, which contains all the inspired and revealed words of God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible contains the words of the

Old Testament prophets (2 Peter 1:19-21), the words of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22-23; 1 Peter 1:10-12) and the words of the New Testament apostles (John 16:13-15; 2 Peter 3:1-2,15-16).

Just as the apostles Paul and his co-workers, also Christians must not go beyond what is written in the Bible

(1 Corinthians 4:6)!

23:33-40. God forbids everyone to begin his own fabricated words by saying, "This is an oracle of God."

God does not guide people through everyone who claims to have a prophetic gift, that is, by everyone who claims that what he says is an oracle of God" (verse 31,34,38).

God commanded the false prophets through the genuine prophet Jeremiah never to begin their oracles with the statement: 'This is an oracle (a prophecy) of God! Why not? Because they mislead other people to believe that their fabrications are the words of God. Thus they twist God's words (verse 36) and mislead God's people (verse 13).

God himself will judge every prophet who continues to claim that his words are oracles (prophecies) of God (verse 38)! God will cast him out of his presence and his shame will never be forgotten (verse 39-40).

In the New Testament the Spirit of the LORD rests on the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 11:2) and speaks his final words through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). The spirit of a Christian with a prophetic gift must be controlled by the Christian. This means that he may not claim that the Spirit of God took control of him like in the Old Testament and he could not but speak (Ezekiel 2:2; cf. Jeremiah 1:7-9). The Christian remains fully responsible for what he proclaims. Other Christians must test him and weigh carefully what he says in the light of the Bible (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.