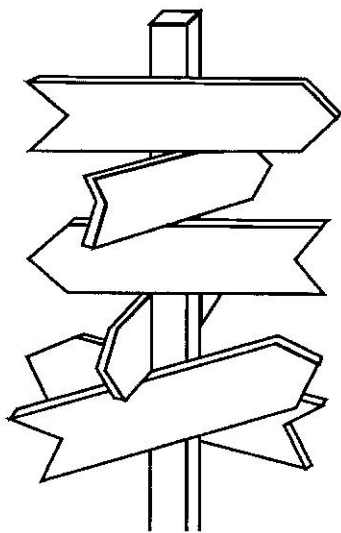


Guidance



By James McConkey

Book Messages by James H. McConkey

Prayer

The Surrendered Life

The Three-Fold Secret of the Holy Spirit

The Way of Victory

The Book of Revelation

The End of the Age

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GUIDANCE

"He leadeth me." (Ps. 23:2)

God guides us by His Word.

The Word of God is our supreme means of guidance. Wherever it speaks plainly upon any problem the child of God need seek not further. For its authority is final. No Christian, for example, needs special guidance as to whether he is called to the consecration of his life to his Lord. The Word of God is absolutely clear in its call to all. Romans 12:1 is addressed to all believers — and beseeches us as "brethren" to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. So no believer needs special guidance as to whether he is called to live a holy life. The Word distinctly declares "This is the will of God — even our sanctification." No believer needs any special guidance against bitterness, censoriousness and evil-speaking. The great command of God's Word is that we should "love one another even as Christ loved us." Wherever, therefore, the Word of God applies to our lives, its authority is supreme — and no guidance beyond it need be sought.

* * * *

God may also guide us by circumstances.

God would not ordinarily lead a blind man to a work requiring great keenness of vision. Nor would He call a deaf man to a service demanding the sharpest of hearing. Neither would an unlearned man be led in a

mission field to a translation work requiring a highly educated one. In such cases circumstances, unless they were changed, would seem to be conclusive guidance. Yet this is not true of all circumstances. For Satan may also enter into this sphere of circumstances and so manipulate them as to woefully deceive even God's own children. The case of the Gibeonites is strikingly in point. God has warned Joshua to make no covenant with the Canaanites. But the Gibeonites were inhabitants of Canaan. So they devised a clever scheme to deceive Joshua and the princes of Israel into the belief that they were from a far-off land. To this end, among other things they brought moldy bread. This they said, they had taken hot from their ovens when they started from their alleged distant home. The journey was so long that it had grown moldy by the way and they showed it to buttress their deception. Then follows the striking statement — "And the men (that is, the Israelites) received them by reason of their victuals (margin) and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord (Josh. 9:14). That is, Joshua and his elders accepted the circumstance of the moldy bread as conclusive without testing it out in prayer and waiting upon God. The result was disastrous. They made a covenant with an enemy people contrary to the command of God. The teaching for the Christian here is luminously clear. Circumstances should ordinarily be tested in the place of waiting and the chamber of prayer in order that God may either confirm them as being of Himself or show us that they are being used by our great adversary to beguile us.

* * * *

God also guides us by the Spirit.

Years ago a godly pastor overseas named Blumhardt was greatly used by God in prayer for the healing of the sick. Ere he prayed for healing he was wont to wait upon God in prayer to ascertain His will as to healing the individual before him. He testified that when he first began to pray in this way it often took him hours to ascertain the will of God in the matter. But after the lapse of a couple years of coming to God in this way he stated that often he would scarcely turn to God in prayer ere the answer would come, almost instantly. He had learned by much experience to know the mind of God as to the healing of the sick one before him.

This illustrates what is probably the most important lesson for the Christian as to the guidance of the spirit. It is that such guidance is learned only by a close, continuous, experimental walk with God, and in no other way. Such a walk is fraught with great blessing to the child of God. Any other is beset with peril. What that peril is the Word reveals when it says: "Try the spirits whether they be of God." Plainly we are taught here, as elsewhere, that there are other spirits than the Spirit of God. These are spirits of evil. Their business is to deceive and lead astray. And only by such an experimental knowledge as the godly pastor named above had acquired, can we ourselves be preserved from the danger of their insidious misleadings. How do you learn to recog-

nize a human voice? Never from another's description of it. You must actually hear that voice again and again until you are able unerringly to recognize and distinguish it from all other voices. This was the way Blumhardt came to know his great Shepherd's voice. Nor is there any other way for us to know it. For —

There is no royal road to guidance.

It is taught only in God's school. And there only can it be learned. We must be willing to sit on the primary benches, if necessary, to master all its lessons. For guidance is one of the severest tests of the Christian's walk with God. It touches his life at every point. Prayer; knowledge of the Word; personal temperament; tendency to haste; advice of friends; reliance upon our own wisdom; impatience with delays; submission to the will of God in all matters in question — all these and many more, become factors in seeking guidance; and they test to the limit our personal walk with God. No experience is more common in the believer's life than to come into the place of absolute perplexity as to which of two paths to take, which of two possible courses of action to follow. And while there are times when the crisis is met with comparative ease, there are others when our perplexity is extreme as to what we shall do at the parting of the ways. Then every lesson of prayer, experience, and knowledge of God's Word comes into play and helps to illumine our pathway and make clear our course of action.

* * * *

*God's great clarifier in guidance
is — waiting.*

Sometimes you draw from a faucet a glass of water which is muddy and turbid. How do you clear it? You place the glass of muddy water on your table. Moment by moment the sediment deposits at the bottom of the glass. Gradually the water grows clearer. In a few moments it is so clear that you may distinguish objects through it. It has all been brought about simply by waiting.

The law is the same in the realm of guidance. Here too, God's great precipitant is — waiting. We face some situation needing His guidance. It is full of uncertainty. We seek to peer through it as through the glass of turbid water. But we cannot see. The one thing to do is to wait. As we do so, the sediment slowly settles. The situation clears. Things take on new proportions, new adjustments. The trifling things assume their proper place of insignificance. The big things loom up into their proper importance. Waiting is the solution of it all. The time element is the supremely essential factor. The vast majority of our mistakes come from neglect of it. Haste is more often a trap of Satan than it is a necessity of guidance. "They which believe shall not make haste" is true here as in many other crises.

*Guidance is sometimes
extraordinary, sometimes ordinary.*

Paul's guidance to the open door in

Macedonia by the vision of the man who stood there beseeching him; Peter's vision of the sheet let down from heaven to show the broadening of the gospel stream to the Gentiles; the disciples' guidance to the upper chamber for the Passover by the man with the pitcher who led them to it; the wise men's guidance from the far away East by the star which at length stood over the Christ-child — all these are instances of extraordinary guidance. And all of us have had examples of such extraordinary guidance. Some great text flashes out of the Word to make our pathway luminous with its teaching; some striking circumstance rears itself in our path as a clear finger-board of guidance; some strong, steadfast pressure of the Spirit stays with us until we see that it is clearly of God — all these are cases of the extraordinary in guidance. Yet, we need to remember that God also guides by the usual as well as the unusual. And it would spell disaster for us to insist upon the extraordinary when God may be leading us by the ordinary. The guidance of King Saul at the mouth of the prophet is a clear case of God combining the unusual with the usual. Saul was to meet two men at Rachel's tomb who would tell him of the finding of his father's straying herd. A little further on he would meet three men bearing provisions who would give to him from their supply. Still later would come a company of prophets, and their spirit of prophecy was to fall upon Saul who would himself prophesy. These were all cases of extraordinary guidance. But when these had come to pass — then, said Samuel, "Do as

occasion serves thee." That is, at this point the extraordinary guidance was to cease and the ordinary begin. Now he was to use his God-guided judgment concerning each circumstance as it arose, and take each step as occasion demanded. This brings us naturally to our next truth, namely, that —

Guidance is usually a step at a time.

All of us need this lesson. We want our guidance as far in advance as possible instead of being content to walk with God a step at a time. Yet this is at once faith's severest test and highest development. Most of our mistakes in guidance come from our waning to see beyond the next turn in the road, or the next bend in the river. "I thank God for the tracklessness of the desert," said a devout child of God. It is a beautiful picture. The traveler who rises in the morning to traverse the great desert looks out upon a trackless waste. There is not a trace of a signboard or beaten path. There is but one thing for him to do. That is to follow his guide, step by step, through all the weary journey of the day over the untrodden waste. Such is the perfect walk of the child of God who has learned to trust Him. Such was Abraham's who went forth "not knowing whither he went" save that he was following the Guide who was leading him. Such is the lesson Christ brings to us when He says "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" His life was so meted out by God that He lived every hour in His Father's plan and purpose taking no anxious thought for

the morrow. And our Lord means this same lesson for us when He says, "As the Father hath sent me even so send I you." Do we doubt this the-by-step guidance for the future? Then let us look back upon the years of the past. No child of God can do so without unspeakable gratitude and wonderment. For God has led every faltering step of his way up to the very hour at which he reads these lines.

* * * *

Guidance may be by stops as well as steps.

"The stops of a good man, as well as his steps, are ordered by the Lord", says George Muller. Naturally an opened door seems more like guidance to us than a closed one. Yet God may guide by the latter as definitely as God may guide by the former. His guidance of the children of Israel by the pillar of cloud and fire is a clear case in point (Numbers 9). When the cloud was lifted the Israelites took up their march. It was the guidance of God to move onward. But when the cloud tarried and abode upon the tabernacle then the people rested in their tents. "And whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not." "At the commandment of the Lord they rested — and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed." Both the tarrying and the journeying were guidance from the Lord, the one as much as the other. We when we are hindered or stayed from moving forward, are prone to

think that we are having no guidance. In fact, no guidance forward may be guidance of the most real sort. It is simply guidance to wait. Waiting, with the cloud, is true and blessed guidance. Going ahead without it is simply human willfulness.

Again, guidance is usually cumulative.

That is God does not confine our guidance to any one proof or leading, but confirms it by accumulative signs and indications. He not only led Saul to Ananias but prepared Ananias for Saul. He led Philip to the wilderness there to find someone whom he had prepared for Philip. He gives a message from the Word, and then leads us to those who need to hear it. He confirms the Word by the Spirit, and buttresses the inner guidance by external circumstances. He makes us fruitful in one service, and barren in another. He gives joy and blessing in the ministry He is drawing us *to*, and distaste and unrest in that He is leading us *from*. He forges one link after another in the chain of guidance until the whole is complete and convincing. Of this kind is the statement of Christ concerning prayer, that if two of His own be agreed touching anything it shall be given them. The truth here is better expressed in the thought "*if two of you find yourselves agreed.*" If one of us is guided to a certain petition in prayer we might have some doubt as to our own leading in the matter. But when another believer, and then another is led the same way the proof becomes cumulative that our leading is coming from a common source,

namely, the Lord in the midst of us. The word "to be agreed" here is a musical expression meaning "to strike the same note". The truth is a beautiful one. For the unison of a great orchestra in striking the same note as it tunes up is proof conclusive that the common note came from its common leader. So when spirit led men and women find themselves striking the same note" in their prayer petitions it is pretty sure proof that this note came from their own great Leader.

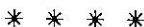
* * * *

Beware of shortcuts in guidance.

We recall a Summer day in Switzerland. A number of us were crossing a great glacier. The path was narrow and winding. Presently we came to a point where the guide, instead of continuing straight ahead, made a sharp, sudden detour to the right. Of course all of us followed his lead — that is, all but one man. He was evidently annoyed at the detour and resolved to take a shortcut. So he started straight ahead instead of following in the pathway. Immediately the guide rushed back, grasped him by the collar, and with no gentle hand dragged him back. Then, without a word, he pointed to a patch of snow upon which the man was about to tread. Instead of being a sure foothold for his steps, it was a mere crust of snow covering a great crevasse opening into the very bowels of the glacier. Had he trodden upon it he would have gone down to an unspeakable death in the heart of

the great glacier. The shortcut would have ended in appalling disaster.

A similar peril besets the believer's walk. Sometimes our Guide seems too slow for us. Haste of spirit; eagerness for results; counsel of well-meaning friends; seeming delay of God to lead us onward — these things and others of a kind, tempt us to take shortcuts toward desired ends. But like the man on the glacier we make a mistake which may end in disaster. At times God does indeed seem to lead us by devious and roundabout paths. But it pays us far better to make detours *with* Him than to take shortcuts *without* Him.



Beware of guidance solely of the flesh.

Flesh and blood could not reveal the Christ to Simon Peter. Neither can it reveal the things of Christ to us. Nor does it matter whether it is our own flesh and blood or that of some other. For the other man's flesh and blood is compassed with the same infirmities and subject to the same errors as ours. Moreover the man who relies upon his friends for his guidance soon finds that the variety of advice they offer only increases the number of his perplexities. Then too it is a divine principle that God does not reveal to another man His plans for your life. Christ's rebuke of Peter for wanting to know His will for John is the clearest possible proof of this (John 21:22). You may help the little child to walk in its beginnings of the art. But if it is ever to learn

to walk alone, there comes a time when it must let go of your hand entirely and ceases from all dependence upon you. The believer who would learn to walk with God must learn the same lesson. And as baby learns it at the cost of some tumbles, even so must the Christian learn it at the cost of some mistakes. It were better learned that way than not to be learned at all. The price of a few blunders is not too high for such a treasure as a walk alone with God in the place of His own God-given guidance. Does God then have no place for your Christian friends in this matter of guidance? He surely does. Get all the help; all the light upon God's word; all the experience of others you possibly can. That is you may get facts from others. But you must make your decisions yourself. For when we reach the place of decision we cannot evade the personal, patient waiting upon God alone through which we learn the most precious lessons of His guidance.

* * * *

Last of all:

*Guidance is sure for those
who wait and pray.*

Sometimes our perplexity is so great that it seems no guidance will ever come. For such times the psalmist has a precious message in his word about the night-watchers. "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." (Ps. 130:6) How do men

who wait in the night hours for the dawn, watch for the morning? The answer is four-fold:

- * They watch in *darkness*.
- * They watch for that which *comes slowly*.
- * They watch for that which is *sure to come*.
- * They watch for that which when it does come, *brings the light of day*.

So it is with us who wait for guidance. Often our perplexity is so extreme that we seem to be waiting in total darkness. Often too as we wait, even as those who wait for the day, the first faint streaks of dawn seem to come, oh so slowly! Then too as there never yet has been a night which was not sure to end in the dawn, so our night of uncertainty is sure to end in the dawning light of God's guidance. Lastly, as the slow-coming dawn when it does arrive brings light and blessing without measure, so when our God-given guidance at last breaks upon us it will so rejoice our waiting souls and so illumine our beclouded path we shall almost forget the long days when we waited in darkness; waited for that which was slow in coming; yet waited for that which was as sure to come as the tender radiance of the dawn was sure to those who watched and waited for the morning.

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God's Jewel Case	The Way of Cleansing
The God-Planned Life	The Word
Guidance	
Highway of Guidance	
Holy Ground	

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