

Thinking for Yourself

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

Thinking for Yourself (from [Acts 17:1-4](#))

If you've raised children, then you know that the younger they are the more guidance they need. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers need almost constant guidance. The parent decides what they will wear, eat, play with, and so on. The parent gives constant warnings: "Don't put that in your mouth." "Don't touch! It's hot." The parent is continually teaching: "Wear your coat and hat when it's cold outside." "Wash your hands before eating."

As the children grow, their need for guidance decreases. By the time they are leaving elementary school, we hope they no longer need to be told to brush their teeth or put on clean underwear. As they progress through their teen years, we gradually give them more and more freedom as they prove to be responsible, even to the point of giving them a driver's license. They still need guidance, probably lots of correction, but our aim is to teach them how to make good decisions on their own.

And then they become adults, running their own lives. They will still, if they are smart, come to us for guidance from time to time on issues they're facing—after all, we've been there, done that—but the decision will be theirs. This is how things were designed to be.

This is how things were designed to be spiritually, as well. This surprises some people, but God doesn't want to run your life and make all your decisions for you. He doesn't want to have to give you constant guidance. He wants you to mature to where you can make many, even most, of your decisions for yourself—because you already know right from wrong. He's there to give guidance when you need it, but the majority of the day-to-day decisions he entrusts to you. He made you in his image, with the ability to think and make decisions for yourself. He enjoys letting you do it.

As new Christians, we need constant guidance. As newborn spiritual babies ([1 Peter 2:2](#)), we need to learn what is right and wrong in God's eyes, what spiritual food we should eat, what companions we should have, and what tasks we should be doing to serve God. It is a whole new world to us, and we need direction.

But as we grow spiritually, the need for direction should decrease. We shouldn't need daily guidance to remind us to read the Bible, for example. We should have developed that commitment and habit in our life already. We should not need a special leading from the Holy Spirit to tell us to go to church, tell the truth, and stay morally pure. We should already know God's will in these matters.

The point is, as we grow spiritually, we don't need to pray for guidance in everything. In a sense, God has already given us guidance about many of the things we face—by the principles we've learned from his Word and the experiences he's allowed us to have. He has been forming "*the mind of Christ*" ([1 Corinthians 2:16](#)) in us, and wants us to think for ourselves.

We see this in the Apostle Paul's life. Paul is the apostle most responsible for taking the Gospel to the Gentile world. His missionary journeys took him all the way from Jerusalem to Rome. The following passage summarizes the strategy Paul used to reach people with the Gospel. Read it, and write down the "**custom**" ([Acts 17:2](#)) Paul followed as he took the Gospel to a new area.

Acts 17:1-4 (NASB)

¹ Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

⁴ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

Paul's custom when he visited a new area:

² And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Paul's "*custom*" ([v.2](#)) when he visited a new city was to go to the synagogue on the day of worship and preach Jesus from the Scriptures. It was not something he needed guidance to do. He did it every time he could. Why? Because it made sense.

Paul's custom actually included more than we find in [verse 2](#). If we look at the whole passage, we'll see that Paul's custom actually included **six things**:

1) Paul visited cities. In this passage, he is visiting Thessalonica ([v.1](#)), which was the capital of the province of Macedonia and had a population of more than 200,000 people. Paul went there for the same reason he visited the other cities (Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome): that's where most of the people were. Paul wanted to reach all people, not just city dwellers, but he trusted that the Word would spread from the cities to the regions beyond, and it did (see [Acts 19:10](#)).

Acts 19:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul didn't have to pray about taking the Gospel to cities every time. It was the custom he had developed. It made sense.

2) As mentioned, Paul went into the synagogue—which was the Jewish equivalent of the local church. Paul went to the synagogue because this is where he would find people interested in spiritual things. The Jewish people would be there, as well as the “**God-fearers**” (v.4)—non-Jewish people who had not become full-fledged converts to Judaism, but were believers in the God of the Jews, and were waiting for his promised Messiah.

Paul knew he would find people interested in the Gospel at the synagogue. It made sense to go there.

3) As mentioned, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was when people worshiped. It made sense to go then.

4) As mentioned, he spoke to the gathered worshipers from the Scriptures. This refers to the Old Testament books on hand, which contained the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and which both the Jews and God-fearers accepted as the Word of God.

5) He preached Jesus: “*This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ*” (v.3). He didn’t preach his own philosophy, or politics, or the latest fads of culture. His message was about Jesus Christ.

6) He called for a decision: “*And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women*” (v.4).

These six customs of Paul—the strategy he used in spreading the Gospel—were not matters he had to pray about everywhere he went. He knew they worked and were God’s will. He knew they made sense. Perhaps he had prayed about them at first. Perhaps he had learned from experience that they worked. Or perhaps it had just been a matter of logic (of course, you’ll reach more people in a city; of course, you’ll find the people interested in spiritual matters at the synagogue).

The point is the Lord did not have to guide Paul on these matters every time. Paul had matured to the point that he could make these decisions himself. Paul was open to new direction (as we saw earlier in our teaching, when Paul allowed a dream from the Lord to redirect his traveling plans from the east to the west), but he also felt free to think for himself.

Have you been hesitating to take action because you are waiting on God for some specific guidance? Of course, many times that’s the course we should take. But many times the Lord is waiting for us to think for ourselves.

Missionary Marti Ensign invited some African pastors to the United States for a meeting. During some free time, they wanted to go shopping. Marti gave them her number in case they ran into a difficulty or got lost. Sure enough, in less than an hour the phone rang. “I am lost,” the African said.

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Marti told him to put the phone down, go and find out the names of the two streets at the corner, come back and tell her, and she'd come get him.

In a few minutes his voice came back over the line: "I am at the corner of 'Walk' and 'Don't walk.' "

Have you ever felt like that in life, stuck at a crossroads, not sure which way to go? It may be that God has already shown you—by what he's taught you through his Word and your experiences. Perhaps he is waiting on you to make the decision. You can think for yourself.