

GOD LEADS HIS DEAR CHILDREN ALONG

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way." Psalm 37:23.

One of the inescapable responsibilities of life is the necessity of making decisions. At times we travel a plain road. Then we come to the place where a decision has to be made as to which way to go. In such cases proper direction is exceedingly important. The same thing is true as one travels down the highway of life. And the glorious thing about it is the fact that a Christian does not have to make choices or decisions without guidance.

I. Guidance Is Needed.

Jeremiah said: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (10:23). Human experience confirms this affirmation. Wrecked lives innumerable bear eloquent testimony to man's inability to direct his steps and to shape his destiny. Daily guidance of God is not only our wondrous privilege, but also our absolute and indispensable necessity.

Life is one long succession of choices, between the right and the wrong, the better and the best. Two paths open out before us, and we must walk in one of them. But which shall it be? We must have more than human guidance, for the path ahead is so obscure, our vision so defective, and our wisdom so limited. It is very doubtful if there was ever a time when God's people stood more in need of definite and positive guidance than now. The people of God need to know and to do His will as never before. To be saved and then not know the leading of the Lord is sad. So many of God's children just go plodding along in this work-a-day world without any obvious concern about the will of God and the leading of the Lord in their lives. The consequences in maladjusted and misdirected lives are so serious as to make correct orientation to the will of God a matter of all-consuming importance. Doing the will of God results in an inner harmony. Missing the divine plan results in inner discord.

Is it possible to enjoy divine direction in life, in its broad highways and in its by-ways? Is there a divine plan for the life of every believer? Can we know with assurance that we are moving in the direction of the will of God? These questions are not of merely academic interest, but are of vital importance to all who desire God's best. If there be no divine plan for every life, then each must devise his own plan and then work to it. But if there be such an ideal plan, then each must diligently set himself to discover and execute the plan. Guidance and direction are needed by all of us, and they are available to all.

II. Guidance Is Provided.

That God provided guidance to His children in the long ago is strikingly illustrated in the Bible. From his father's house and the land of his kindred, Abram "went out, not knowing whither he went," but with the assurance that God was guiding him. The story of Joseph is a thrilling account of divine guidance through strange and perplexing experiences. When Moses at the burning bush shrank from the task to which God called him, he was persuaded to undertake the great adventure by the assurance that God would be with him and direct him. Before the host of Israelites in the wilderness went a pillar of cloud by day, and by night a pillar of fire. The promise of God to the Psalmist was just as distinct: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (32:8).

The provision and promise of guidance are for us as certainly as they were for the men of faith who lived long ago. God is as truly present with us now as He was with them then. He is quite as willing and as able to direct our steps as He was to guide those who lived and wrought in previous generations.

There is something beautiful and tender in the thought of God offering to be the guide of His children. It is comforting to know that He is interested in our steps, and that He is willing and ready to order them. Unfortunately, not everyone who professes to seek guidance is honestly desirous of being guided. Any architect can tell you that some of his clients ask him to design a building for them, only to let him discover speedily that they have already designed it for themselves. What they really want is for him to sanction their plan, and give them the satisfaction of seeing him draw on paper what they already have in their minds. In very much the same fashion we frequently go to the Great Architect of our lives. We ask Him for wisdom and guidance, but we have already decided how we will shape our courses. It is not His way that we are seeking, but His approval of our way. Some people go so far as to assert that they are being guided by the Lord, but subsequent events prove that they simply follow their own inclinations and interpret such to be the will of God.

But to those who sincerely desire His direction, the Scriptures afford satisfying testimony to the fact that God is arranging and controlling with meticulous care the details of the life of the one who submits to His guidance. He is willing to take the helm of your life, and with unfailing wisdom and unerring skill, steer the barque of your life through unseen rocks and treacherous shoals to the desired haven. The person who ascertains and executes God's plan for his life will be joyful, useful, and successful in the true sense of those terms.

III. Guidance Is Channeled.

God has various ways of leading His dear children along.

1. Through His Word.

God's purposes, plans, and ways are revealed in the Bible. To know God's Word and cherish its teachings is to acquire a sense of direction in the affairs of life that will save us from many a wrong decision and make the right way plain. God's guidance will never be contrary to His Word. Nothing that cuts across the plain teachings of the Scriptures can be from God, for the Holy Spirit does not speak contradictorily.

2. Through the Holy Spirit.

Paul said: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). The Holy Spirit guides us by enlightening our judgment. In John 16:13 we read: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."

When we do not know just what to do, the Holy Spirit will guide us, if we are willing to follow His directions. Through the centuries men have experienced very definite guidance by the Holy Spirit. A splendid example of His guidance was in the case of Philip. Of this the Bible says: "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (Acts 8:29). God has never guided a single one of His children to do anything that is contrary to the Bible or injurious to a single human being, and He never will do either in the future.

3. Through His providences.

When acting in compliance with the Word of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit, surrounding circumstances always fall in line. Gates of iron will swing open of their own accord. Insurmountable obstacles will disappear at the shout of faith. God's hand is on things, and He brings about the opening of doors, and the closing of doors. We must watch the hand of God in all events.

It is glorious to know that there will be perfect harmony between God's Word, the Holy Spirit, and providential circumstances.

IV. Guidance Is Conditioned.

It is the privilege of every child of God to have the guidance of God's Spirit in every detail of life. In the Scriptures we find several principles of guidance. Before you can expect God to lead you along, there are some things that you must know and must do.

1. You must realize that you are not capable of self-guidance.

No one is capable of deciding for himself the way in which he should go. It is so easy to interpret your own inclinations as being the will of God. Such a misinterpretation always means a hazardous experience.

2. You must have a real desire to obtain God's guidance.

3. You must pray for guidance.

God's Word says: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Ask for God's guidance at every turn in life, and not merely in the great crises, but in the ordinary matters of everyday life.

4. You must expect God to guide you.

James said: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (1:6). Many actually do not expect God to guide them when they ask Him to do so.

5. You must be willing for God to guide you.

There must be a willingness to obey the will of God when it is revealed to you. Obedience to Him in the ordinary duties of life will guarantee direction in the crises of life. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6). A child of God does not have any right to do his own planning and then ask God to bless his plans, but he should ask God to reveal His will to him, and then obey it when he learns what it is.

6. You must follow a step at a time as God leads you along.

Most of us want to know the entire way before we take the first step, but God's method is to show us and lead us a step at a time. We must not force a half-open door, but we must wait until God opens the door. Isaiah said: "He that believeth shall not make haste" (28:16). The Psalmist said: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14). The principle of waiting is a real test of faith. Let us lay hold on the glorious promise which God has made to us, and be governed accordingly, in the words: "As thou goest thy way shall be opened by step by step before thee" (Proverbs 4:12). God's guidance will be personal and satisfying.