The background of the entire cover is a repeating pattern of a church building, likely Trinity Church, rendered in a light tan or yellowish-brown color. The church features a prominent square tower with a clock face and arched windows, and a main body with a gabled roof. The pattern is arranged in a grid-like fashion, with the church appearing in various orientations and sizes across the surface.

HOW TO GET GUIDANCE

Trinity Sermon No 25

*Margaretta Mary Woodruff
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ROBERT J. BANKS

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HOW TO GET GUIDANCE

An Address given by
the Reverend
ROBERT J. BANKS, B.A., B.D., Th.L.
at
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, ADELAIDE
Trinity Sermon No. 25

HOW TO GET GUIDANCE

St. Paul, blinded by the vision on the Damascus Road, and standing at the cross roads of life, cried out in desperation to Jesus Christ "Lord, what shall I do?"

Is this not the cry of all Christian persons throughout the whole of their lives, perhaps many times each day, and very often in an agony of uncertainty over a problem that weighs upon them? "Lord Jesus Christ, what shall I do?" The cry perhaps of a young person who is seeking to know what God wants him to do with his life - or concerning his stand for Jesus Christ, just how and when and where he should make it. The cry of a young married couple who are seeking to solve the new problems meeting them - or to determine their responsibility to each other, to their children, to their neighbours and to their congregation. The cry of parents concerned for a child who is growing up and wandering from Christian things - or, for themselves as they face a major crisis. The cry of an elderly person faced with a future he feels to be full of loneliness and uselessness. The cry of a church as it looks into the future and seeks to know what God has instore.

Most of us have at least one problem or more constantly weighing upon our minds. They are real. They concern us. And we are uncertain as to what the future holds.

How tremendous it is then to turn to some of the promises which God sets forth in His word! Psalm 32:8 for example, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you;" Psalm 23:3, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake"; Isaiah, "The Lord will guide you continually;" or the answer to the question of Paul on the Damascus Road, "Rise, go to Damascus and you will be told all that is appointed for you to do."

Time and time again promises such as these are made through the Scriptures. God will guide. This is certain for the very reason set out in Ephesians, 2:10, "We", says St. Paul, "are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God's plan for the Christian is already formed and He desires to guide the Christian along its path. This is why

He says to the Christian person, in James 1. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously, and He shall give him wisdom." J.B. Phillips translates it - "If any of you do not know how to meet any particular problem, he only has to ask God who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty, and you may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him."

This, then, is certain - God has a plan for the Christian; God is willing to guide the Christian; God urges the Christian to ask for the wisdom necessary.

This much we know, but it is here that the problem of guidance comes to a head. We can speak to God. We can ask Him in prayer what He wants us to do. But how does God speak to us in return? How does God implant his message and His purpose in our hearts? The Scriptures indicate that there are several ways in which God works.

Firstly through the Word of God.

The Scriptures, we know, contain a

great number of very clear and definite statements - The Law in the Old Testament, the directions of the Prophets, the sayings of Christ in the Gospels, or the instructions given by Paul and other Apostles in the Letters of the New Testament. Here are clear and definite statements as to how the Christian person is to behave. Here are plain answers to the problems in so many people's minds. I think we would be quite surprised if we realised how many problems we face because we do not know the Scriptures. Paul wrote to Timothy that Scripture was given for the purpose of training the Christian in righteousness, and equipping him for the work God has in store for him. (II Tim. 3:16). The more a Christian knows the Scriptures, the more he knows the mind of God, and the more he knows the answers to his problems.

But the Scriptures do not give clear and definite answers applicable to every situation. On the other hand, we find that the Word of God does lay down principles which we can use as the basis for making a decision in such situations. Perhaps we could put it this way. Problems do not basically alter. The ones we face are the ones faced by the

early Christians. Only surface changes have taken place, and it is in the Word of God that we can find the necessary principles for their solution.

The Holy Spirit also speaks through Fellowship with Other Christians.

There is a verse in Proverbs, "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that you may be wise," and again and again in the New Testament it is said that God speaks to persons through other persons. It may be through a minister, a leader in the church, or a Christian friend that you know. It may be through a group of Christians meeting together for discussion and Bible study. It may be as you pray with other Christians and hear their prayers, or as you watch their lives and see answers to your problems reflected in them.

Yet we need to remember that even the directions and the advice which other Christians give must be checked against the Word of God, for this kind of guidance is not infallible.

Sometimes, God speaks through Circumstances.

God controls circumstances. We know that. The Scriptures tell us so.

But here difficulty arises, for it is not always easy to determine what circumstances are saying. For example, what happens when a door is closed in our face? Does it mean that God is saying ... "No further"? Is He saying ... "Try again"? Perhaps He is saying ... "Look in another direction".

Circumstances by themselves are often difficult to interpret. We must look at them, yet they must never be considered final. Perhaps we should sound a warning to those who are practically minded, because people who are practically minded tend to be guided by circumstances more than anything else. It is a danger, for example, that many men in business face. Circumstances are important, but they are not the whole truth.

And then Feelings.

If you look through the Scriptures, you will find that nowhere in the Bible does God promise to give corresponding inward feelings when he asks us to take a certain course of action. He may do so, but He often asks his children to act in a very important matter without them. These, too, can be very mis-

leading. They fluctuate. They can be easily influenced by our own desires. The devil often has strict control over them. In every congregation you find people who are led by feelings more than anything else. They are felt led into this and felt led into that and then felt led out of it again almost as quickly. They take responsibility and then drop it, because they no longer feel that God is guiding them to do it. Feelings should be checked, but they are no means final when making a decision, and if a person is impulsive, moody, or emotionally inclined, then he should be very careful indeed.

Turn next to Conscience.

Sometimes conscience will be an important factor in making up our minds about a particular problem. We must examine it, but we must not be governed by conscience alone, because conscience is something that could easily lead us astray. It depends how much that conscience has been trained by the Word of God. There are some people whose consciences have been little taught by the word of God and so their consciences have little to say. There are others whose consciences have been taught not

only by the Word of God, but by all sorts of other influences, (such as environment and upbringing), and their conscience might have too much to say.

It must be consulted, but it must be checked against the Word of God, as with all these other means of guidance. And if you are a person who has free standards about certain things, or on the other hand, if you are a person who has very strict standards about certain things, you need to be wary of your conscience, because it might say too little or it might say too much. It might give you too much freedom, or it might give you too little.

What of Signs?

They are not promised in the Scriptures and they are often condemned. You might remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he said:- "A corrupt and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." God has given them. You find as you read through the Bible that at certain decisive times in the history of Israel, God gave signs as an indication of His will. Again, experience shows that when a Christian is young in the faith, when his knowledge of

Scripture is small, when a great crisis confronts him, God may give some extraordinary indication as to the course to take. But the mature Christian should beware of signs. Jesus Christ made it quite clear that Satan also can work wonders. If you are a person who is hesitant, timid, or indecisive, you need to beware, because you will look for signs and God might ask you to proceed without them.

Well, then, when a particular problem of guidance arises, we should seek the answer along the lines that the Scriptures suggest. We should check the Word of God. We should seek advice of other Christians who have had more experience than ourselves. We should look at circumstances. We should examine our own feelings and our own conscience. We should consider all these things, using that common sense that God has given us, praying that He might lead us by His Spirit. Sometimes, God will show the path clearly before us. At other times He will indicate only a single step. He is then asking us to go out in faith, step by step, into the future.

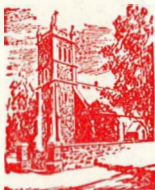
As we do this we need to remember two things. Firstly, we must continue

to do the immediate tasks which God has already given us. We should be busy and practical about the things which God has set round about. Secondly, we need to grow in the knowledge of the Word of God. We must not stand still in the knowledge of the Scriptures. We need to grow in understanding of them, for as we do so, more and more do we gain the mind of Jesus Christ. More and more do we think like Jesus Christ. More and more do we see all problems and their answers, from His point of view.

God has a plan for your life. He promises to guide you into it if you ask. God knows the problem you have on your mind at any moment. He knows how soon a decision must be made. Above all, God is able to overrule any mistake.

Then let the words of Paul to the Phillipians rest in your own heart. "Don't worry over anything. Tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding will keep constant guard on your hearts, and minds, as they rest in Jesus Christ."

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