

# Guided in Prayer

What does it mean for God's people to be guided in prayer? The early church seeks leaders with integrity and prays for guidance. In prayer, Jesus commends the disciples into God's care. The psalmist exults in a relationship with God grounded in God's ways. Disciples today also are called to journey in faith, prayerfully entrusting their lives to God.

## Focus Scripture: Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

As Jesus prepared to ascend to God 40 days after the Resurrection, he ordered the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1–5). After the ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, where they were "constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (v. 14). The focus scripture picks up the story of this gathering of Jesus' followers – about 120 according to the text. Peter takes a position of leadership in the group, and proposes that they elect a new apostle to replace Judas. Peter proposes that this person should have been present with the group from the beginning of the time Jesus was among them. The group offers the names of two men. Before casting lots, they pray for guidance.

While "casting lots" is referred to many times in the Bible, there is no detailed description of the actual procedure. It is thought that it involved drawing or throwing small stones or pieces of pottery on which "yes," "no," or individual names were written. It was an accepted way of making decisions at the time. The Hebrew people believed that casting lots placed the results in God's hands (see Joshua 18:6).

Among the potential pool of candidates were members of Jesus' family and other followers. Though the text reports Peter saying "one of the men," should be selected, modern readers may wonder if any of the women were considered. Many women had been part of the group of Jesus' disciples from the beginning and would continue to play significant roles in the emerging Christian community.

It is interesting to note that this is the only time that the group of Jesus' disciples known as The Twelve is "reconstituted." Later, as disciples are killed, replacements are not selected. Indeed, after Acts 6:2, The Twelve are not mentioned again in scripture. The broader

community of disciples carries the ministry forward.

As the details are sketchy, it would be difficult to use this account as a model of leadership selection today. However, the believers were open to God's guidance as they joined together in prayer and waiting. They expected God to work in their lives, as do church members today.

**John 17:6–19** lifts up the role of intercessory prayer. This passage is part of Jesus' prayer just prior to his arrest. Jesus prays to God to help the disciples as they seek to fulfill their mission in the world. Jesus prays for their protection, and that they will be made holy in the truth.

When the choices one makes are life-giving and in harmony with God's ways, the psalmist declares in **Psalm 1**, there is delight. The psalm commends meditating on the laws of God, calling to mind the practices of faith that help us stay grounded in God.

**1 John 5:9–13** pictures the relationship of abundant life that God extends to all, to either choose or deny. Trusting and believing in Jesus leads to eternal life. This passage invites reflection about discernment – whose testimony do we follow as we seek truth and wholeness of life?

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Philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard once said: "The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays." As we pray, we become firmly grounded in our relationship with God, and we are changed. To be guided in prayer is to invite transformation. We trust God; God has entrusted us to make decisions that proclaim the gospel in word and deed. When have you and your church felt you were guided by prayer?

May 24, 2009

## Focus Scripture

Acts 1:15–17,  
21–26

## Additional Scriptures

Psalm 1  
1 John 5:9–13  
John 17:6–19

God of all wisdom,  
give us visions of  
the life you intend  
for us. Make  
your ways our  
ways. Guide us in  
building a Spirit-  
led community  
that bears fruit  
which is pleasing  
to you and  
beneficial to our  
neighbours. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

