

## Thought for the week: Seeking divine guidance

Have you ever been entrusted with a huge piece of work you've never done before, and then left to do it with minimal guidance and no supervision? That's what happened to Abraham's servant. Let's see how he handled the situation.

First, we read just before today's passage that the servant clarified the task, getting as much information as he could from his master, Abraham. In the servant's concern to get the task right, he says in Genesis 24:39-40, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me'. But Abraham responds with some wonderfully reassuring words: 'The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful.'

Second, the servant was willing to set off, taking 10 camels and 'all kinds of choice gifts from his master' (Genesis 24:10), and trusting that God would guide and protect him along the way – a distance of about 500 miles – and give him success. We don't know how his journey took him to the town of Nahor, but, when he arrived at the well, he had a clear plan for discerning God's choice of a bride for Isaac. And he offers his plan to God in prayer: 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also." Let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.' (Genesis 24:42-44)

It was an inspired idea, designed to elicit something of the girl's character, never mind her appearance. In a hot climate, anyone would offer to draw water for a thirsty stranger, but it would take a very unusual and generous person to draw water for 10 thirsty camels! One camel can easily drink 25 gallons.

Third, the servant took time to consider whether this was indeed the right girl for the job. He waited for as long as it took for all the camels to finish drinking, and only then did he ask about her family. Imagine his joy when he realised that God had indeed answered his prayer and made his way successful! As he told Rebekah's family, 'I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.' (Genesis 24:48)

So, how might all this apply to our own questions about and struggles with divine guidance? First, there is clarifying the issue, best done in conversation with our Father in heaven, who loves to listen to our thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears. We also gather information and discuss our ideas and options with wise counsellors.

Then, perhaps before we feel ready, we need to make a move. We don't yet know where our journey will take us, but God invites us to 'step out in faith', to trust God's moment-by-moment guidance – rather as we might trust the directions we get from Google Maps. Usually, the technology offers several possible routes, and its recommendations change if the traffic situation alters. We may follow its first suggestion: if we deviate, it can usually accommodate our new choice. Occasionally, it asks us to 'make a U-turn'. And so it can be with God: Often it doesn't matter what path we take but, if we are 'keeping in step with the Spirit', we can trust him to retrieve the situation if we're heading for a dead end.

The point is this: There's no easy way to know what the best option is; it depends on so many factors. For a Christian, it's about believing that what matters most to God is our willingness to trust him – as Abraham's servant trusted the angel – and to dare to 'walk by faith and not by sight'.

Then we will be able to conclude, like Abraham's faithful servant, 'As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master's kin.' (Genesis 24:27)