

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD

A Study of the Light from Heaven

that helps the Faithful

Navigate the Darkness on Earth

by

Ed Mathews

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Posted in the United States of America for everyone throughout the world
seeking to do the will of the sovereign Master of the universe.

Glory, honor and praise to Him both now and forever.

DEDICATION

This book is graciously dedicated to those students who went into the “highways and byways” of the world. You ventured forth under the guidance of God to search for the lost. You felt His presence. You were shown the way. You followed His prompting. You obeyed His will.

I pray that my efforts to clarify His leading made your journey less arduous. Your comments and suggestions while seeking the counsel of God did much to focus and improve what is found on the following pages.

As you know, I wanted to be on the front lines with you. Circumstances prevented that from happening. Therefore, your encouragement in and out of class became my lifeline. It provided a meaningful outlet for my yearning to be in the trenches in some distant land.

For all of that (and much more), I am profoundly grateful. I especially appreciate what you do for the sake of His name. May He guide you (and may you follow Him) until He returns.

Ed Mathews
March 6, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

The world is in a perilous condition. Religious leaders often have spiritual cataracts. Their devoted followers walk in the dark. Together they stumble along. The ditch of disaster looms ahead. It is only a matter of time until both of them wander off the path.

The prophet Isaiah described this pitiful situation. “Those who guide this people mislead them and those who are guided are led astray,” Isaiah 9:16; cf. Isaiah 3:12b. He believed the messengers of God “ought to preserve knowledge.” The children of God “ought to seek instruction.” But neither did what they should have done, Malachi 2:7,8. As a result, the community of faith was “robbed of the truth,” I Timothy 6:5. “They brought disaster upon themselves, Isaiah 3:9b. Everyone suffered.

Jesus called such people “blind guides.” And, He reasoned, “If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit,” Matthew 15:14. In His day, houses of worship were crawling with these religious fakes. The Lord advised His disciples to “leave them,” to let them alone. They were not reliable sources of guidance. For, unfortunately, their blindness was self-willed. They deliberately chose the darkness rather than the light, John 3:19,20. And, to compound their error, they proudly called their blindness sight, John 9:41.

Little has changed. The blind are still relying on the sightless to guide them. They remain ignorant of His will. They grope in a swamp of religious misinformation. They want the help of God but follow the uncertain suggestions of men. Unaware of the fraud that entangles them, they move ahead in a blissful fog, confused in their attempt to discern the leading from above.

The blindness of the blind is their jeopardy. They have no way of judging the value of the counsel they receive. Authoritative sounding words are no proof of clear vision. Self-proclaimed guides are accepted solely because they claim to be guides, Romans 2:18-24. Sadly they are merely announcing the “delusions of their own minds,” Jeremiah 14:14. God does not send such charlatans to prey on His people, Jeremiah 23:21,32. Only the blind submit to the leading of the blind.

. **Wanting the Will of God.** The saints must follow the purposes of heaven. “The man who does the will of God lives forever,” I John 2:17. And, thankfully, we can know the plans He has for our life. “Do not be foolish,” Paul wrote, “but understand what the Lord's will is,” Ephesians 5:17. God equips us “with everything good for doing His will.” Plus He works in us what is pleasing to Him, Hebrews 13:21. Submission is our part. When we yield to Him, He empowers us. Samuel was attentive when God spoke. He said, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is

listening,” I Samuel 3:10. We should have a similar attitude. We must wholeheartedly desire to know Him. Divine guidance begins with our wanting Him to show us His way.

. Following the Will of God. Heaven has a “set purpose,” Acts 2:23. The saints are chosen ones. We are special to Him, “the first fruits of all He created,” James 1:18. He actively works in our lives. He gives us a map. He shows us the way. He leads us through the maze of life. He cheers us on. But, make no mistake about it, a journey with the Lord is never a joy ride. It includes discipline. It requires suffering, I Peter 4:1,2. Yet, it promises a grand reward, Hebrews 10:35,36. Consequently, to know the will of God is the greatest scholarship, to do the will of God is the greatest achievement.

David is a prime example. When Saul died, the way was open for the former shepherd to take the throne. He had been anointed. His time of patient waiting was over. The moment of decisive action had come. But he did not take a step without the direction of God. He “inquired of the Lord,” II Samuel 2:1. Becoming king did not release him from deferring to the King of kings. Like us, David was liable to stray from the purpose of Jehovah. For “there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death,” Proverbs 14:12; cf. Proverbs 12:15. Why is this so? Our ignorance, our pride, and our ambition blind our eyes and close our ears. Truly “it is not in man to direct his steps,” Jeremiah 10:23b. Our past failures speak volumes about our present vulnerabilities. We do not have the good sense to steer ourselves through life. We need the guidance of the Lord, Psalms 31:3.

It behooves us to do everything in our limited power to prepare for His prompting. We should consider our situation and inventory our capabilities. We should listen to the voice of conscience and seek the advice of wise people. We should observe the ways of providence and study scripture. But, above all, we should pray for His leading. David said, “I sought the Lord and He answered me,” Psalms 34:4.

The faithful followers of God can move ahead with confidence. We have the anointing of the Spirit. We know the truth, I John 2:20. What a blessing! No more confused wondering. No more aimless guessing. The Holy Spirit will prepare our hearts, enlighten our minds, and nudge our wills. That is His promise. We can count on it, Psalms 32:8; 48:14.

CHAPTER ONE

CERTAINTY OF GUIDANCE

A tourist visited a popular tapestry shop in Turkey. He was interested in seeing how the weavers made their beautiful pieces of art. The workers had their hands full of colored threads. They were interlacing various shades of red, blue, yellow, and green on a loom. To the surprise of the tourist, the fabric was an ugly tangle of dangling strings. The apparent mess had no design. It made no sense. It seemed like the erratic play of a little child.

The visitor said, "I do not understand. Your workers are producing a worthless jumble of snarled threads. I came to see how your world-renowned tapestry is made. Surely this is not how it is done."

"Your observation is quite correct," the shop owner replied. "It is not very pretty now. Return in a couple of days. When it is finished, you will change your mind."

The tourist returned at the appointed time. But, once again, he was disappointed at what he saw. Though the tapestry was closer to completion, it still looked like a confused, disorganized wad of threads. The tourist shook his head. "I still do not see the beauty in all the mess." The shop owner smiled. He gently took the foreign visitor around to the other side of the loom. "Wow!" the tourist gasped. "It is incredible." The artistic mingling of the various colors was easily seen. The beauty was awesome. The tourist was speechless.

The tapestry is woven from the under side. Those who do not know what the weaver is doing see only the snarled ends of twisted threads. On the underneath side, there is no meaningful symmetry, no arresting design.

So, too, it is with our lives. On the earth side, things do not often make sense. But, in the hands of the Master Weaver, the heaven side of our life is beautiful. David wrote, "He makes my way perfect," Psalms 18:32. He can do that because "His way is perfect," Psalms 18:30. Here we may see only tangled threads of confusion, knotted strings of disappointment. Our life seems meaningless. However, if we allow Him to control the various strands of our existence, He will, in time, produce an amazing work of art.

* * * * *

Likely you have already heard the illustration of the tourist in the tapestry shop (or some variation of it). Familiarity with the story does not diminish the value of the truth it expresses. To put it simply, the greatest mistake we can make is to reject something we do not fully understand.

The guidance of God may not be completely knowable. But it is entirely believable. If we trust His word, if we believe in His promises, there is ample reason to know He leads us. The Bible says it over and over.

“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way,”
Psalms 25:9.

“You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory,”
Psalm 73:24

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight,” Proverbs 3:5,6.

“The Lord will guide you always,” Isaiah 58:11a.

“It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose,”
Philippians 2:13.

These are grand promises. They fill us with hope. They encourage us through the tough patches in our spiritual journey. They challenge us to move ahead when we cannot see the goal that lies beyond our grasp.

Still there are some unsaid things in these wonderful guarantees.

- . We are not promised guidance for the DISTANT FUTURE.
- . We are not given PRECISE DETAILS on how God will guide.
- . We are not promised a CONFIDENT ASSURANCE once we have been guided.

These three unsaid things are what create the anxiety about divine guidance. And, unless we are careful, they can lead to a crippling doubt.

As is often said, we should “live by faith” in matters involving the operations of heaven, II Corinthians 5:7. This is infinitely obvious with the leading of the Lord. “We are born only yesterday and know nothing,” Job 8:9. “How great is God—beyond our understanding,” Job 36:26. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways, Isaiah 55:8,9. When the scripture mentions His thoughts and His

ways, it is referring to His decisions and actions (which are the external expressions of His internal will).

What is meant by the phrase “will of God?” We talk about it often. We glibly speak of its existence. We act as if we grasp its meaning. A closer look may yield a much needed refinement in our understanding.

. The Old Testament frequently speaks of the will of God, Ezra 10:11; Psalms 40:8; 143:10. The Lord made a genuine effort to communicate with human beings, Hebrews 1:1,2. The Most High, the God of gods wanted His people to be informed. And, since He made His will known, He expected them to follow it. “As soon as they hear Me,” God said, “they will obey Me,” Psalms 18:44.

. The New Testament takes the idea a step further. It seems to make a case for different levels of His will. (1) The **DECREED WILL** of God is the absolute, unchanging, irresistible plan of the Lord, Matthew 26:39; Acts 2:23; Romans 9:19; Ephesians 1:11. Included in His decreed will are His plans, precepts, and purposes that will not change (and cannot be changed). His decreed will is His firm intentions, John 6:38-40; Acts 4:27,28; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:3-10. (2) The **DESIRED WILL** of God is the relative, changing, resistible wish of the Lord, I Thessalonians 4:3; I Timothy 2:3,4; Hebrews 13:20,21. Humans can (and should) choose to “accept” it, Matthew 7:21; John 7:17; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:17. But humans can also choose to “ignore” it, Hebrews 2:1-4. Consequently, while we are always under the decreed will, we can reject the desired will of God.

These two levels of His will can be operative at different times in the life of the same person. For example, early in his missionary career, Paul was guided by the decreed will of God. He was “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” and “not allowed” to enter Bithynia, Acts 16:6-8. Later, however, near the end of his missionary work, Paul hoped that the desired will of God might open the way for him to go to Rome, Romans 1:10.

In the above paragraph, the first instance of divine leading required dutiful compliance. The second offered helpful assistance. The first demanded strict obedience. The second allowed optional cooperation. Both were the guidance of God. The following chapters focus almost entirely on the desired will of the Lord—something we need but often neglect.

* * * * *

Jehovah rescued His people from slavery. The exodus from Egypt was under the guiding hand of God. He used a cloud to lead them through the barren wilderness,

Exodus 13:21. Their pilgrimage foreshadowed our passage through life. The cloud was a shelter in the day from the oppressive heat of the desert. It was a light at night to keep them from wandering away. It hovered over them in vigilant protection. And, when appropriate, it moved ahead of them as a gracious guide. No wonder they saw God as their “light” and “salvation,” Psalms 27:1.

The Lord was present in Israel. He is with us today. He promised never to leave them, Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalms 48:14. He said He would be with us “always,” Matthew 18:20; 28:20b. He clears the way for His people to move ahead, I Thessalonians 3:11.

The cloud was not managed by the Israelites. His guidance is not determined by human wishes. Sometimes the cloud lingered long in one place (as though it had forgotten how to move). At other times, it forged on ahead. In a similar manner, our guidance can seem arbitrary, undetectable, and confusing. It can be obvious or hidden. It can be active or passive. It demands patience. It calls for preparedness. God will guide when and how guidance is needed. The choice is His.

When the cloud moved, the people moved. When the cloud stood still, the people pitched their tents. Likewise, we should follow His lead. For, apart from Him, we are merely aimless wanderers. We will surely fail, John 6:68; 14:6. Israel learned the hard way. On one occasion, they presumed to go when the cloud did not move. Disaster ensued, Numbers 14:44,45. When we presume to go beyond the permission of the Lord, the same fate awaits us, I Corinthians 10:11,12.

* * * * *

This is my prayer: *“that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

The apostle affectionately longed for his spiritual brothers and sisters in Philippi, Philippians 1:8. He claimed that these saints were some of his dearest friends, Philippians 2:12; 4:1. Therefore, he prayed for them. In fact, he literally wrote “I keep praying” for you.

The Philippians were not “fair weather friends” to Paul. They sent aid to the apostle “again and again” when he was in need, Philippians 4:16. Likewise, Paul was not a “fair weather friend” to the Philippians. He prayed for them “continually,” I Thessalonians 5:17. He knew that the faithful “should always pray,” Luke 18:1; cf. Philippians 1:4. So, while a prisoner in a Roman jail, he stayed on his knees, praying again and again for his beloved friends.

His thoughts were not focused on his own dangers and hardships. Instead, the spiritual maturity of his close comrades occupied his mind. It was his joy to think of

them gaining deeper insights into the will of God.

That is also my concern for you. My greatest wish is that you may know His will for your life. And, because I want you to follow His will, I continually speak on your behalf to the One who is ready to guide you to His home above. I sincerely hope you will listen to what He says.

CHAPTER TWO

EXAMPLES OF GUIDANCE

When I look ahead, the path is steep. The rocks are jagged. The thorns are sharp. "It is too difficult," I confess. "I cannot do it!"

"Take My hand," He whispers. "I will help you." We walk on together as good friends should and do. Soon the day grows dim. The sun begins to set. Darkness approaches. I become uneasy. "Read My word," He suggests. "It is a light to guide you along the way," cf. Psalms 119:105.

We continue to climb. The trail gets narrower. It seems that few have gone this far. The thorns reach out to grab me but the Lord brushes them aside with the back of His hand. "You are safe as long as you stay with Me," He says.

Then I begin to feel weary. My strength gives out. "I cannot go further, Lord!" He smiles. He understands. "Here," He offers, "Let Me carry you." Then I remember that His power is made perfect in my weakness, II Corinthians 12:9.

Finally, we reach a huge, green pasture. He gently puts me down. I see His bloodied hands and bruised feet. Pointing at His wounds, I ask, "Are these for Me?"

"Yes," He says, "for you and for everyone who allows Me to lead them."

I fall at His feet, humbled by His sacrifice. "Lord," I promise, "Wherever You lead me, I will follow. There is no road too long, no valley too deep, no hill too high, no thorn too sharp, if You are with me!"

God knows each of His children. Everyone who follows Him will make it home, John 10:28-30. Like a faithful shepherd, He calls them by their name, John 10:3. He leads them to lush pastures and quiet waters, Psalms 23:1,2. His sheep are secure (though danger is not far away). He does not hide His face from their distress. He listens to their cry for help, Psalms 22:24. He lays down His life for His sheep. He protects His followers from harm, John 10:11-13. Is it any wonder, then, that He is called the Good Shepherd?

* * * * *

Christians believe in divine guidance. Yet, when confronted with a difficult

situation, their faith is frequently paralyzed. They want God to lead them. They think He can. They wish He would. But they do not have the foggiest idea HOW He does.

This is a major concern. Without some sense of the particulars regarding His guidance, the faithful “have eyes but cannot see.” They easily fall prey to a host of unhealthy claims about the leading of the Lord. It behooves us to be biblical in our understanding of this important concept.

The Book of Acts is a good place to start. Numerous examples of divine guidance occurred during the early history of the Church.

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Phillip, 'Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian...This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot...The Spirit told Phillip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it,'" Acts 8:26-29.

“While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them,'" Acts 10:19,20.

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off," Acts 13:2,3.

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them," Acts 16:9,10.

“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, 'The Holy Spirit says, In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles,'" Acts 21:10,11.

“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick,' He said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about Me,'" Acts 22:17,18.

All of these examples of divine guidance from the Book of Acts have one thing in common. They are all supernatural. The instructions from heaven came through an angel, a vision, the Holy Spirit, a prophet, and the Lord Himself. The directions were clear. The communication was precise. The recipients learned exactly what they were to do (or what would be done to them). Hence, if we limit ourselves to the Book of Acts, we could rightfully conclude that all guidance from God is miraculous.

However, an appropriate study of the Bible requires one to look at the rest of the New Testament. In other words, what examples of supernatural guidance are there in the letters of Paul, Peter, and John? Surprisingly, in the epistles, there is no mention of heaven miraculously leading anyone to do anything. If, then, we were to limit ourselves to the inspired letters, we could rightfully conclude that divine guidance is NOT supernatural.

What, then, should we assume from this study of divine guidance in the New Testament? Though supernatural guidance is found, it is certainly not the only method of His leading. Why?

. When miraculous guidance was given, human decisions were still required, Acts 10:17,19;16:10.

. And, though the first missionary journey of Paul was initiated by the Holy Spirit, Acts 13:2,3, the second, Acts 15:30, and the third, Acts 18:23, journeys were a matter of human judgment.

Thus, when the Lord promises guidance, we must not assume that it will always be supernatural. The means of His guidance are solely His choice. The option to follow it is our choice.

When the net of research is cast far and wide throughout the inspired word, a person can come to but one conclusion. The ordinary process of moving forward was usually via human planning. Facts were gathered. Variables were weighted. Possibilities were considered. A decision was reached. And, in light of these determinations, an action was taken, cf. I Corinthians 16:5-9.

Ordinary human judgment figured heavily in the experiences of divine guidance in scripture. How, then, did God guide? In the simplest terms, He guided by the Holy Spirit, John 14:26; 16:13; cf. I John 2:20,27. The Bible plainly says that the Spirit "guides," "teaches," and "reminds." Because believers are anointed with the Spirit, they "know the truth." And, though there might be those who try to lead them astray, if they remain in Him, they will not fall victim to the false inducements of evil people.

These assurances are welcome. For there are a multitude of pretenders peddling various ideas about the leading of the Lord. We should stay focused on what God says. If He is guiding us, we ought to let Him tell us how the Holy Spirit leads. And, thankfully, that is precisely what He does.

The guidance of God is hidden from human beings, I Corinthians 2:9. If He does not reveal it, we cannot comprehend it. But, the Lord has made His will known to the faithful by the Holy Spirit, I Corinthians 2:10a. Thus, we can “understand what God has freely given us,” I Corinthians 2:12. For, like the spirit of man knows man, so the Spirit of God knows God, I Corinthians 2:10b,11. And the Spirit who knows God teaches the things of God to those who have His Spirit, I Corinthians 2:13. Therefore, we can make “judgments” about the various teachings on guidance advocated by pseudo spiritual charlatans, I Corinthians 2:15.

The term “judgment” means to appraise or to investigate. The man without the Spirit is ill equipped to evaluate the numerous claims about divine guidance. Faithful believers are. They “examine” (which is the same word as “appraise” or “investigate”) the scriptures daily to determine the truth of what they hear, Acts 17:11. In other words, the Spirit helps us investigate scripture. When we get into the word, the word gets into us, Hebrews 4:12. The word “penetrates” the inner sanctum of our mind. It probes the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. So, as we judge the word, the word appraises us. As we investigate the scripture, scripture critiques us. We look into it. It looks into us. This is the usual method of guidance. The Lord provides the directions. We must be eager to follow them.

God does not desire to guide us magically. He wants us to know His mind, to grasp His heart. This means that we must be so soaked with His word that we will know instinctively what decision to make in ever situation. We need hearts so sensitive to the promptings of His Spirit that we automatically take the proper steps in all circumstances.

The prerequisites are clear. We must study His word daily. The Holy Spirit will teach, remind, and guide us with the precepts we glean from scripture. And, in order to prepare us for that guidance, we must be on our knees constantly. For prayer opens our hearts, softens our minds, and nurtures our will to receive His prodding. Divine guidance is available. Are we available for divine guidance?

“Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth..., Psalms 25:4,5.

“Teach me Your way, O Lord, lead me in a straight path..., Psalms 27:11.

“Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name,” Psalm 86:11.

“I seek You with all of my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands....Direct me in the path of Your commands....Turn my heart toward Your statutes....Direct my footsteps according to Your word...,
Psalms 119:10,35,36,133.

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” Colossians 1:9.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him,” James 1:5.

In former times, this was the way the saints were guided by God. Is it not the way we are lead by Him now?

* * * * *

Israel certainly needed the guidance of God. The trip from Egypt to the Promised Land required crossing a barren desert with no road signs. It was a wasteland in every direction as far as the eye could see. Sand to the right. Sand to the left. Sand before and behind. The journey was hopeless unless God went with them, Exodus 13:21,22.

The cloud stayed in front of the people. Otherwise they would have gone astray. They marched on where their unaided hope would fail, where their unguided heart would grow weary. They marched on through uncertain valleys and across monotonous plains. They marched without getting lost, without losing their way. He did not leave them or forsake them, Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5. And neither will he abandon us, Hebrews 13:5.

He is with us even “to the very end of the age,” Matthew 28:20. There is no part of our life from which He withdraws. In the darkest night, He is there. In the brightness day, He is present. He is ever at hand to restrain, to correct, and to rescue. By internal and external coaching, He directs our steps. By His word, by His Spirit, by our conscience, He intervenes to save us from ourselves, to keep us on the path, to show us the way. Darkness does not hide Him. For, “darkness is light” to Him, Psalms 139:12. He keeps our lamp burning. He turns night into day, Psalms 18:28.

His guidance varied to fit the different needs of the journey. Sometimes it was by a bright cloud. At other times it was by an awesome fire. Nothing was off limits regarding the means He might employ. On one occasion He used the cloud to separate His people from their enemies, Exodus 4:9,20. On another occasion, He

confused the adversary, Exodus 24:24. At all times, He chooses the method best suited to accomplish His purpose. He is in control of every situation. No one need shrink back in fear.

The cloud did not depart from His people until they reached the Land of Promise. His guidance is given for the entire trip. As Israel needed His leading, so we depend on His help until we have passed through the wilderness of life. What we need, we have. The Spirit will guide us all the way home.

* * * * *

*This is my prayer: **that your love** may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,"* Philippians 1:9,10.

The apostle prayed again and again that the love of the Philippians for the truth might have no limits. We cannot succeed in our Christian walk if we do not relish the rigors of the journey. Such love is of God because "God is love," I John 4:16b. It is evidence of His indwelling. For "whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him," I John 4:16c. Love is the motivating power that keeps us moving forward.

Love penetrates through all the disguises of error. It generates the enthusiasm to keep on keeping on when things appear useless. Christians are able "to test all things, hold on to the good, and avoid every kind of evil" because they deeply love what is right, I Thessalonians 5:21,22. They prefer to be guided by God rather than influenced by the world. They have made a choice and they intend to keep it.

Love for the guidance of God is found in every believer. But there is always room for more. Jesus said, "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," Matthew 22:37. Therefore, the prayer of Paul is still current. Our capacity for truth must expand. Our search for His guidance must continue.

Love cannot lie dormant. Otherwise it will die. Our love for His presence must be nurtured. It must result in a closer walk with God. There can be no nobler ambition, no greater accomplishment. To follow the Lord, to obey His will, to recognize His guidance, to go where He leads, to do what He asks, to die in His embrace—this is the grandest aspiration of life, the greatest theme of prayer.

CHAPTER THREE

KINDS OF GUIDANCE

While visiting Dallas, I observed a blind man walking briskly along a busy street. He had a “seeing eye” dog. It is intriguing to watch a “service” animal work. As I observed the blind man and his dog, I learned a valuable lesson. There was a strong bond of trust between them. Without the slightest concern, the man followed his guide. He seemed oblivious to the danger around him. He allowed his dog to take the lead.

The traffic was heavy. Horns blared. Engines roared. Tires screeched. People yelled. But the blind man and his dog ignored it all. One thoughtless moment, one microsecond lapse in vigilance could have ended in disaster. An unexpected brake failure, a sudden tire blowout could have shattered the safety of those nearby. But the man and his dog calmly moved ahead.

The two of them stood out in the crowd. The man by himself was helpless on that congested city sidewalk. However, with his guide dog, he was probably safer than anyone else. The animal had complete composure amidst all the confusion. He showed no signs of distraction, no nervous hesitation. When all was clear, he stepped off the curb and lead the man safely across the busy street.

Is not the blind man and his “seeing eye” dog like a believer and His “seeing eye” God? In effect, we are blind (and surrounded by many dangers). The Lord watches over us, Psalms 33:18; 34:15. His eyes are on our ways, Job 34:21; 36:7. We are the “apple of His eye,” Psalms 17:8. Our circumstances are always in full view of the Lord, Proverbs 15:3.

Why, then, do we not put our complete trust in Him? He is our “eyes” when we cannot see. He promises “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you,” Psalms 32:8. He sees what mortals cannot see, Job 10:4. The invisible is visible to Him. Should not our actions reflect our faith? There is no reason to be anxious. There is no need to be nervous. There is no sense in worrying, Matthew 6:34. God is better than the best “seeing eye” dog.

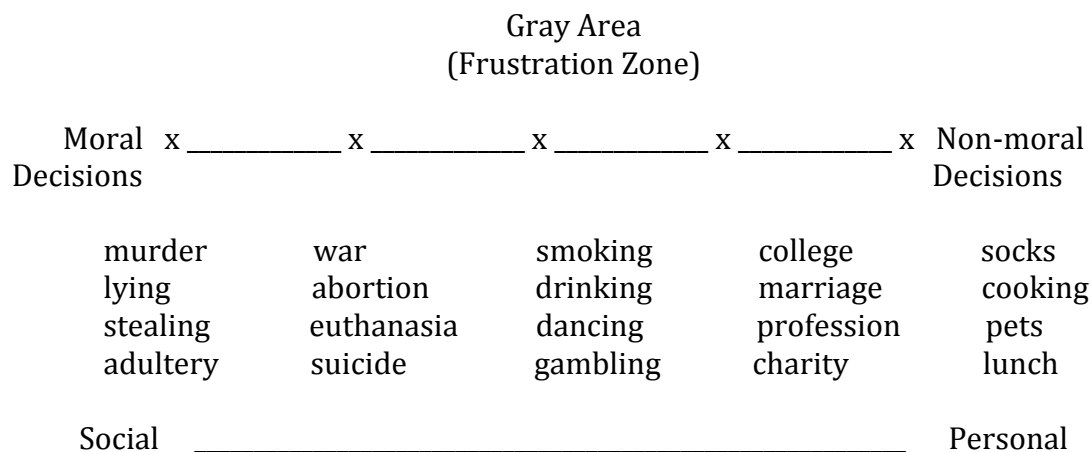
* * * * *

What have we learned so far in our study about the guidance of the Lord?

- . socks to wear
- . cake to bake
- . pet to buy
- . food for lunch

Heaven has not given directives regarding such decisions. We are free to choose between the alternatives as we wish. No moral obligations are involved.

So far, so good! Things seem easy. The decisions up to this point are clearly between “black and white” choices. In other words, the simplest issues are at either end of the continuum—the moral and non-moral decisions. As we move toward the center of the continuum—which (in the above illustration) we have called the gray area—frustration increases. The decisions get harder. The choices are definitely less plain, less clear, less obvious, and less precise.



When moving from left to right along the continuum, decisions become more complex (or guidance becomes less clear). Why? A single “thus says the Lord” is not available. So we must carefully deliberate and delicately balance the pros and cons of each dilemma. Christians will not always agree. You may not like where I have placed the various items along the continuum. That is to be expected. The closer we move to the “gray area” the more discussion we will likely have. At the heart of the “frustration zone” is where disagreement is most intense. It is where great moral issues exist without clear divine direction to solve them. It is where believers must work the hardest to get along with one another, Romans 14:2,13-18.

When moving from right to left along of the continuum, the same increase in frustration will likely occur.

- . college to attend
- . choice of spouse
- . profession to pursue
- . charity to support

These are very personal choices that may receive very different responses from different individuals. In most cases, they involve few moral implications and no clear divine guidance. The remainder of this book will focus on the desired will of God in the gray area of human responsibility.

However, there are those who say, "God will always reveal His will to every sincere seeker!" In other words, regardless of what a person asks, he or she will receive a specific answer. This is a powerfully attractive statement. It removes the "gray area." It is also a powerfully dangerous statement.

The Danger	Reason for the Danger
It is <u>unscriptural</u> .	God has not promised to reveal His clear and unmistakable will for every non-moral decision.
It is <u>unrealistic</u> .	In spite of claims that there is only one right way, several options are usually available.
It is <u>immature</u> .	Those who claim to get such guidance often make foolish decisions due to a lack of wisdom.

No one needs to feel guilty for not having guidance for every decision in life. The lack of divine direction does not indicate that one is any less a child of God. Quite to the contrary! God sometimes leaves His children so they can have an opportunity to exercise their own discretion, to discover what is in their heart, cf. II Chronicles 32:31. The Lord is interested in followers "who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good and evil," Hebrews 5:14. Therefore, the Lord allows us some latitude to make our own decisions in non-moral matters.

* * * * *

The Lord solemnly vowed to lead Israel through the desert. "An angel" was commissioned to guide them to the Promised Land, the place God had "prepared" for them, Exodus 23:20. He had already done enough to demonstrate His power, to show His faithfulness. Unfortunately, there remained some lingering symptoms of

doubt. The Lord wished their resolve would take deeper root. He begged them to “pay attention” to their guiding angel, Exodus 23:21a. The land of promise was ready to be occupied, Exodus 23:23.

. **Assurance of Guidance.** The angel would safely deliver the people of God, Exodus 23:23. He would not guide them some of the way or most of the way. The angel would lead them all the way home. How? His guidance was not fully explained. Questions may have arisen. Perplexities may have surfaced. God did not clarify. He did not discuss. He told them what they needed to know. “Listen” to the angel, the Lord advised, Exodus 23:21a. No conversation required. No debate necessary. The angel knew the way. He was qualified for the job. All uncertainty, all doubt, all vacillation was wasted energy. The guidance of the Lord was guaranteed.

. **Peril of Neglect.** Failure to follow the Lord had dire repercussions. Pain and loss were the inevitable consequences. Israel must not “rebel” against the angel, Exodus 23:21b. Why? “My name is in him,” God said, Exodus 23:21c. The guiding angel was a manifestation of Jehovah Himself. If the people disobeyed the angel, they were disobeying heaven. The result of such careless behavior was dreadful. The angel represented both the “kindness and sternness” of God, Romans 11:22. To ignore him was to offend the Lord. Israel needed the reminder. There was nothing about this arrangement that on the surface suggested such imminent danger. The people could easily become used to their gentle guide and forget his stern judgment. And so can we.

. **Blessing of Obedience.** The outcome of this guidance is a resounding recommendation for accepting it. But Israel faced stiff opposition. Menacing enemies blocked their path. God did not “sugar coat” the facts. The people had already encountered some resistance on the trail. These adversaries would be defending their land, protecting their homes, and shielding their families from harm. In short, they were not going to meekly surrender. There was significant difficulty ahead though Israel need not be concerned. God would provide, Exodus 23:27. This was great news. Yet, the sobering fact was that the victory would not come in “a single year,” Exodus 23:29,30. Obstacles would remain as a “test” of their fidelity to God, Judges 2:20-22. Is that not the way He still works in our life?

* * * * *

*“This is my prayer: that your love **may abound more and more** in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

The Philippians already possessed a desire to know the will of God. Paul constantly

prayed that that love for knowledge, that desire for deep insight would continue to grow. He wanted them to abound with wise discernment regarding the will of heaven.

The word “abound” refers to an excessive abundance, a surplus, or an extravagant overflow, Romans 5:15; II Corinthians 1:5; 4:15; 8:2; 9:12; Philippians 1:25,26; Colossians 2:6,7; I Thessalonians 3:12. The Philippians should be bursting with knowledge, brimming with wisdom. The apostle hoped they would gain more than enough to carry them through the tangled labyrinth of life. He envisioned their spiritual maturity as “pressed down, shaken together, and running over,” Luke 6:38. Obviously they must not be content with “just getting by.” Paul wanted them to have a lavish amount of insight that sloshed over and spilled out.

The apostle was not one to delight in a half-hearted effort. For him, Christianity demanded an all out engagement, a vigorous pursuit of the Lord, Philippians 3:12-14. He frequently expressed this incessant effort with the words “more and more,” I Thessalonians 4:1,9,10; II Thessalonians 1:3. So, in like manner, he urged his friends to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, Philippians 1:9; cf. Colossians 1:9,10. They had their work cut out for them. We do, too.

CHAPTER FOUR

WISDOM AS GUIDANCE

Palestine is a semi-arid land. Water is scarce, Psalms 42:1. The psalmist draws an interesting word picture. He says the Lord leads us “beside still waters,” Psalms 23:2.

The dry creek beds become raging torrents after a thunderstorm. The current is deep and swift. The sheep are thirsty. It is treacherous for them to wade into the roaring stream. If they do, they will likely be swept away. Their wool will become saturated with water. The extra weight will pull them under. They will surely drown.

The shepherd realizes the danger. He keeps the sheep away from the river until he can form a little ditch with his staff. When the water, carried off by his trench, has collected into a quiet pool, he leads the sheep to “still waters.”

The word “still” refers to rest or quietness. It speaks of an absence of disturbance, the presence of calm. Therefore, after the flood, the ark “came to rest” on Mt. Ararat, Genesis 8:4. In a similar vein, the Lord “rested” after creation, Exodus 20:11. He also guided His people and gave them “rest,” Isaiah 63:14.

By quiet waters, the sheep find their needed refreshment. They drink in safety. No wonder they love their shepherd. He leads them with tender care. He quenches their thirst in secure places. The sheep have no reason to fear, Psalms 23:4.

Life is filled with boisterous streams. They appear inviting. Their allurements hide the lurking danger. The Lord knows our situation. He leads us “beside still waters.” He refreshes our soul. He guides us in “paths of righteousness,” Psalms 23:3; cf. Psalms 5:8; 71:1,2. All of that is ours if we follow Him.

* * * * *

In the last chapter, it was stated that God does not promise to reveal His clear, unmistakable will for every non-moral, personal decision. He leaves those choices to us. The clothes we wear, the hairstyle we adopt, the food we eat, the car we buy, the color we paint the house (and a whole lot more) is our responsibility. We are not only allowed to choose but required to make thoughtful decisions regarding such matters, cf. Romans 14:5.

How should a believer make decisions about non-moral issues? Some people are still convinced that God leads them every moment of every day in everything. They firmly believe the Lord reveals to them what He wants done regarding each detail of their daily life. They “feel lead” in all decisions (including minute particulars that have to do with recipes, purchases, and pets). Their faith is admirable. Yet God does not have an exact plan for every item of human existence. Chance must be factored into the scheme of things, Ecclesiastes 9:11.

In non-moral dilemmas, we are instructed to use “sober judgment,” Romans 12:3. When describing such judgment, the term “sober” refers to clarity of thinking, an acknowledgment of reality. It points to alertness and self-control, I Thessalonians 5:6; I Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8. Fuzzy thinking must be dismissed. Keeping our head is required, II Timothy 4:5. Confused speculation can lead to misguided actions. The apostle summoned believers to avoid warped thinking, Titus 2:11,12.

The New Testament contains numerous examples of using human wisdom in decision making.

. “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God to wait on tables,” Acts 6:2.

. “If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me,” I Corinthians 16:4.

. “I think it is necessary to send back Hermaphroditus,” Philippians 2:25.

. “So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens,” I Thessalonians 3:1.

The apostles obviously made decisions about matters pertaining to their daily, personal life, Acts 20:16; Titus 4:11-13. Not once, in these instances of using their own wisdom, was the guidance of God mentioned. These were non-moral matters. The Lord left them to make such decisions on their own.

In each of the above cases, “spiritual expediency” was used. It is my contention that in non-moral matters this is the way to proceed through life.

Spiritual	suggests that the means and the end of a decision are governed by (or in accord with) the moral will of God.
Expediency	indicates what is suitable (or appropriate) to a particular purpose or situation, namely, what works best to accomplish the intended objective.

Spiritual expediency requires a cool head and a clear mind. It demands the proper use of wisdom. In short, if people are to exercise “spiritual expediency,” they must have the ability to see and the inclination to choose the best methods for gaining the desired results, cf. Proverbs 2:12-15.

This calls for “heavenly wisdom.” James made a clear distinction between “heavenly” and “earthly” thinking. We should, too. These categories of thought are very different from each other, James 3:13-17. “Heavenly” wisdom helps guide us through life in a manner consistent with a Christian commitment. It is more than “common sense.” For “common sense” believes it is foolish to “love your enemy,” “forgive those who sin against you,” and “turn the other cheek.” Common sense is “earthly” wisdom. It is not of God. Only “heavenly” wisdom comes from above. It is possessed by people whose thinking is soaked in the word of God, whose mind is molded by the Holy Spirit.

How does one acquire “heavenly” wisdom? There are at least two basic prerequisites. (1) Gaining such knowledge begins with humility. The wise do not think of themselves as wise, Proverbs 3:7. And (2) those who desire real wisdom must believe God is the source of such understanding, Proverbs 2:6. All those who fail to acknowledge these basic realities are self-deceived fools doomed to remain ignorant, Romans 1:21,22. But, armed with these two prerequisites, humans are ready to discover “heavenly” wisdom in the only way it can be found: it must be sought as a “hidden treasure,” Proverbs 2:1-5.

All of this speaks of being teachable, of wanting to know, of paying the price to learn, Proverbs 9:9; 15:31; 19:20. None of this promises instant omniscience. Acquiring wisdom is a lengthy process rather than a direct, intravenous injection! It takes time. It requires effort. It is found by a diligent study of His word, Psalms 119:97-100; cf. Psalms 19:7; II Timothy 2:7.

* * * * *

The Lord promises to be active in the lives of His people. He vows to “teach” and to “guide” those who believe in Him. We need His help. The wise know that they cannot learn true knowledge without divine assistance, Psalms 119:33-35.

. **Benefactors of His Help.** God instructs everyone: the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the sinner, Psalms 25:8. He helps us when we fail (or in spite of our failures). Why? Because He is “good.” It is His nature to be helpful. He has an undying desire to instruct, to guide, and to encourage. After all, He is who He is. He cannot be otherwise. “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His ways,” Psalms 25:9. His way may not be popular but it is always “loving and faithful,” Psalms 18:25. Indeed, the Almighty respectfully instructs those who

respectfully listen to Him, Psalms 25:12; cf. James 1:5. The Lord cannot guide the rebellious. He cannot teach the unteachable. The shortest way to the halls of wisdom is a willing heart and a receptive mind.

. **Blessings of His Help.** Those who feel guided by God are emboldened to ask for the forgiveness of their sins. They do so for two reasons: (1) For “the sake of His name” and (2) because their sin is “great,” Psalms 25:7,11. In other words, people will sink under the weight of their guilt unless God removes the burden of their sin, I Peter 5:7. And, when He does, He promises to “confide” in them, Psalms 25:14; cf. Proverbs 3:32. The Lord will come to them and make His “home” with them, John 14:23. The faithful get from God what they ask from God, Psalms 25:4,5; cf. Job 33:14-18. The wisdom of God is hidden from the disobedient. His ways are an “open book” to those who are eager to read His inspired words.

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*“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more **in knowledge** and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

Paul joined “love” and “knowledge” together because knowledge alone results in pride, I Corinthians 8:1b. Or, to say it differently, knowledge without love has little value, I Corinthians 13:2. This does not mean knowledge is worthless. We need knowledge about the will of God to temper our enthusiasm about the guidance of God, Romans 10:2. The apostle wanted the Philippians to overflow in knowledge shaped love.

Paul was speaking of heart knowledge not head knowledge. He was talking about the knowledge gained through experience. Pharaoh confessed that he did not “know” Jehovah, Exodus 5:2. A little later, at the Red Sea, God announced that He would destroy the Egyptian army. Then, He said, “the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord...,” Exodus 14:18. This scenario illustrates the significant interplay of factors involved in knowing. Jehovah provided the obstinate ruler with a direct experience of His power. Pharaoh was forced to revise his view of God. Experience was a convincing teacher.

And, in like manner, the apostle constantly prayed that the love of the Philippians for truth might grow more and more through the knowledge that is gained in experiencing God. Only that kind of love can really know Him, I John 4:7,8. The road to knowing His guidance is paved by the experience of walking through life with Him. In other words, we cannot know Him unless we are headed in His direction, Amos 3:3.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUDGMENT AS GUIDANCE

The conquest of Jericho was an awesome event. It contains numerous lessons about the guidance of God. The monotonous marching, the endless horn blowing, the unexplained silence seemed like a silly strategy, Joshua 6:8-11. The curious parade went on every day for a week—round and round the heavily protected city. Those inside the walls must have viewed these strange proceedings with an amused grin, a giddy snicker. Those who marched on the outside of the walls just kept marching.

Silly or not the Lord had given the orders, Joshua 6:1-5. The people of God listened. They conscientiously followed His directions. And, true to His word, the walls collapsed. The city was captured, Joshua 6:20. A great miracle had unfolded before their eyes. No one should have been surprised. For, on cue, as predicted, the walls came tumbling down, Joshua 6:15,16.

The guidance of heaven always demands faithfulness to the instructions of God. The Lord said, “Advance!” March around Jericho! Joshua 6:7. On the first day, the air was filled with excitement. On the second day, they completed another lap. On the third day, they were still going in circles. On the fourth day, it was the same as the day before. On the fifth day, they were still marching. On the sixth day, the walls had not moved. Despite all their efforts, the walls of Jericho were still standing. The daily parade around the city is an illustration of how the Lord accomplishes His will. In short, He seldom leads in obvious ways. He rarely acts in a predictable manner.

Usually, in dealing with the walls of our difficulty, the Lord gives us a trumpet when we think a sword would be better. He tells us to be quiet when we want to shout. He orders us to march when we prefer to rest. He sends us on a long, circular foray when we think a direct assault would be better. This is to be expected. For, if we ask Him for help, we must let Him decide what form His help will take.

Divine guidance requires human trust. He knows what to do. He has the power to get it done. We can be certain that the walls of our Jericho will eventually collapse when the Almighty is involved. Twelve laps prove our faithfulness. The thirteenth proves His faithfulness!

* * * * *

In non-moral issues, God has no specific directives. He has not given a detailed plan

for such quandaries. Like marching around Jericho, God announced the big plan. Israel dealt with the details, namely, what to wear, how fast to walk, and what to take on the trek. So, in the non-moral arena of life, we are left to figure out the little stuff. If this is true—and I am convinced it is—a set of blueprints for every decision cannot be found. There is no point in looking for what does not exist. As those who hunted for the “fountain of youth,” so those who try to discover specific guidance in non-moral issues. Frustration and disillusionment will be the outcome of their effort.

What help, then, according to this study, does divine guidance provide for determining non-moral matters? First, we suggested that “sober judgment” was the right place to start, Romans 12:3. Then, in addition, each conclusion of sober judgment should be compared with “heavenly wisdom,” James 3:17. This implies holding ourselves to a higher standard than anyone else expects of us. It means being more righteous than the world thinks necessary. It involves hanging on to the truth after everyone else has let go. It keeps us from following false motives. It ensures that even our non-moral decisions will reflect the moral character of God.

Sober judgment is never an accident. It is the culmination of careful deliberation. It is the result of gathering the facts. It is based on the conditions required in gaining divine guidance. Those conditions include:

- . trust, Psalms 25:1,2a; 143:8.
- . hope, Psalms 25:3,21.
- . teachableness, Psalms 25:4; cf. Exodus 33:13.
- . humility, Psalms 25:9.
- . fear or respect (of the Lord), Psalms 25:12,14.
- . attentiveness, Psalms 25:15; 123:1,2.
- . surrender (to the Lord), Psalms 25:20; 34:8; 64:10.

God does not guide everyone. He only confides in those who walk in His way, Proverbs 3:31,32. He instructs those who have the spiritual capacity to learn, Matthew 7:6. He gives His guidance to those who “please” the Holy Spirit, Galatians 6:7,8.

Evidence abounds in scripture that guidance in non-moral matters is a result of logical decision making.

- . “The disciples...decided,” Acts 11:27-30 (especially verse 29).
- . “It is my judgment,” James said, Acts 15:19.
- . “The apostles and elders...decided,” Acts 15:22.
- . “So we all agreed,” Acts 15:25.
- . “Paul do not think it wise,” Acts 15:38.
- . “Paul wanted to take him along on the journey...,” Acts 16:3.

- . Paul “decided,” Acts 20:3,16.
- . “It has always been my ambition...,” Romans 15:20.
- . “I plan...I hope...,” Romans 16:24.
- . “Perhaps I will stay...,” I Corinthians 16:6.
- . “I do not want...I hope...,” I Corinthians 16:7.

Where is the supernatural guidance in these passages? It is not mentioned. These verses reflect the exercise of human, cognitive activity. God allows His people to make their own decisions in non-moral matters. He gives them room to think, discuss, propose, and decide. All of this supports my contention. In non-moral issues, the Lord gives us the broad guidelines. He wants us to fill in the fine details.

However, that is just the beginning. There is more. Our conscience is a vital component in this process. Why? It is sensitive to what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, Romans 2:14,15. As a believer grows “in the grace and knowledge of the Lord,” II Peter 3:18, he or she will become increasingly aware of what should or should not be done, Romans 9:1; II Corinthians 1:12. In other words, those who are living in the will of God receive positive feedback—a “good” or “clear” conscience, Acts 23:1; 24:16; I Timothy 1:5; 3:8,9; II Timothy 1:3. This means our decisions in non-moral issues are given affirmation, as our conscience, soaked in scripture, faithfully echoes back to us the standards we have adopted.

Coupled with the voice of conscience is the evaluation of our gifts. For, under certain circumstances, spiritual gifts can be a clue for accepting specific responsibilities in the Church. Spiritual gifts are special “manifestations of the Spirit,” I Corinthians 12:7. The third person of the godhead “determines” who gets them, I Corinthians 12:11. These gifts are given for the “common good,” I Corinthians 12:7, that is, they are received in order “to serve others,” I Peter 4:10. Christians should evaluate their abilities before accepting a position of service in the Body of Christ. This is part of making a mature decision. It does not mean that the possession of a particular skill is a definitive indication that one should serve where that gift is useful. For example, the gift of public speaking alone does not qualify a person to be an evangelist. It is only one indication, one factor among many to consider (which the letters to Timothy and Titus clearly demonstrate).

* * * * *

Jacob was told his son was the victim of a “ferocious animal” attack, Genesis 37:31-33. Decades passed. Jacob mourned for Joseph. A famine prompted a trip to Egypt to get food. There Joseph confronted his betrayers, Genesis 45:3. He forgave them, Genesis 45:5,6. He invited his whole family to come and live along the Nile, Genesis 45:9-11. When the brothers returned to Canaan, the aged Jacob was “stunned” by the news, Genesis 45:25,26. In time, Jacob was “convinced,”

Genesis 45:27,28. He set out to see his son. On the way, he stopped to worship God, Genesis 46:1. The Lord promised to be with the patriarch, Genesis 46:2-4.

. Example of Jacob. Before leaving Canaan, Jacob drew near to God. Though he was eager to see Joseph, he paused to speak to the Most High. We, too, should pray before proceeding, inquire before committing, Nehemiah 2:4,5. Jesus said, to those concerned about food and clothes, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well," Matthew 6:33. The example of Jacob is still pertinent today. But, sadly, it is ignored. Why do we neglect to connect first with the Lord? Why do we move on as if we do not need His guidance? Can we succeed without Him? Absolutely not! John 15:5.

. Promise of God. Divine guidance comes in many forms. It can be direct or indirect. It can be sooner or later. We do not determine the size or shape of His leading. He promises to reveal His will when it is needed. Our responsibility is to listen when it is provided. Jacob needed reassurance. God said, "I will go down to Egypt with you," Genesis 46:4. That was sufficient. Without complete clarity, Jacob moved on. Though we might prefer a vision or a miracle, we may get neither. Though we might want Him to speak directly to us, He may decide to speak through His word. We are to ask for His guidance and let Him determine the form it will take. He promises He will never forsake us, Deuteronomy 31:8; I Samuel 12:22; cf. Psalms 48:14; Isaiah 58:11. That is sufficient.

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*This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and **depth of insight** so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,"* Philippians 1:9,10.

Paul not only prayed that the love of the Philippians would overflow more and more in knowledge but also in deep insight. The apostle was concerned that their love might become indiscriminate, willing to tolerate anything. He wanted them to be vigilant. Their love must not morph into a mushy sentimentality. The Philippians were not to accept all things or approve all people.

The apostle wished his converts would develop discernment. They needed to acquire the delicate sensitivity which intuitively perceived what was right, the deep insight which instinctively drew back from what was wrong, Hebrews 5:14.

Love is not blind attachment. It must not waste itself on worthless pursuits. Love must not attempt frivolous projects or impractical efforts. Discernment is more than knowing the facts. It is the ability to see the true nature of things, to grasp the

deeper realities. It is the skill to “test and approve” what is the will of God in the complex situations of life, Romans 12:2; cf. I Thessalonians 5:21.

Deep insight keeps its focus on truth. It is aware of the schemes of evil men, the lies of the devil. It can separate the good from the bad, the important from the unimportant, the doable from the impossible.

Those who lack deep insights can have honorable intentions but poor judgment. They may have the facts but lack the ability to use them wisely. Knowledge and discernment form a team. Each needs the other. Both are required to stay on the path of righteousness. The scripture calls people who lack deep insight “senseless.” They are “fools” because they do not “understand,” Psalms 92:6. It behooves us to get deep insight. The alternative is totally unattractive. Indeed, it is dangerous.

CHAPTER SIX

ADVICE AS GUIDANCE

An animal talent show on television featured a group of trained pigs. They had been taught to follow a few rudimentary commands. Their act was extremely simple. Any dog—including a mixed breed mutt—could have performed their routine. And, if a dog did, no one would have considered its actions worthy of network television. But these were pigs!

Why should a farmer be paid thousands of dollars to have his hogs stand on their hind legs and beg for corn? Why does such a performance get the thunderous applause of a studio audience? Well because the pigs did not act like pigs. The farmer called them by name. He guided them on stage. He treated them like lambs.

Usually pigs are driven. They are herded like cattle. These hogs trailed along behind their owner. He was their “shepherd.” They acted like his “sheep,” John 10:1-5.

Still there is a big difference between sheep and pigs. The sheep look into the face of their shepherd. Pigs do not. They have no neck—so they cannot lift their heads. Their eyes are set so that they only look toward the ground. While a sheep watches the shepherd, a pig roots in the dirt. The only way a pig can look up is to turn on its back.

During a visit with a bedridden friend, I mentioned these curious facts about pigs and sheep. “Thank God,” the patient said, “the Lord has turned me over so that I can concentrate on Him!” He confessed his tendency to focus on earthly things, cf. I John 2:15-17. We all are prone to do that. Now the bedridden man was on his back. His eyes could easily look into the face of the Good Shepherd.

This is the way the Lord may choose to lead us. If we end up on our back, there is a good reason for it. He knows it is easier to get our attention when we look up. He knows it is easier to lead us when we are watching His face. He knows that we can easily get absorbed in earthly stuff and neglect “to hear His voice,” John 10:27.

The guidance of God requires that we look up. It demands that we focus on the Shepherd. Certainly, by now, we have learned that there is only dirt under our feet!

* * * * *

Suppose you face a tough decision. You are not sure what choice to make. You want to do the will of God, but are not clear about what that looks like. You decide to share your problem with a friend. Is that the right thing to do? Should you ask others for advice? Does the counsel of others help us discover the will of God?

It can. In non-moral matters, it is good to seek the opinion of informed people. Why? (1) It is practical. Articulating our dilemma helps us clarify it. And listening to the response of others can give us additional insights. (2) It is biblical. Advice was commonly asked of and received from others in Bible times, Exodus 18:24-26; Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6; 27:17; Acts 27:12; I Corinthians 7:25,40; II Corinthians 8:10.

Often individuals are reluctant to seek advice. They feel it is a sign of weakness. Actually, however, it can be an indication of maturity. To know you have a problem, to know you cannot solve it by yourself, and to know some one else might have the wisdom to help you is a sign of mature thinking. Only the immature refuse advice. They do not realize their limitations—their inability to do it alone. Is that not childish? When people—young or old—realize they cannot succeed on their own, when they recognize their need of assistance, they are acting in an adult manner.

From whom should advice be sought? That depends. It is difficult to lay down hard and fast rules. Every person is different. Every dilemma is different. Still the following guidelines might be helpful.

- . Seek advice when making major (rather than minor) decisions. A major decision refers to those choices that require significant deliberation.
- . Consult more people for more momentous dilemmas. The greater the implications of the choice, the greater the number from whom counsel should be sought.
- . Seek advice from both those with whom you agree and also from those with whom you disagree. Keep in mind, you are asking for advice not searching for consensus.
- . Give greater weight to counsel from Christians than from non-Christians. God only gives spiritual wisdom to believers. This is especially important when the choice under consideration may have some moral implications.
- . Get advice from those who know you well. This would include parents, friends, and spouses. They will have more insight into your personality, more sympathy for your quandary.

People have opinions. If asked, they will usually share them with you. How should their recommendations be evaluated? When are their opinions the will of God? Except for certain chain-of-command situations (like rulers over subjects, Romans 13:5, elders over church members, Hebrews 13:17, parents over children, Ephesians 6:1-3, and husbands over wives, Colossians 3:18), I do not believe a person has an obligation to follow the advice of any human being. This is true regardless of how many people might agree with the advice, Numbers 13:30-33; 14:39-45. It is also true regardless of the spiritual maturity of those giving the advice, Acts 21:10-14.

No person has all the answers. Everyone is biased, subjective, and (partially) uninformed. Always evaluate advice in view of what the scripture says. His will is wrapped up in His word. Human advice must agree with divine wisdom. In other words, we must always “seek” Him, I Chronicles 16:11; II Chronicles 15:2; 18:4; Psalms 119:2; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 11:6.

Advice should always be tested. Three questions can help in the process. (1) Is it scriptural? Wisdom from above will never contradict the Bible. (2) Is it right? Wisdom from above may be contrary to our feelings, to our prejudices, and to our desires. It is NEVER contrary to our moral inclinations. And (3) is it reasonable? Wisdom from above is in harmony with a spiritually informed judgment. God rarely ever asks us to act in ways that ignore our rational nature.

Finally, how should advice be given? Mentors of advice should be people who know their own faults, Matthew 7:1-5, who are transformed, Romans 12:2. They should also be spiritual, I Corinthians 2:15; Galatians 6:1, and morally mature, Hebrews 5:14. A deficit in any one of these characteristics would disqualify a person as an adviser. Furthermore, they should offer their counsel as a suggestion rather than as a command, as something “helpful” rather than as something required, Ephesians 4:29. It is, after all, just advice!

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The Lord guides us with His “counsel,” Psalms 73:24. We should be thankful He does. For, when we look across the landscape of our existence, we become perplexed. Life is not fair. The godless prosper, Psalms 73:4,5. They are proud of their sinful ways, Psalms 73:6-9. They think God is unaware of their mischief, Psalms 73:11.

. Source of Guidance. The author of this psalm struggled with the injustice he saw, Psalms 73:2,3. “Surely, in vain have I kept my heart pure,” he wrote. “In vain have I washed my hands in innocence,” Psalms 73:13. He wondered why the Almighty did not punish evildoers. Though he tried to understand, he ended up

feeling more confused. Finally, when he retreated to the “sanctuary of God,” he found some answers, Psalms 73:16,17.

. **Assurance of Guidance.** The day of reckoning was on its way, Psalms 73:18-20. The righteous must not jump to rash conclusions. Though their hearts are “grieved” and their spirits “embittered,” they should cling to Him who will take them “into glory,” Psalms 73:21-24. Though their flesh will fail, God will provide them strength, Psalms 73:26. The wicked will “perish,” Psalms 73:27. The saints will triumph.

. **Promise of Guidance.** All of this speaks of the need for divine guidance. Humans are prone to conceit. They slide into unbridled arrogance, Psalms 12:1-4. They strut around like proud peacocks when sin is “honored among men,” Psalms 12:7,8. Why do they not learn? God will not tolerate the oppression of His people, Psalms 12:5. He hears their groans. He feels their pain. He sees their misery. He promises to come to their aid. Often, that aid comes in the form of guidance—guidance through troubled waters, guidance across barren deserts, guidance through dark valleys, Psalms 16:7.

The Lord counsels His people, Psalms 32:8. The word “counsel” can be translated advice. God exhorts. He encourages and recommends. He cautions and admonishes. He throws open the doors to His library of wisdom. He invites us to peruse the pages of His word. He tells us that our present troubles are preparing us for future bliss, II Corinthians 4:16-18. He reminds us that we own “an eternal house in heaven,” II Corinthians 5:1; I Peter 1:3,4. It is ours if we follow His advice.

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*“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, **so that you may be able to discern** what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

The portion of the above prayer under consideration can be translated in two ways:

“so that you might be able to distinguish”
 “so that you might be able to approve”

The difference is small. The first emphasizes the act of differentiation. The second takes it a bit further. It emphasizes the act of endorsement. The author may have intended both ideas. Paul prayed that his friends in Philippi might distinguish and approve what is excellent. So should we.

There are volumes of advice available. Not all of it is worthwhile. Some of it is destructive. The people of God must be on guard. They must decide and accept

what is healthy for their souls. Christians must develop the ability to recognize the good amongst the bad. They must gain the gumption to choose the worthy over the unworthy.

A widow was passing through some difficult times. "I do not know what to do," she confessed. Her neighbor was elated.

"Thank God," the neighbor said, "When you do not know what to do, it may be best to do nothing!"

"But that seems so irresponsible," the grieving women protested. "Surely there is something I can do."

"There is," the neighbor replied. "Wait for the guidance of God," she advised. "If you have exhausted all human thought, if you have come to the end of your rope, wait for God."

Is that good advice? Is it good for the believer to just hunker down and wait?

Paul prayed that those who have knowledge and perception will keep testing the advice that comes their way. It was a custom in the ancient world to test the coins used in the market. Every coin was dropped onto a hard surface to see if it was genuine. Similarly, every kernel of counsel should be tested, too.

The apostle Paul was suggesting caution. Evaluate what is seen. Assess what is read. Weight what is heard. Does it square with heavenly wisdom? If it is important to check metal coins, is it not more important to test spiritual advice? There is never a right time to do the wrong thing.

Should the widow follow the advice of her neighbor? Should she wait for God? We live in a generation on the move. We are encouraged to take command. We are told that those who hesitate are lost. But what does the Bible say? "Wait for the Lord," the psalmist wrote, "be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord," Psalms 27:14; cf. Psalms 43:5; 62:5.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SIGNS AS GUIDANCE

The Lord calls us to live faithfully. He asks us to yield to Him, to defer to His will, to obey His commands. “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight,” Proverbs 3:6. Acknowledging Him refers to a “whole hearted devotion.” It involves a “willing mind,” I Chronicles 28:9. If we serve Him in that manner, He will remove the obstacles from our path, cf. Isaiah 40:4.

The story is told about a lone survivor of a disaster at sea. A ship sank in the middle of nowhere. The survivor made his way to a small, uninhabited island. There he built a shelter. In his humble abode, he placed his few, precious possessions that were salvaged from the disabled ship.

Every day he prayed for deliverance. Every day he scanned the horizon. He waited to hail the next passing boat. None came by. He continued to pray. He continued to watch. Eventually, however, his hope began to wane. No relief was in sight.

Several months passed. Then, one day, after foraging for food, he returned to his little hut. The castaway was greeted by a horrible scene. His whole campsite was reduced to smoldering ashes. All that he had saved from the sinking ship was now lost forever. His entire inventory of earthly possessions had disappeared in a plume of smoke. Only the Lord was left. And, so far, the Lord had done nothing.

Disaster had struck (or so it appeared). But, what seemed like loss turned out to be gain. To his limited vision, the fire was a cruel, inexplicable blow. To God it was the means of rescue, His way of answering prayer. For, within a matter of an hour, a ship appeared. It was headed straight toward the island. “We saw your smoke signal,” the captain said. The calamity was really a blessing in disguise.

This can hardly be viewed as an accident. Rather, it reinforces a grand truth. “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him,” Romans 8:28; cf. Isaiah 38:17a; Jeremiah 29:11. God is present even in our disasters. He is guiding all things to their appointed end. Watch for His loving hand. He is leading in ways we cannot imagine. Our deepest trials are our greatest triumphs. His guidance may be hidden from our tear-dimmed eyes. If He sinks our boat, He will send another ship!

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Instances of supernatural guidance in the Bible—like visions and signs—cause some folks to think that these types of manifestations are the norm. Therefore, they are prone to regularly request and routinely expect omens, portents, indications, and revelations to assist in making their decisions. Is this what God intended?

In order to answer that question, let us start by reviewing how signs occurred in the scriptures. Supernatural guidance came in one of two ways. (1) Sometimes such leading came directly to a person in dreams, voices, and visitations. (2) At other times, such leading came indirectly through other people who received visions, discernments, and prophecies. The bulk of our discussion regarding signs will focus on the phenomenon of direct supernatural guidance. The following information is quite illuminating.

First, should believers expect to receive direct supernatural guidance? Some people say, “Yes!” But, since very few receive it, the majority is left frustrated and disillusioned. Hence, most Christians will answer, “No!” Their reasons vary. (1) In the first century, the canon of scripture was incomplete. Therefore, those who believe in supernatural guidance claim that signs were needed to guide the faithful. However, the guidance gained from signs was over issues the completed canon of scripture would not have resolved (if it had been available). (2) There is no statement in the New Testament telling us to expect or seek signs. And (3) such guidance can lead to pride in being more spiritual. It can also lead to laziness in not taking responsibility for making decisions.

Second, does this mean that divine guidance is obsolete? No! Guidance is given when guidance is needed—to lead us to do what would otherwise not be done, cf. Acts 8:26; 10:19,20; 16:9,10. No one must think of himself as less spiritual because God has not intervened directly (or indirectly) in his life. Indeed, supernatural guidance could signify spiritual immaturity. Is that not the case with Peter on the roof top and Paul on the Damascus road? They were both headed in the wrong direction!

Third, some will claim that the gift of prophecy is a form of divine guidance. Is this correct? There is no instance of prophecy serving as guidance in the New Testament (after Pentecost). As indicated in chapter six of this book, Paul received counsel from a prophet (Agabus) but ignored it, Acts 21:10-14. There was no hint that he disobeyed God. The apostle recognized the validity of the prediction yet did not take the implied advice as the will of the Lord for his life. Consequently, even if a person claims prophetic revelation, we are free to disregard the non-moral recommendations stemming from it.

Fourth, is it appropriate for Christians to use a “fleece” to determine the will of God? Both the expression and the technique of “fleecing” is based on the story of Gideon, Judges 6:36-40. At a number of points, this event fails to authenticate the

contemporary practice of “putting out a fleece.” (1) Gideon was asking for a miracle (dry fleece and wet ground) since he had already received a supernatural demonstration, Judges 6:14-22. (2) Gideon was not asking for guidance. He was asking for confirmation of the guidance he had already received, Judges 6:37. Consequently (3) this incident is at best an expression of hesitation and at worst an act of doubt. Neither attitude is acceptable, Matthew 12:38-32; Luke 1:11-20. Requesting a sign runs contrary to the will of the Lord. Beware!

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Certainly we need the help of heaven. Even in non-moral matters, we should stay tuned to the Lord. Several considerations make this quite clear.

. **Need of Guidance.** Life is complex. We are constantly required to make countless decisions every day. The longer we live the more we recognize the profound interconnection of the dilemmas we face. One difficulty leads to another difficulty. One solution requires another solution. Like spring weeds, there seems to be no end of quandaries to solve. Innumerable decisions confront us. Countless choices beg for attention. We are besieged, overwhelmed, and eventually confused. A sense of helplessness rises in our heart. A rush of uncertainty hangs over our head. We need His help.

. **Lack of Knowledge.** In the universe of information, we know very little. So, like a bold adventurer, we set our sails to travel on unknown seas. We live in the now. We make decisions that affect the future. Life is a risk, a precarious gamble (if the Lord is excluded). We grope along with a blindfold over our eyes. We gingerly tiptoe ahead. How necessary it is, then, to be guided by the One who knows the “end from the beginning.” How important to tap into His storehouse of knowledge. He may not send a miraculous sign but He will deliver us nonetheless. Count on it.

The lower creatures are guided by instinct. We are endowed with a higher nature. God has given us the serious responsibility to think and to decide. He gives this privilege on condition that we look both inward and upward. Inward to see what our mind thinks and upward to make sure it squares with the will of God, Proverbs 1:7.

. **Trust in God.** Decisions should begin with “trust in the Lord,” Proverbs 3:5a. A few, polite gestures in His direction are inadequate. Our trust must include all of our heart, all of our will, and all of our mind. Every thought, every affection, every desire should be laid on the altar. The more completely we trust Him, the more surely He will guide us.

. **Surrender to Heaven.** Decisions must start with subordinating our understanding to His wisdom, Proverbs 3:5b. Guidance is not getting confirmation

of what we think. It is not asking Him to agree with us. No! It is following our Leader. It is going His way. It is doing His will. Of what value is a guide, if his directions are ignored?

God will surely lead in ways He thinks best. His wisdom will show the way, Proverbs 4:11. Therefore, we should “hold on to instruction, and not let it go; guard it well, for it is our life,” Proverbs 4:12. Surely, it is foolish to read this book, if one cares little about divine guidance. Surely, it is vain to pray for divine leading when human following is withheld, cf. Proverbs 4:20,21.

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*“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern **what is best** and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

The word translated “best” refers to the ability to differentiate, to discern the most desirable among numerous competing choices. Only those of advanced knowledge can make such distinctions. The term “best” frequently describes what is “better,” “superior,” or “excellent.” Thus, Paul wanted his converts to “approve what is superior,” Romans 2:18. He was referring to those things that really mattered. So he admonished the Corinthians to “eagerly desire the greater gifts,” I Corinthians 12:31. Moreover, Jesus had a “superior” name, that is, more “excellent” than the angels, Hebrews 1:4. And His ministry was “superior” to that of the Old Testament priesthood, Hebrews 8:6. We, then, are encouraged to grasp hold of what is “superior,” “greater,” or “best.”

Believers are placed in a world of varying influences, of conflicting choices. If we succumb to the lesser promptings of life, we will be carried off to the lower realms of living. Natural instincts will rule. The flesh will take over, Romans 7:18. God will have a minor role in our existence. Instead of love, there will be selfish ambitions, personal preferences, and power struggles, Romans 8:5-8. Instead of purity, we will have corruption. Instead of innocence, we will forsake our higher calling. Rather than pressing upward, we will sink lower in sin and depravity, cf. Philippians 3:14.

In spite of these degrading influences, the Christian should hold firmly to the higher road. The discipline of such a choice will be a blessing. Strong temptations are not overcome without pain. But, in being overcome, they are stepping stones toward a greater good. Choosing what is superior leads to a better place. The believer gains more strength to fend off his lower impulses, Romans 8:9-11. The hard road turns out to be the best road. The unfaithful will choose to drift into hell. The faithful will opt to climb into heaven.

The effect of where we live is determined by what we choose, Romans 8:12-14. Paul urges us to select the “best.” He prays that we would be drawn to the more “excellent.” He begs us to distinguish between various opinions, influences, feelings, and behaviors so that we can separate the right from the wrong, the spiritual from the carnal, the true from the false. This requires a prevailing attitude that prefers the greater, the superior, the excellent, the best. Eternity will reveal the choices we make.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FEELINGS AS GUIDANCE

God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah 1:1,2. The prophet wanted to go to Tarshish, Jonah 1:3a. Instead of heading east, he headed west. He had his own plans. He went his own way. While attempting to flee from the Almighty, he dashed straight into the arms of trouble.

His problem began when he tried to “run away from the Lord.” Exactly how does a person escape from the One who is present everywhere? Psalms 139:7-10. How does a person hide from a God that sees everything? Psalms 139:1-3. Jonah had not thought things through very carefully.

He went to the seaport city of Joppa. He found a ship headed in the opposite direction God wanted him to go, Jonah 1:3b,c. How convenient! The destination of the vessel was just what the prophet ordered. It was bound for a distant outpost. Likely, the messenger of God rejoiced in his good fortune. He paid the fare, got on board, and sailed into a “violent storm,” Jonah 1:4.

We are prone to feel that convenience is equivalent to correctness. When we ignore the will of God, it is surprising how easily we can justify our wishes. Deeply biased by our own plans, we quickly interpret what is coincidental to our plans as a confirmation of divine leading. But, like the boat carrying Jonah, a ship of convenience can soon become a vehicle of disaster. The prophet learned the hard way that human feelings are faulty interpreters of the divine mind.

We are warned to beware of convenient ships! What appears as “opportunity” may actually be a snare of satan, the allurements of the world, a short cut to the chastening of God. Unless we completely surrender to the Lord, unless we completely saturate our minds with His word, we, too, may fall prey to our feelings. However, our wishes are not the same as His will.

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Some people strongly believe that God confirms His will through human feelings. If this be so, there is no need to bother with any other form of guidance. But is it so? Are our feelings a safe guide? Is “feeling lead” a dependable means of determining His will?

The Bible nowhere promises guidance by human feelings. In fact, the Lord often asked His followers to act when their feelings said otherwise. Why? Our emotions are notoriously misleading. They can be very unstable.

Since we are not to follow our feelings, how are we to proceed in non-moral matters? It seems prudent to carefully decide, prayerfully set things in motion, and let God make mid-course corrections, cf. Acts 15:36 and 16:6-8. For example, Paul planned to visit the Corinthians, I Corinthians 16:5-9. Actually, he planned to visit them twice, II Corinthians 1:15,16. But those plans were changed, II Corinthians 1:23. Thus, the apostle was falsely accused of fickleness, II Corinthians 1:17. However, truth be known, new facts came to light. Paul was not lead by his feelings. Instead, he planned, he unplanned, and he replanned as changing circumstances dictated.

This does not mean that feelings should be ignored. For, if we feel uncomfortable with a course of action, we should stop and reassess our plans. Conscience may be telling us something, cf. Romans 2:15. Likewise, if we feel good about what we are doing, it pays to keep a close eye on our carnal nature. Our conscience could be corrupted, Titus 1:15. In other words, feelings are not a compass—one way or the other—for our conduct, cf. II Chronicles 6:8,9.

With that understood, one must not conclude that we are destined to proceed through life without any form of confirmation. Quite to the contrary! God provides reassurance.

“He has given proof (of the Judgment) to all men by raising (Christ) from the dead,” Acts 17:31.

“My purpose is that...they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,” Colossians 2:2.

“...our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction,” I Thessalonians 1:5.

“...continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of...,” II Timothy 3:14.

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure,” Hebrew 6:11.

“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,” Hebrews 10:22.

“This is how we know that we belong to the truth,” I John 3:19.

The assurance of God was about the Judgment, the Messiah, the Gospel, and our ultimate salvation. Nowhere is there mention of His assurance about human hunches in non-moral matters. Still the Lord does not want confused believers wandering around anxiously wringing their hands about His will. He wants us to be at peace in our faith. He prefers we move ahead in confidence—convinced of what we believe. Therefore, many people think a feeling of “peace” is an indication of being in the will of God, Colossians 3:15.

This is an attractive conclusion. But, from the context of the above passage, two observations are in order. (1) Paul is encouraging believers to live in harmony with each other, Colossians 3:12-14. The test for deciding whether they had achieved such a unity was peaceful co-existence, Colossians 3:15. Hence, the absence of hostility between Church members is quite remote from the inner guidance many folks claim they find in this verse. (2) The Bible elsewhere certainly affirms that joy results from doing His will, Psalms 1:1,2; 16:11; John 15:10,11; Romans 5:11. In each case, nevertheless, joy was not a means of discerning His will. It was the product of following it. We must not get the “cart before the horse.” To “feel good” about something is not evidence for doing it. Instead, “feeling good” is an affirmation after the right thing has been done.

The issue under consideration is not whether God leads us. The issue is how does He lead us. Several additional passages are cited as indicators of His guidance in non-moral matters. What, in fact, do these scriptures teach?

. **Isaiah 30:21.** “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’” Isaiah was talking to ancient Israel. She had disobeyed God. She ignored His will. She had neglected His guidance, Isaiah 30:9-11. Therefore, Israel was destroyed like a crumbling wall, Isaiah 30:12-14. Her only hope resided in changing her ways, Isaiah 30:15. But Israel remained adamant, Isaiah 30:16,17. Still the Lord longed to show His grace, Isaiah 30:18. He promised to answer her cry for help, Isaiah 30:19. Though He sent her “adversity” for her sin, if she repented, He would send her “teachers” to guide her into the truth, Isaiah 30:20. Consequently, the passage is not referring to feelings or hunches regarding non-moral dilemmas. It speaks of sin, punishment, repentance, and instruction in moral living.

. **John 16:13.** “When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” What a great promise. However, as before, the words “all truth” do not refer to house purchases, parking spaces, or vacation plans but to the teachings of Jesus, John 16:14. “All truth” has to do with moral issues (rather than non-moral matters). Inner feelings are neither mentioned nor implied.

. **Romans 4:14.** “...those that are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Praise the Lord! This is true. Yet, again, hunches, impressions, sensations, and

feelings are not involved. The passage is pointing to guidance in the moral will of God. It is the Spirit that enables us to triumph over our “sinful nature,” Romans 8:5-8. Those who have the Spirit “belong” to Christ, Romans 8:9. The Spirit gives “life,” Romans 8:11. Hence, if we choose the Spirit, we “will live,” Romans 8:13. We will be “sons of God,” Romans 8:14. All of this reflects spiritual realities. None of it alludes to emotional sentiments or to good feelings.

. **Galatians 5:25.** “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Indeed, if we choose to follow the Spirit, we should “keep in line” with Him. The apostle is comparing believers to a marching band or a parade of soldiers. If we stay in line with the Spirit, we will produce the “fruit of the Spirit,” Galatians 5:22,23. We will overcome our “sinful nature,” Galatians 5:19-21. Obviously, these are moral issues. The verse, then, is not about “feeling lead” in non-moral quandaries.

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that believers should rely on their feelings for guidance. Instead, our feelings should always be weighted against the word of God. If we have peace with what is contrary to His will, we can be certain it is not be the peace “which transcends all understanding,” Philippians 4:7.

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The infection of sin is difficult to cure. The life of Joram, king of Israel, is a case in point. His parents—Ahab and Jezebel—were very wicked people, I Kings 16:30-33. Joram “got rid of the sacred stone of Baal” his father had made. But he “clung” to some of the other sins of his predecessors, II Kings 3:1-3. The whole country had been contaminated. The sinful influence of one generation became the lifestyle of the next generation. Joram got rid of the idol but he did not change his heart, cf. Matthew 23:27,28. Observe how Joram failed to put the Lord at the center of His life.

. **He Felt Lead.** The king of Moab rose up in rebellion against Joram, II Kings 3:4,5. What did Joram do? Did he seek the guidance of God? No! He mustered his troops. He relied on the strength of human resources, II Kings 3:6,7a. The king felt lead to fight for what belonged to him. And, clearly, others agreed with his assessment.

. **His Feelings were Confirmed.** The king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, agreed to join in the fight, II Kings 3:7b. A strategy was announced, II Kings 3:8. Yet there is still no mention of guidance from heaven. All of this is typical of how we act. We find confirmation for our plans without the slightest reference to God. We rely on human initiative, on feeling lead. No wonder we have so much anxiety. It would be far better to follow the example of Moses. “If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here,” he said to the Lord, Exodus 33:15. For, be assured, if we do not seek His guidance, we will not receive His blessing!

. **He Blamed God.** As the military alliance of Israel, Judah, and Edom proceeded to the battlefield, trouble developed. The army ran out of water, II Kings 3:9. Finally, Joram thought of the Lord. He remembered that there was a God in heaven who watched over the affairs of men on earth. And, true to human nature, the king blamed God for his predicament, II Kings 3:10. Why was the Lord accused? This was not His plan. He did not agree to it. He was not invited to lead the way.

We are quick to follow our feelings. When they fail us, we grumble at God because He lets us eat the fruit of our choosing. Joram never thought of “inquiring of the Lord,” II Kings 3:11. Finally, at the suggestion of Jehoshaphat, the three kings located the prophet, Elisha, because “the word of the Lord was with him,” II Kings 3:12. That was a good move—albeit a bit late. If they really wanted reliable guidance, they should have turned first to the one, dependable source of such guidance.

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*“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and **may be pure** and blameless until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

Paul prayed that the believers in Philippi would gain greater discernment. He knew their ability to differentiate good from bad would keep them “pure.” The term he used for “pure” is an interesting word. It has two possible derivations. Each possibility forms a vivid picture.

. On the one hand, the word may have come from a compound term. One part meant “sunshine.” The other part suggested “judgment.” Therefore, the idea could refer to that which is exposed to bright sunlight without showing any flaws. If that was the intended meaning, the emphasis was on a purity that is verified by intense examination.

. On the other hand, the term could have come from a word that referred to swirling around in a sieve. The image portrayed the process of sifting until every impurity was extracted. If that was the intended meaning, it signified the cleansing of a believer by carefully sifting out the dross, removing of the grit to find the gold.

Each meaning is poignant. They graphically portray the point of the prayer of Paul. Corrupting elements were absent. Even under close scrutiny, blemishes could not be detected. The Philippians were not a mixture of good and bad. They were “unalloyed,” pure metal through and through.

Notwithstanding, some versions translate the term “sincere,” I Corinthians 5:8; II Corinthians 1:12; 2:17. Obviously, this leans toward the first derivation of the word.

In the days of Roman prosperity, when merchants lived in marble mansions along the banks of the Tiber River, the word “sincere” appeared in every building contract. In Latin, “sin” meant without and “cera” referred to wax. Thus, the stone masons were not to have wax in their pockets. For, occasionally, their chisels would slip and leave ugly gashes on the surface of the marble stone. It was common for the stone masons to cover up these mistakes by rubbing wax into the flaws. When the job was finished, when the contractor had been paid, the sun would melt the wax and their shoddy workmanship was exposed. Therefore, the merchant stipulated that those building his fancy house must be “sincere.”

The Lord requires workers to serve their bosses in “sincerity,” Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22. This sincerity, this singleness of purpose springs from a pure heart. It cleanses the whole person, Matthew 6:22,23. “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin,” I John 1:7. Internal purity oozes out into external goodness. It prepares us for the “day of Christ.” Consequently, if we fail to stand for something, we will fall for anything.

CHAPTER NINE

CIRCUMSTANCES AS GUIDANCE

Smack dab in the middle of main street in Enterprise, Alabama is an unusual monument. It is the strangest statute in the world—a memorial to a bug. Yes...a bug! There in plain view, beautifully carved in stone, is the likeness of a boll weevil.

The story of the statute is an interesting one. It goes something like this. From the earliest days, on the cotton plantations, the farmers struggled to raise a crop. When it failed, they failed. Every season was challenged by a serious pestilence. A little beetle damaged the cotton bolls. In time, it became impossible to produce a harvest.

George Washington Carver, an African American scientist, along with others, began research on the annual plague. Peanuts were the answer. He found that this underground vegetable could be planted and harvested without the weevil bothering it. That was a major break through.

Soon peanut mills took the place of cotton gins. The former cotton belt became the peanut capitol of the world. The farmers discovered that the profits from peanuts far exceeded the cash from cotton. The plantations prospered. And the little beetle that brought such grief was not forgotten. The imposing statute stands as recognition of its contribution to prosperity.

Surely there is a lesson here. God may allow “weevils” to create havoc in our lives for a higher purpose, Romans 8:18; II Corinthians 4:17; I Peter 1:6,7; 4:13. In other words, maybe we are trying to cultivate cotton when we should be planting peanuts! We must learn that disappointments are often the “boll weevils” of providence. The Lord could be graciously nudging us to plant the crop of His choosing. If we could read the final chapter of our life, we would see that great things result from our adversity.

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Circumstantial evidence is important to every day life. Things rarely just happen. Instead, they usually occur by design. They happen “according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will,” Ephesians 1:11; cf. Romans 8:28.

Such guidance is by no means easy to determine. An unexpected check may come in

the mail. A tornado may destroy our house. By chance, Ruth went to the field of Boaz. David got an unplanned peek at Bathsheba. At the time of the event, could Ruth have known it was the will of God? Could David have known his chance event was the doing of the devil? No! Neither of them knew.

Why are circumstances difficult to “read?” They were never designed to “give hints” about the future. Sometimes things just happen to “turn out” a certain way, Ruth 2:3; Ecclesiastes 9:11. Therefore, Paul was careful not to misread unexpected occurrences as divine guidance, Philemon 15,16. He knew they could easily be misinterpreted, Luke 13:1-3; John 9:2,3; Acts 28:1-6. Consequently, when we observe something happening, it is the better part of wisdom to withhold our judgment until the natural course of the event reaches its conclusion, Ecclesiastes 11:5,6.

Still some people believe that certain events are messages from God. Indeed, that may be true! The problem is determining which events are actually messages from heaven. And, if they are signals from the Most High, how do we interpret them? Care is required. For, unless God explains the event, a happening is just a happening. A famine is just a famine unless the Lord clarifies His will, Deuteronomy 11:16,17. A drought is simply a drought unless God says it is His judgment, Amos 4:6-8. Unless the Lord explains a stubbed toe, the loss of a job, the ring of the phone, or any other chance event, it is just a chance event. It is always better to sleep on what we think has happened than wake up embarrassed that we jumped to a rash conclusion.

The thrust of this book has been to make the reader Bible oriented. For, without the word of God, we cannot know the will of God. The scripture oriented believer lives in the world. It is here (in the world) where the will of God is done. However, we do not receive the will of God from the WORLD but from the WORD. The “world” is the stage. The “word” is the script. Guidance comes from the script not from the stage. It comes from God not from blind chance. It is communicated by the Lord rather than assumed from the interpretations of men.

There are various kinds (types or categories) of circumstances that confront us all the time. It is in these situations that some folks claim to find their guidance for daily decisions.

KINDS OF CIRCUMSTANCES

<u>Constraining Events</u>	<u>Enabling Events</u>
These prevent us from taking certain actions either through physical restraint or “un-get-over-able” barriers such as war, flood, catastrophe, illness, accident, a flat tire, lack of funds, etc.	These present opportunities to which we can freely respond: employment, scholarship offer, invitation to serve, a good deal on the purchase of a house, favorable weather, unexpected gifts, etc.

Constraining and enabling circumstances are hard to read. For example, if God wishes to deepen our trust, He may contrive less favorable circumstances to stretch our faith. Yet, if He wants to move us in a direction we would not normally consider, He might send the same unfavorable situation to steer us into a different path. This can create confusion. How are we to know from circumstances alone what God is intending? The same event can legitimately be interpreted two different ways!

How, for example, should we view an “open door?” The term “open door” is a figure of speech for access to something, an opportunity to do a particular thing, Acts 14:27. In the New Testament, the use of this figurative expression referred to an opportunity for evangelism, I Corinthians 16:8,9; II Corinthians 2:12,13; Colossians 4:3. These passages indicate that (1) “doors” are opportunities to preach the Gospel that (2) are given by God and (3) can be ignored. Therefore, “open doors” are not necessarily a sign of guidance. Common sense, sanctified by prayer, must be exercised when confronted with “opportunities.”

The role of “open doors” in our decision-making is twofold. First, they may suggest possibilities that still require careful consideration—the judicious use of wisdom, sober judgment, and advice. Second, they may confirm choices we have already made through the rigorous exercise of prayer and planning. They are definitely NOT infallible indicators of the divine mind.

Finally, what does the Bible say about “closed doors?” Nothing! The phrase is not found in the Bible. If the apostles were prevented from pursuing a plan, they often tried again later. Lack of opportunity was usually viewed as a “delaying door” rather than a “closed door,” Romans 1:9-13.

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The psalmist prayed, “Since You are my rock, and my fortress, for the sake of Your name lead and guide me,” Psalms 31:3. God leads humankind. He guides their destiny. Indeed, He holds their lives “in His hands,” Daniel 5:23. He does this so that everyone may seek Him and find Him, Acts 17:26,27. What, then, does all of this imply?

. **The Request.** The prayer of the psalmist assumes that the Lord is active in the world. He does not ignore His creation. He neither sleeps nor slumbers, Psalms 121:4. He is busy 24/7. He watches over our “coming and going both now and forevermore,” Psalms 121:8. He grants this priceless blessing in at least two ways.

. **By His Providence.** His unfailing, unerring, unseen guidance is displayed in things both big and small. “(The Lord) covers the sky with clouds; He supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills,” Psalms 147:8. He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. He numbers the hairs of our head, Matthew 10:29,30. He is aware of our every move, Psalms 139:1-3. Regardless of where we go or what we do, His hand will guide us. He promises to keep us safe, Psalms 139:9,10.

. **By The Scripture.** The word of God is a light, Psalms 119:105. It shines to illuminate the path that we were created to follow. It equips us for “every good work,” II Timothy 3:16,17. Critics may write scholarly tomes to dismiss it. But it continues to shine, to show the way. Those who are guided by this light rise to lofty heights, gain an inner purity, and receive hopeful assurance (found no where else). And, in the end, those who trust in Him are not sorry they followed the light, cf. Psalms 19:7-11; II Timothy 4:6-8.

. **The Rationale.** The force behind the prayer of the psalmist is God Himself. His name represents who He is. He is “great,” Jeremiah 10:6, “glorious,” Deuteronomy 28:58, “majestic,” Psalms 8:1, and “holy,” Psalms 33:21. Consequently, the Lord is concerned for His name, Ezekiel 36:21; 39:7,25. When God acts for the sake of His name, He is acting in accord with His character. He promises to answer the prayers of the righteous. His honor is on the line, John 14:13,14. Therefore, He will respond to our pleas. It is a sure thing, guaranteed by the One who always delivers on His commitments.

Of all the prayers we could pray, this one certainly tops the list. For, without His guidance, we will miss the purpose of life. We will become servants of our passions. We will bow to expediency, become slaves of fashion, or submit to the whims of others. We will grasp anything like a sinking swimmer caught in the rip tide. For, if

heaven is not our guide, something on earth will be. In other words, if we do not choose God, satan will become our master, Ephesians 2:1-3.

Life is definitely a one time journey. It is imperative, then, that we get it right on the first try. The wrong path cannot lead us to the right place. If we refuse to accept the best, we will be forced to accept the worst. It is our call. We choose the direction. God determines the destiny.

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*“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and **blameless** until the day of Christ,”* Philippians 1:9,10.

The word “blameless” can have either an active or a passive sense. If active, the term would mean not causing damage, harm, or injury to others, I Corinthians 10:32. If passive, the word would mean undamaged, unharmed, or uninjured, Acts 24:16. In either case, the person would be “blameless,” healthy, and complete.

Likely, Paul had the passive sense in mind. The apostle was picturing the Philippians as travelers. He prayed they would not cause a fellow traveler to stumble. In short, he hoped his converts in Philippi would be without offense.

Christians can cause others to fall. Thus, the strong in faith must not let their freedom in Christ become a stumbling block to the weak in faith, Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8:9. Love demands we think of how others may react to our behavior, I Corinthians 8:13; Philippians 2:4.

Believers must not give offense to any one inside or outside the Body of Christ. This is more than just being pleasant. It means doing nothing to weaken faith or keep from faith, II Corinthians 6:3. Our aim is to present ourselves before Him on the Judgment Day “without fault,” Jude 24.

It is difficult to avoid offense, James 3:2. Since we believe in Christ, we are an offense already to many, Romans 9:33. We exist between a rock and a hard place. Still we do not compromise the core of our faith, Romans 10:11. We “live at peace with everyone,” Romans 12:18. We take abuse rather than give offense in order to have “a good reputation with outsiders,” I Timothy 3:7. We do all of this (and more) so that we may be “blameless” before God and man, Philippians 2:15; II Peter 3:14. “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come,” Matthew 18:7.

CHAPTER TEN

CONDITIONS OF GUIDANCE

Life can appear “meaningless,” Ecclesiastes 1:2. It can be viewed as a constant monotony (where nothing really changes). The sun rises. The sun sets. The seasons come and go. Round and round the cycle of existence spins in a predictable rhythm.

Humans stand on slippery ground, Psalms 73:18. They are born and die in a blink of an eye, Psalms 73:19,20. Nothing lasts. “This world in its present form is passing away,” I Corinthians 7:31b. It is easy to become disillusioned, to be depressed (until we seek the Lord), Psalms 73:16,17.

What can we count on? What will last to the end? The world will be “shaken,” Hebrews 12:25-27. The desires of man will disappear. Only those who do the will of God will remain, I John 2:17.

The Lord is always with us. He guides us with His counsel, Psalms 73:23,24. Therefore, we should resolve to stick with the Lord, to desire none other, Psalms 25:4,5. God is our hope, our refuge, and our anchor, Psalms 73:28. The present is bearable because the future is secure.

A king in ancient times asked his wise men to create a sentence that would always be true in all situations. His advisory council pondered their assignment for weeks. Finally, they settled on a brief expression they believed was unchanging, timeless, and true. They confidently approached the king with their decision. “AND THIS TOO WILL PASS AWAY,” they said. Exactly! Nothing abides (except the will of God).

. A street car in Atlanta, Georgia jumped the track. It ran into a special gas lamp. The memorial light was called “the eternal flame of the Confederacy.” That day the “eternal flame” of the southern states was extinguished forever.

. A giant candle was built in a small town in the state of New York. It was to burn everyday throughout the year for perpetuity in order to symbolize the friendship among the nations of the world. On the first lighting of the candle, it accidentally caught fire and burned to the ground. The light lasted a mere eight minutes!

. Adolf Hitler vowed that his government—the Third Reich—would rule a thousand years. Actually, it lasted less than a thousand days!

.The survivors of terrorist attacks, mass shootings, and horrific accidents want to memorialize their lost loved ones. These kind gestures are done to keep their memory alive forever. They accomplish their goal for a few weeks until the next heinous act, barbaric bombing, or cowardly deed. In no time, past victims are overshadowed by new victims. Death shallows the dead. Life moves on.

Nothing lasts. Everything in this world is terminal. All flesh is as grass. Only the word of the Lord stands forever, I Peter 1:24,25. The best effort, the most worthy expenditure of energy is to find and fulfill the will of God, Hebrews 13:20,21.

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In emergencies, people are interested in the Lord. They seek His guidance. They want His protection. But, when the crisis is past, they forget all about Him. They proceed as if He does not exist, Isaiah 1:4.

This is not how it should be. God is not a parachute, a life jacket in times of peril. Faith in Him must be a lifestyle. We should follow His lead “in season and out of season.”

Therefore, divine guidance is conditional. We have the umbrella of His protection if we stay close to Him before it rains. He is not a part time God. We must not be a part time believer.

This should be obvious. Yet it is not always remembered, Jeremiah 3:19,20. Much perplexity about divine guidance is due to a lack of attention to the conditions of His leading. In other words, God is with us if we are with Him. The following four prerequisites are the short list of requirements for His guidance.

1. **BELIEVE.** We must fully trust that the Lord is capable of and active in guiding His followers, James 1:5-7. Hence, it is written, “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this,” Psalms 37:5. Our love for Him is reciprocated by His kind concern for us, Romans 8:28. Those who do not believe in Him have no right to expect His leading.

2. **OBEY.** Sincere obedience is another condition of His guidance, Psalms 25:10; 32:8-10. It is a mockery to ask for His help if we are unwilling to take His hand, cf. James 4:3. Obedience involves two things:

A. **A Proper Attitude.** Our primary responsibility in being guided is absolute commitment to the Guide, Romans 12:1,2. Only in an unreserved

surrender can we discover the will of heaven. All of this is based on submitting ourselves willingly and completely every day to His counsel. If we refuse the directives from above, we will not be lead here below. We cannot have our cake and eat it, too. Where there is a will, there is a way. Where there are two wills, there is no way!

B. A Proper Behavior. Though our obedience should encompass all aspects of His will found in scripture, certain ones are worthy of special mention.

(1) Purity. If there is deliberate disobedience in our lives, we should not expect gracious guidance but stern discipline, Psalms 68:18,19; cf. Deuteronomy 1:45; John 9:31. Why complain that God does not guide when our sin separates us from Him? Isaiah 59:2.

(2) Goodness. The Lord asks us to do good, Psalms 37:3,27. Active obedience is a prerequisite for divine guidance, Psalms 37:8,9,28,29,39,40.

(3) Patience. God leads when He determines leading is appropriate. He may not act as quickly as we would like. But He will act when necessary, Psalms 37:7,34. Impatience is evidence of distrust. "Be still and know that I am God," Psalms 46:10.

(4) Humility "Clothe yourselves with humility...(for) God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you," I Peter 5:5b,6. The proud do not want to know the will of God, Psalms 25:9. But those who are teachable, like "little children," receive the counsel of heaven, Matthew 11:25.

(5) Worship. We must acknowledge God as God. He is not an elective in the school of life. He is life, Acts 17:26,27. "For in Him we live and move and have our being," Acts 17:28. "It is He who made us," Psalms 100:3. We did not make ourselves. To acknowledge Him, then, is to declare our dependence on Him, Proverbs 3:5,6. Those who recognize the Lord as Lord are leadable.

3. **PRAY.** We must believe, obey, and pray. However, the latter is one of the most neglected conditions of guidance. What should be obvious is often ignored at enormous risk. We will "find the knowledge of God" when we "call out for insight," Proverbs 2:1-5. Though an important purpose of prayer is getting wisdom, the primary purpose is gaining an attitude to receive it. Prayer opens the heart and prepares the mind to listen, Psalms 25:4,5; 119:10,35,133; 143:10.

4. **STUDY.** Once we believe, obey, and pray, we are ready to do our homework. But why bother? Studying the word deepens our understanding of God. It brings us

face to face with our Guide. It discloses the mind of our Leader. This whole affair is focused on Him. We trust Him. We pray to Him. We obey Him. And we study about Him. Obviously it is best, then, that we get into His word—the sooner the better.

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Life is good when God is present. He promises to watch over the details of our day to day existence. “I will instruct you,” He said. “I will teach you in the way you should go.” Additionally, he promised, “I will counsel you and watch over you,” Psalms 32:8. “The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love,” Psalms 33:18; cf. I Peter 3:12.

. Manner Of His Watching. Some folks hear this promise and cringe. They do not want a celestial boogie man invading their privacy. It makes them uncomfortable to realize the eye of heaven is watching their every move. However, the Lord is not a super snoop. His watching is motivated by care and concern. Because He is our Master, we follow His prompting, Psalms 123:2. Because He is a loving Father, He instructs His children, Proverbs 4:1-4. And should we go astray, He accepts us back when we repent, Jeremiah 24:6,7. His watching is driven by His compassion, II Chronicles 16:9. He is especially watchful in times of distress, Psalms 33:18,19.

. Blessing Of His Watching. We cannot guide ourselves, Jeremiah 10:23. The Lord does not take pleasure in using “bit and bridle.” He wants to guide us through reason not restraint, Philippians 2:12,13. He sets us free so that our obedience may be voluntary. He prefers we choose. He will not use force. God reaches out to us even when we are disobedient. He paid the price for our salvation when we were still sinners, Romans 5:8. He loved us first (before we loved Him in return), I John 4:19. His watchfulness is our inspiration, Romans 8:31,32. When His eyes are on us and our eyes are on Him, we are safe from all harm, Job 34:21; Proverbs 15:3.

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“This is my prayer: that you may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,” Philippians 1:9,10.

The purposes of heaven have a beginning and an end. God does not leave His work unfinished. He carries it on to “completion,” Philippians 1:6. The Lord is not like us. We conduct experiments. We make trial runs. But God finishes things. He gets them done. He fulfills His purposes, Psalms 138:8. He promises a life that will never end, John 3:16,. He gives a spiritual refreshing that will never run dry, John 4:14. He offers a gift that will never be revoked, Romans 11:29, He has given us an

inheritance that will not perish, I Peter 1:3,4. His work will find its completion in “the day of Christ Jesus,” Philippians 1:6.

The “day of Christ,” Philippians 2:16, is also called the “day of our Lord Jesus (Christ),” I Corinthians 1:8; II Corinthians 1:14, or the “day of the Lord,” I Corinthians 5:5; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:2. Sometimes it is just referred to as “this day,” I Thessalonians 5:4, or “the day,” II Thessalonians 1:10. All of these passages point to His second coming, I Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thessalonians 2:1,8. It is called the day of Christ because it is the day He will appear in glory, judge the inhabitants of the earth, and take the righteous home to heaven, Matthew 25:31-46. The end of time will have come. The work of God on earth will be ended. The mission of Jesus will be finished. The faith of the saints will (at last) become sight.

CONCLUSION

After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the Lord for direction, Judges 1:1a. There are at least three important lessons found in this text. We do well to incorporate them into our daily life. Each lesson speaks directly to the issue of divine guidance.

. **Ask The Lord.** The people distrusted their own wisdom. They had misgivings about their motives. They felt all things were in the hands of God. Hence, they were rightfully prompted to “inquire of the Lord,” cf. Judges 18:5; 20:18. And “the Lord answered” them, Judges 1:2a. They asked the right source. They received the requested information. The key to this whole scenario was their sincerity. They had pure intentions. They wanted to know. They were willing to do what God told them. This is not always the case. For example, centuries later, after their countrymen had been deported to Babylonian exile, the captains of the defeated Jewish army asked Jeremiah for directions, Jeremiah 42:1-3. The prophet obliged, Jeremiah 42:4. The people promised to follow the instructions of heaven, Jeremiah 42:5,6. The answer from God came ten days later, Jeremiah 42:7. Evidently, in the interim, the resolve of the people evaporated. The response from God was clear. The Lord vowed to treat them kindly, Jeremiah 42:9-12. The people would not hear of it, Jeremiah 43:4-7. They disobeyed. The hand of heaven was heavy upon them, Jeremiah 44:11-14. Men asked for His counsel hoping that it would agree with their inclinations. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

. **Include Others.** The text has another lesson. Judah was told that they were to be the first to go into the Promised Land, Judges 1:1b,2. However, the tribe of Judah asked the tribe of Simeon, their brothers, to come up with them, Judges 1:3a. It is good to have the assistance of God. It is good to have some human help, too, Proverbs 27:17. So Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples two-by-two, Luke 10:1. The strength of the one was increased by the companionship of the other. Likewise, the wisdom of two is better than that of one. Each can supply what the other might lack. One can have knowledge while the other has prudence. Was this not true in the case of Moses and Aaron as well as Paul and Barnabas? No one has all the skills by himself to get the job done. Hence, Judah said to Simeon, “Come up with us...we in turn will go with you,” Judges 1:3b. This does not destroy individual responsibility. It merely helps in times of weakness, Galatians 6:1-5.

. **Accept Our Assignment.** The third lesson in this text is equally important. Divine guidance assigns different tasks to different people. Some tasks are done in public. Others are done in private. Notwithstanding, the behind-the-scenes task may be the most vital. The majority of people are helpers (whether giving needed encouragement or offering timely suggestions). The tribe of Simeon helped the tribe of Judah. After Judah secured their portion of the land, Simeon all but disappeared from the scene. In a similar way, Andrew brought his brother Peter to

the Lord, and Peter received the keys of the kingdom. Barnabas introduced Paul to the folks in Jerusalem, and thereafter walked in the shadow of the apostle. This is intended to be a comfort to all of those who play second fiddle. We are strategic to the outcome, as strategic as a pinch of leaven is to a lump of dough. Consequently, let us do what we can. There is no need to envy the talents of those who lead the band. Why? They have to face the music! Although our name may not be in the headlines now, we will still hear the welcome words "well done" on the Day of Judgment. Is that not, after all, what is most important? We are not left to figure things out on our own. There is a clear destiny toward which we are being directed.

An aimless life (which follows its own fancies) is a wasted life. Only God knows the way home. The strongest person needs His strength. The wisest person needs His guidance. As servants, we wait for His orders. As soldiers, we follow His commands. Without them we are hopelessly lost.

Our need for guidance is clear. We are blind and ignorant. We are oblivious to all the circumstances that surround us. We cannot predict the demands of tomorrow. The ultimate issues of our actions are beyond our understanding. The limitations of our strength are unknown to us. Our future capacities cannot be determined by the present. Hence, only a higher wisdom can keep the faithful from fatal blunders. God "guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way," Psalms 25:9. "He will be our guide even to the end," Psalms 48:14.