

Now let me give you a final general point on guidance, another practical principle. It's this: God mostly guides a step at a time, God mostly guides a step at a time. This is where many people stumble, they want to know everything before they take even the first step of faith. Dr Alexander of Princeton described a little glow-worm, which used to take a step so small that it could hardly be measured, but as it moved across the fields at midnight there was just enough light in its glow to take the next step, and the next step, and the next step, and so it moved forward in the light. Did not the Lord Jesus tell us not to worry about anything, but sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof? This is why some of you don't get guidance, because you're looking for guidance for something that is way ahead, but you ought to be looking for guidance today - and if you sought first the kingdom of God today, all these things would be added unto you!

If all else fails, let me recap on these things: the written word, the inward urge, the outward pointers - remember that God never contradicts His word, God never leads you to do something contrary to duty, you need to search the Scriptures, don't make the Bible into a magic book, guard against fanciful interpretations, test an inward urge by the peace of God ruling your heart, take one step at a time - and if that fails listen to what Oswald Saunders says. I think this is tremendous, he says: 'I try to gather all the information, and all the facts that are involved in a decision, and then I weigh them up. Then I pray over them in the Lord's presence, and trust the Holy Spirit to sway my mind in the direction of God's will, and God generally guides by presenting reasons to my mind for acting in a certain way'.

I hope this has been a help to you, but please don't forget where we started off this morning. The hymn says: 'O pilgrim bound for the heavenly land, never lose sight of Jesus'. Is God's will not presently in your life for many of these elementary reasons, but perhaps primarily because you have lost sight of Jesus? Can I say: if you're not saved, you can't expect God to lead you. If you're backslidden, you can't expect God to lead you. If you've never surrendered your life completely to the Lord as a Christian, you cannot expect God to lead you. But if you do all those things, and day by day take up your cross and follow Him, you'll not only expect it, you'll see it - God will lead you, and that very clearly.

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"Guidance"



*How to know God's
will for your life*

by Pastor David Legge

“Guidance”

Now I want you to turn with me to James chapter 1, the epistle of James chapter 1, we’re presently going through a series entitled ‘Back to Basics’, looking at the ABCs of the Christian life, the elementary principles of the Christian faith that all of us need to learn very early in our life as a Christian. It’s important that the lambs among the flock do get to learn these facts and teachings very early in their spiritual lives, because a lot of how they will succeed and go on and mature in the Christian faith will depend upon how quickly they implement these things in their experiences. But, all of us would be honest if we said that we all need from time to time, and certainly at this time, to remind ourselves to get back to basics and maybe retrace the old paths that we have lost in recent days, or over many years of Christian testimony. We’re looking now at the subject of ‘Guidance’, and this is a terribly important one, and I think a lot of young people in particular - because of the great decisions that they have to make in their education, and regarding their career, and marriage, and where they’ll live and so on - are particularly interested in guidance. But it’s not applicable just to those who are young among us, I think all of us have decisions from day-to-day that we need to know God’s will regarding. So we read preliminary verses from James 1 verse 5 first of all. James says: *‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord’.*

Guidance: God has promised to give it to us. Now Christians are often troubled about this subject of guidance, because they want to know, and they want to feel that they’re in God’s will. They don’t want to take a wrong step or a wrong path. Sometimes guidance seems to be so obscure, and that accentuates the fear - because it’s so hard, we feel, to know God’s will, and therefore so easy to take a wrong step. I would have to say that I fear that there are more Christians today who are not concerned at all, or not troubled about God’s guidance in their lives - they’re content to make their own decisions, to plough their own furrow as they see fit. I’m not interested in those folk specifically, but in those who are troubled about the issue of guidance, and if it is possible they want to know the will of God in every situation in their lives, and they want to know how to know God’s will - if it is possible at all.

Now let me say that if you are confused about the issue of guidance and God’s

temple. Now the two reasons why they weren’t allowing me into Bible College were that I was too young and too inexperienced. First Chronicles 29 verse 1, a paraphrase is this: ‘God does not want men just of themselves to build the temple, but I have chosen Solomon who is young and inexperienced to build the temple, because the temple is not for men, it’s for the Lord’. Now those were the two things - that verse was not inspired for me thousands and thousands years ago, but those two things were the very two things that men were using to prohibit me doing God’s will as I felt it was in my life. I took that verse and used it as the grounds for going ahead and applying for Bible College. Now do you see that there’s a fine line between that, taking the verse in its context, what it meant, it meant youth, it meant inexperience for Solomon; and that’s what it meant for me - but don’t take some kind of fanciful interpretation out of the Scriptures.

We must move on: how do you know if the urge within you is from God, or if it’s from another spirit or the devil? Well here’s a very very elementary principle that will help you with this: you will know if the urge is from God’s Spirit if you’re living according to God’s standards. This isn’t rocket science: if you want to be guided by God’s Spirit, you have to live by God’s Spirit. You see some people want to be guided, but they don’t want to live according to God’s word. We’re not talking about ‘inner light’ here when we talk about an internal witness. We have to say that we have to guard against sudden ideas of impulse that come into our minds, emotional tenseness, times when we’re rocked to and fro - I always advise people that when you’re in an emotional turmoil, don’t make a very important decision. It’s the same in the spiritual realm, all sorts of thoughts can come into your mind - and let me say this: if an urge comes upon you, and it disturbs you, you ought to distrust it.

Let me show you the rule regarding the inner urge. Turn with me to Colossians, we’re nearly finished, turn with me to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 15 - here’s how to know if an urge is from God: ‘And let the peace of God’, Colossians 3:15, ‘rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful’. ‘Let the peace of God rule in your hearts’, that word for ‘rule’ is the verb form of the word for ‘a judge’ in public games or in the Olympics, an umpire or a referee; in other words, someone who decides over a disputed issue - was that a foul, or was that not a foul? What the Holy Spirit is saying is, this is how you discern these inward urges: if you lose your peace, the Holy Spirit is blowing the whistle, and saying there’s something wrong here. Now sometimes we need to get out of our comfort zone, that’s for sure, sometimes we’re uncomfortable about things God’s leading us to do; but what we’re talking about is the inner peace of the fellowship, that ought to transcend our spirits, that we have in Christ. That’s why Paul says in Philippians 4:6: ‘Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And’ - what? - ‘the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall rule in your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord’. Do you want to know if the inner urge is of God? Well, peace will be given to you.

makes things ridiculous and demeans the whole realm of God's guidance. What we're saying is: don't stop at seeking to know God's will for the big things, ask God's will for the small things, commit everything in your life to Him day by day - for this is the reason that God hides His will, not that we should get to know God's will, but that we should get to know God!

Do you get to know God? Or is it just to get to know the way ahead, the next step? Luther said: 'I know not the way He leads me, but well do I know my Guide'. Another principle regarding the Scriptures is this: don't make the Bible into a book of magic. Some people who consult the Scriptures only when they're in trouble, they play what some people have called 'Bible roulette'. They get their Bible, and then they flick through it, stop, and then stick their finger or a pen onto it, and decide 'Well, God spoke to me through that verse'. Now I know that there are some people, and it has happened to me too, that the Bible does open and something does speak to you - but that is the exception rather than the rule. We ought not to be doing that, and some people have likened it - and I think it's true - to pinning the tail on the donkey. It's got nothing to do with God's guidance, and it is an irreverent and improper use of the holy Scriptures. So we must guard against using God's book, theoretically, like a teacup, leaving things up to chance. But if you're a person who is regularly in God's word, reading and imbibing it, when God speaks to you tomorrow after you've been reading God's word today, you know it's not a chance, you know it's not a coincidence.

Fifthly, that leads out of that, we must guard against fanciful interpretations regarding the Scriptures. Here's a rule of thumb: take the meaning of Scripture in its context, take the meaning of the Scripture in its context. You've all heard - it nearly bores me telling it again, but it's a good illustration - about the man who read that Judas went out and hanged himself, and then he flicked through the Bible again and found the text that said 'Go out and do thou likewise'. That's the danger when we use God's word in this fanciful way, we interpret everything as being directly to us, to our particular circumstances, whatever we may be in. Now listen to me: guidance at times transcends our intelligence and human reason. It can be beyond us what God is asking us to do, but there is a difference between transcending our intelligence and reason, and contradicting it - nonsensical things.

Now here is what you need to know: take the meaning as it is in the Scriptures. Let me give you an example from my own personal life, 1 Chronicles 29:1, you don't need to turn to it. I was, because of my age at the time, not allowed to go into Bible College to do pastoral theology and so on. To cut a long story short, one man of God encouraged me to put it in the people's court in the College, and I applied for the College and I got a refusal. Then I decided to wait upon God on the matter, and I believe God spoke to me through 1 Chronicles 29 verse 1, where David could not build the temple because there was blood on his hands - you know the story - but God had chosen Solomon to build the

will today, you need to be very careful - because Satan's objective is to make believers, men and women and boys and girls, confused about guidance and God's will. Because, of course, as we would know of him, he is a liar and a murderer and a cheat from the beginning, he doesn't want us to find God's perfect plan for our lives - but this is often how he goes about confusing us. Sometimes what he does is he comes alongside a believer, and he accuses them of not obeying something in the past that he says, and they think, was God's will - now, it was not God's will at all, but he accuses them of taking a wrong path, and this believer has discerned in their mind that they have in some way chosen 'Plan B' and they can't get out of it, they're locked into it because of something in the past that they did wrong, a wrong choice that they made. Now if you're thinking that today, you need to know that that is of the devil. Because even if you have made wrong decisions in your life - you need to join the club, because there's not one of us that has never done that - you need to know that the Son of God can set us free. There's not two plans in God's mind, or two routes in God's map, but God can break out into so many realms that we have not even imagined - God can set us free, and set us on the right road again. So don't believe that lie of the devil regarding God's will.

Then he can confuse us, not only into thinking that we have chosen the wrong path in the past, but he can confuse us regarding how to discern God's will in the future. This is probably where the most of us are: 'I've this great decision, how do I make it? I can do this, that, or the other. How do I know? Is there some kind of red direct telephone line to heaven, whereby I can discern and divine God's holy will for my life?'. Now, we're going to look at it very practically today, but let me say before we go on any further: it is important that as children of God we must know how God guides, we must know! We must know how to discern God's will!

Let me say, as a foundation before we enter into the actual preliminaries and practical principles involved in God's guidance in our lives: do not believe the lie of the devil that God's will and God's guidance is obscure, that it's something airy-fairy, something mystical, something magical that only these people who have got their heads in the heavens can discern and know which path and which way to go. God's guidance - now mark this - is always clear guidance. Did you hear that? God's guidance is always clear guidance! You might have to wait for a little while until it becomes clear, but when it comes it's always clear. God's word says: 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all'.

Now I'll freely admit to you that it's not always easy to discern God's will, but let us say categorically today: God is not the author of confusion, God's leadings are

never obscure. Satan's ways are full of obscurity, uncertainty, and doubts, and anxiety, I am sure you will agree - but God's will is never like that. Therefore, if His will is always clear, always precise, always definite, the problem must lie with us regarding how we do not tune in to what God wants us to do in our lives. Never lay the problem at God's feet, the problem is always at ours.

The Surrendered Will

So, how can we know God's guidance? Well, this is the first point that I want to dwell on: the primary preparation that is needed, the primary preparation that is needed if we are going to know God's will for our lives. What is the first thing that needs to be done in preparation for you and I to know what God's path is for our lives? Here it is very simply: the surrendered will, the surrendered will. Now I think you'll find that that is the same sermon I've been preaching ever since we started this series 'Back to Basics', but does that not tell a story in itself? The secret to everything in the Christian life, and the secret to guidance in God's will, is a will that already is obeying whatever God has revealed to it at any cost, at any price. You see, if you want to know God's will and have God's will revealed to you, you've got to be prepared to obey God's will. God is not necessarily going to reveal His will to people who are disobedient, whom He knows aren't going to obey it.

You see, there are people who come and they will, in counselling, ask the question: 'I can't find out what God's will is on this particular issue', and it often is the case that there is another issue in their lives, and they're not obeying God regarding it. They're living in disobedience in one area, yet there is another area they want God to speak to them on! Or, perhaps they have found God's will on the issue that they're seeking it upon - but they don't like what God has had to say on it, so they've convinced themselves that there must be something else that God wants me to do: 'It can't be this, because I can't handle this'.

Let's, before we enter into all the supposed formulas regarding the will of God and guidance, lay this down as the primary preparation that is needed to enable us to fulfil God's will: it is being absolutely obedient and surrendered to Him in every area of our lives, finding that God's will is us bending to His will, rather than trying to bend Him to our will - and there's a world of difference! You see, as well as asking regarding God's will, we also need to listen. There's a lot of us do a lot of asking - 'God do this, God do that' - and we're not prepared to sit down, surrender ourselves to God, and listen to what He has to say to us, rather than just talking about what we want to happen in our lives! We need to seek to know

a word of caution: it would be better to have all three agreeing, and wait until it is such, and then go into God's will. The word of God is always the foundation of all our guidance. Some would even add a fourth to this: godly counsel - it's not as important, but it's often advised to meet godly men or women, and seek their advice and counsel.

Now I hope you've got this in your mind: God's word, the written word; the inward urge; and the outward pointers. Now can I just leave you with a few words of wisdom on all these three, so that you'll understand what I'm saying regarding these practical principles involved in God's guidance. Let's look first of all the written word: the first principle I want you to realise is that God never contradicts His word when He guides us. God never, by His Holy Spirit, contradicts Himself. The Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something that He has prohibited against in the Scriptures. On one occasion R.A. Torrey, the evangelist, said that a man came to him and said that God was leading him to marry a certain woman. He said that she was a very devoted Christian woman, and they were greatly drawn to one another, and they felt God was leading them to be married and do a work for the Lord. Torrey retorts: 'But I said to him, 'You're already married! You've got a wife already!'.

The fact of the matter is, it doesn't matter what we feel or even what our circumstances are like, we have to obey God's word. God will never lead us to do something through circumstances, or through an inner urge, that is not found in His word, or that is against His word. Secondly, God will never lead us through His word into anything that will contradict duty, anything that will contradict duty. In other words, if you feel you're being led to do something that evades a moral obligation that you have, or violates an honest principle, that leading is spurious. God never leads you to rob a bank, do you understand? That would be in direct disregard of God commandments, but in more obscure things God will never ask you to do something that will make you fail other men and transgress in another area of Scripture. Three: in order for God to speak to you through the written word, one of the most obvious things that you need to realise is that you need to search the Scriptures, you need to be in God's word! How can God lead you through His word if you're not reading His word? So you need to study prayerfully, and regularly, the Scriptures.

This is what often happens: you get into an emergency, your back is against the wall, and you turn to God's word! It's a big problem that you have, it's an emergency matter, but you see God guides every day of our lives - and the principle, I believe, is this: if you seek God in the small things, and commit the small things to the Lord every day in your life, when the big things come along you often know instinctively what to do. 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, lean not on thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths'.

Now I'm not talking about a ridiculous fanaticism that prays to the Lord: 'What colour of socks should I wear this morning?', or 'What route should I take to work?' - that

goes against all the circumstances in our lives that have been ordered by God, we have to reject it.

Now I'll show you in a minute or two how all these work together and agree with one another, but let me say this: in order to know that guidance is of God, if those three principles agree, guidance becomes clear. If the word of God has assured you of an issue, the Spirit of God has given the witness and peace in your heart, and thirdly the circumstances around you allow that thing to take place, you don't need to hesitate, you don't need to wait, all you need to do is agree and believe. Now if that doesn't happen, well, you should wait.

One of the most famous Bible teachers of last century, or two centuries ago now, F. B. Meyer, espoused this belief as well. He was on the deck of the Dublin-Holyhead boat returning home, and he wondered how the crew knew when and how to safely steer to the dock. It was a very stormy night, and as he stood on the deck with the visibility low he, from the bridge, peered through a window and asked the Captain: 'How do you know when to turn this ship into the narrow harbour?'. The Captain replied: 'Well sir, that's an art!', but he went on to explain, he said 'Do you see those three red lights on the shore? When they're all in a straight line, they all converge together, I go right in'. Later F. B. Meyer said in one of his writings: 'When we want to know God's will, there are three things which always occur: one, the inward impulse; two, the word of God; three, the trend of circumstances - never act until those three agree'. Did you get it? When those three converge in your life, it's time to go in!

Ecclesiastes 4 says a threefold cord is not easily broken, and this is a threefold cord concerning the will of God. Now let me remind you of it again, and I want you to write this down if you've got a pen, if you want to know God's will you need to remember this: one, the written word; two, the inward urge; three, the outward pointers.

One, God's word - now listen, if God's word makes it clear you don't need to wait on the inward urge, you don't need to wait on the outward pointers, because God's word is our final rule of faith. Has it ever struck you, as a believer, that the vast majority of the will of God has already been revealed in the Bible? You're running around: 'What's God's will for me?' - most of it is in the Bible, and we've got to get to grips with obeying it before we're looking for other things to do. The inward urge and the outward pointers - let me say that if the inward urge agrees with the word of God, you can be sure it's God's will. If the outward circumstances agree with God's word, you can be sure it's God's will, but can I air

God's will, that's true, but we need not just be guided - we need to seek God's will in order to be used.

Someone has said: 'God is not as concerned about what you ought to be, as who you ought to be'. I can't start this subject without getting past this one: God's primary desire for you is not that you go down Road A, B or C, or be a missionary, an evangelist, or a physician - God's will for you is that you be like Christ, and that you surrender your whole being completely to Him, and allow the Holy Spirit of the living God to fill you. If you haven't got to that place, forget about guidance! All things hang on complete surrendered to the lordship of Christ.

On one occasion an ocean liner sank just off the Irish coast - and the maritime world was bewildered, a bit like after the sinking of the Titanic, but the reason this time being that the ship's captain was one of the worlds most excellent seamen. No one, but no one could figure out what had gone wrong, what caused the sinking of the ship. Eventually divers were sent down, and one of the items that was brought up was the ship's compass box. After further examination it was opened, and there was found to be the point of a knife blade inside. Apparently what happened was, while one of the ship's mates was cleaning the compass, the sailor broke the tip of the knife off which had fallen in and lodged itself in the compass device. It was only the smallest, tiniest bit of metal, but it was enough to obscure the whole compass and to bring a bad reading - and the result was that the ship took a wrong course and crashed into the rocky coast.

Now listen, here is a lesson: the apostle says in Hebrews 12 that we are to follow those great cloud of witnesses, and lay aside every sin that so easily besets us; and look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross - but you can't get by this, you can't follow Christ in His way, wherever He wants you to go, until you lay aside those weights and sins. Those sins will obscure the reading of your compass, and send you all over the place. Romans 12 tells us the same thing: *'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed through the renewing of your mind, that ye may know and be able to do what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God'*.

Here is the primary preparation needed: you've got to surrender your all to Christ if you want to know what He wants you to do. Some of you are struggling with

that - and I'll tell you, I feel like preaching on it till kingdom come, because until you get this grasped in your life, you will never get any further, you'll never succeed, you'll always be banging your head against a brick wall in your Christian experience, you'll always be defeated and dejected. If you're fighting with this issue in your life, you will always find it hard to know God's will. A. W. Tozer said: 'The man or woman who is wholly and joyously surrendered to Christ can't make a wrong choice, any choice will be the right choice'.

The Practical Principles

We must move on to look at what is probably in most of your minds: the practical principles involved in guidance in God's will. Sidlow Baxter, in his book 'Does God Still Guide?', gives very interesting illustrations on this matter and teaching. One of the first things he says is this: 'If you remember the children of Israel in the book of Exodus, when they were in the desert and God commanded them to build a tabernacle, God spoke to them in three ways' - three ways. 'One, through the pillar of cloud and fire; two, through the blowing of the trumpet; and three, through the Urim and Thummim', which were just like jewels or crystals whereby God supernaturally allowed men to discern His will. The pillar of cloud and fire was communication to the eye, the trumpet was communication to the ear, and if you like the Urim and Thummim was a bit more personal to the individual, and it came to the heart for exceptional circumstances. Then he notices that when we move from the wilderness, and Israel become a covenant people through the giving of the law, and they enter into the promised land, there are still three ways whereby God communicates guidance to them. A bit more definite this time, first of all there is the guidance of the Mosaic Scriptures - Genesis through to Deuteronomy, the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, the Pentateuch. But again, it's the same as the pillar of fire and cloud, because it's through the eye to the mind to the heart, God is communicating His guidance through the eye. Then secondly there is the judge or the prophet, the man of God who speaks God's will, inspired of God. If the written word speaks to the eye, to the heart, then the prophet or the judge speaks to the ear, and from the ear subsequently to the heart. Thirdly there was again the Urim and Thummim, speaking again directly to the person about personal circumstances.

Now, those are threefold guidances - in the camp, what was it? It was the pillar of cloud and fire, it was the blowing of the trumpet, and third it was the Urim and Thummim. In the land, what was it? It was the Scriptures, and then secondly it was the judge or the prophet, and then again it was the Urim and Thummim.

Now when we go into the New Testament, we find that there is a different emphasis, that God isn't chiefly wanting to guide a covenant people like Israel, a national race, but God is wanting to guide individual Christians - people like you and me. Although that's different, and although there are new inspired Scriptures, and the Gospels of the Lord Jesus, and although something very significant has taken place - i.e. in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost the Holy Spirit has not just come to live with His people, but He has come to dwell in His people, the life of God in us so that we are led by the indwelling Spirit - all those things are tremendous, and great changes, but there are still three principal ways that God guides us. Those three principal ways are along the same lines: one, He speaks to us in promise through His word. This time, as New Testament believers, it's the Gospels He speaks to us through, the promises that the Lord Jesus Christ give us that we have now inherited as the church of Jesus. Secondly, He speaks to us in experience - not just through the word, but in experience, that is the book of Acts. We look at the acts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the apostles and the early believers, and isn't that still the way God speaks to us today: in our experiences, driven by the Spirit? Thirdly, He speaks to us in doctrine - that's the epistles, the teaching of the word of God, how we are to behave ourselves and act orderly and conduct ourselves in the house of God, that is the church of the living God.

It's threefold again: in promise, the Gospels; in experience, the Acts; in doctrine, the Epistles. We see right away that right throughout scripture there emerges a reliable theory and practice of guidance. Can I give it to you in summary? If you forget everything else, this is what I'm trying to make you understand today - here is how we know God's guidance in our life: one, the written word, the written word of God, Old and New Testament. Two, the inward urge, the Spirit that indwells us, God the Holy Ghost; and three, the indication by outward circumstances, things that are going on around us that have been directed by the providential sovereign hand of Almighty God. Did you get them? The written word, the inward urge, and the outward circumstance.

Now, I would have to say that those are not the only means of guidance, there are other ways that God can speak, even in very supernatural ways - and I don't want to get into that now, but what I do want to say is that those three principles involved in guidance are always the test of whatever other guidance we have received. Do you understand? If something does not weigh up with God's word, it cannot be from God. If the Spirit is grieved within our hearts regarding something that we think is guidance from God, it cannot be of God. If something