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Knowing God's guidance



**Way of Life Booklet
No 6**

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Knowing God's Guidance

WAY OF LIFE BOOKLET No. 6

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How can I know the right thing to do? Whom should I marry? What job should I take? How can I deal with this big trouble in my life? All of us have to ask questions like this. For those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Master of our lives the answers are very important. As Christians we know that God has a plan for each of our lives. He cares about each one of us as a father cares for his son, and wants to lead us in His way.

This booklet is written for those who want to follow God's plan for their lives, with the prayer that it will help us to find the way. We shall start by asking ourselves some questions about God's guidance.

WHY DOES GOD GUIDE ?

God guides us because He loves us and is very concerned with us. The Bible is the

Guide-book for life. In it the writers of each of the books, joined together through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, bring the Word of God to men. At the centre of all Bible teaching is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and one of His names is 'the Word' (John 1 : 1). From the way in which this word is used of Christ we see that God wants to show His mind to us, just as we try to show our minds to friends by the words we use. A father guides his child in his behaviour, his learning and his friendships because he wants him to grow up in the right way. So God is interested in all the details of our lives because He wants the best for us. A child can learn that fire burns either because his parents tell him so and warn him of it, or because one day he puts his foot into the fire and learns the hard way by being burnt. In the same way we can learn either by the guidance of God or by making mistakes until we find the right way. God wants us to learn from Himself.

God also guides us because He wants us to do His will. We are not machines to move at His command, as an engine will start

when a switch is moved. We are His children who should obey His commands for love of Him, and then we find that His way is best. Behind all guidance is this simple fact, 'As for God, his way is perfect' (Psalm 18 : 30). All through the ages His children have found it to be true that He 'maketh my way perfect' (verse 32 of the same Psalm). Between the perfect will of God and the perfect way for us to live lies the guidance of God. For our sakes and for His own sake, He wants to give us this guidance.

WHO IS GUIDED BY GOD ?

Many people feel, when they need guidance on a certain matter, that they must go to the witch doctor or ju-ju man. Others feel they must consult the stars or some oracle. A Christian has no need of this, and Christian guidance is very different from the advice people receive in these ways. God does not want to show us a secret way of living a

comfortable life, nor does He want to help us to be lazy or selfish. He does want to guide us into a full life of service for Him.

God guides His servants

God is the One who has placed us here on this earth to serve Him. He has paid such a very high price for our salvation in the death of His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, upon the cross. Shall He not, therefore, guide us in our daily lives so that they can really be used by Him to show His love and His power? 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?' (Psalm 56: 13).

He can only do this if we are prepared to obey Him, for servants have a duty to wait upon their master and to obey his commands. 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us' (Psalm 123: 2).

God guides His sheep

The Lord Jesus Christ said, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep' (John 10: 11). He went all the way to the cross to save us from our sin. Those who know His forgiveness and want to follow His way are His sheep. Of His sheep He says, 'and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice' (John 10: 3-4). In this picture the shepherd goes in front of the sheep so that he faces the danger first. He leads the way and his sheep follow safely along behind. So the Lord Jesus Christ goes before us in all the events of our lives. It is our part to follow Him when we hear Him call.

Perhaps you are reading this booklet just because you are about to make some big decision or meet some great change in your life. You may be wondering whether to get married or to move house. Perhaps you are wondering whether God is calling you into full-time service for Him. Remember that

the Good Shepherd is going before you and you must keep close to Him. He has a plan for you which is a perfect plan. He does not offer you a choice of second-best things, but only a perfect plan. Seek it from Him.

God guides His children

God's children are those who have the great privilege of calling God their heavenly Father. 'But to all who received him, who believed on his name, he gave power to become children of God' (John 1: 12, Revised Standard Version). The guidance of God is within the family of God. We may not see clearly how God guides in the affairs of the world, but He promises to guide those who are His children. Do you belong to the family of God? You do, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and have received forgiveness of sin from Him. You are then born a second time, into the family of God, and have the new life of God within you. If you are not sure of this, go back to the first two booklets in this series, *Receiving Christ as Saviour* and *Being Sure of Salvation*. Study them and come to Christ for His forgiveness. The world and its

problems can be confusing and even frightening. But it is wonderful to remember in the midst of our troubles that we can live as true members of the family of God. We do this once we have repented of our sins, asked Christ to come into our lives as Saviour and decided to live for Him instead of for ourselves.

God intends us to be as children with a father with Him. He wants to lead us and guide us as a father does his son. 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons' (Galatians 4: 4-5).

HOW DOES GOD GUIDE ?

Sometimes we wish that God would guide us in some very wonderful way as He guided Samuel. He called him by his name, 'Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth' (1 Samuel 3: 10). God does not need to do this for us

today. He will not use these unusual ways of guidance except at times when we especially need them. He wants to guide us always along simple and clear lines which are shown to us in the Bible. Guidance is not a spiritual luxury for the best people, but something needed by everyone who is a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. God means us to be sure of our salvation (see Booklet No. 2 in this series). In the same way God means us to be sure about His will for our own lives in our present situation. We shall then be able to serve Him wholeheartedly, because we are sure we are in the place of His choice for us, however difficult that place may be. When God wants us to move from the place where we are, He will begin to show it to us. Read Exodus 40 : 34-38 and study the way in which God led the children of Israel. While they were in the wilderness, the Tabernacle (where His presence dwelt) was covered with a thick cloud. When the cloud moved, the people moved onward. If the cloud was not taken up, the people did not move.

Let us now look at some of the ways in

which God does guide us. We shall number the points as we study them to help us to be clear in our thinking. But God does not choose just one number from this list and use that method of guidance. These points all go together. If one way is the right way for you to go, then God will probably use many different things to show to you that your decision is the right one.

1. God guides the meek

Read carefully Psalm 25, where we find many things set out clearly about God's guidance.

v. 1. I must look to the Lord.

v. 2. I must trust the Lord.

v. 3. I must pray to the Lord.

v. 4. If I am to know His guidance, I must confess my sins to the Lord (see 1 John 1 : 7-9). It is easy to get confused in our lives and be unable to find God's guidance if we have unconfessed sin in our lives. Then our eyes are darkened, so that we cannot see clearly. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', said the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 5 : 8).

v. 8. I must believe in the goodness of God and that He will guide me. Satan still tempts us to doubt the goodness of God in the same way that he tempted Adam and Eve (Genesis 3 : 8). But 'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' (Romans 8 : 28). This does not say that all things are good for the Christian, but that all things *work together* for good to them that love God. There may be many things that are not pleasant that God allows in our lives, but they all *work together* for good, even though that good may well be for other people's sakes and not clearly for our own. We must be firm believers in His goodness. The Bible is at the centre of all God's guidance, here as elsewhere. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God' (Romans 10 : 17). The more we study the Word of God the more clearly we shall know the guidance of God and the more fully shall we believe the goodness of God, because our faith will grow.

v. 9. I must yield my will to His will. 'The meek will he guide in judgement; and

the meek will he teach his way.' Here is the key verse in this great Psalm on guidance. Learn it by heart. It can be read, 'He will teach the ways that are right and best to those who humbly turn to him' (*Living Psalms*). The word 'meek' does not mean weak people, but it does mean those who are honest and brave and loving enough to yield their wills to the will of God. We shall never know His guidance unless we accept His rule.

2. God guides through the Scriptures

The Bible is not a magical thing which falls open at a page and gives us a message. Nor can we use it in magic or as a talisman. It must be read carefully and thoughtfully like any other book. But as well as this, it must be read differently, for it is different from all other books. It stands alone for it is the Word of God to men. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself called the Scriptures the Word of God (Mark 7 : 13). In any decision you are trying to make, you can be sure that God will not lead you to do something which is against His teaching in the Bible.

Therefore study the Bible for yourself. If you meet some difficulty, ask an older Christian to help you with it. Read 2 Timothy 3: 15-17. There you will find that the Bible was written to help us concerning our salvation (v. 15), holy living (v. 16) and service (v. 17). God does not lead us in easy short cuts concerning our guidance. We must study the Bible if we are to know the will of God. When you understand the general teaching of the Bible, then turn to particular passages which speak about your own problems.

Perhaps you are thinking of marriage. Study all you can of the Bible teaching on marriage. Find out God's purpose for marriage and how He could use you as a married person in His service. Do not keep your thinking narrow and concerned with your own comfort, but learn to see Christian guidance as part of a larger thing of Christian living and service. David said, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path' (Psalm 119: 105). God's Word can be the light to show us the next step in our daily living and to lighten the future stretching out in front of us.

Read the Bible daily. Join a Bible-reading society or use some other system of Bible reading so that you read the whole of the Bible and not only the parts that you know well. Then the Word of God will become a part of your life and you will be able to know God's will.

We should seek God's guidance through the general teaching of the Bible, but He does sometimes guide us through special verses. A certain man and woman had no children and were wondering whether it was God's will for them to take a motherless child into their home to care for it. As they were praying, they found this verse, ' . . . take this child away and nurse it for me ' (Exodus 2: 9). God used this verse of Scripture at that time to assure them that the decision was a right one. Some people feel that God must give them a verse of Scripture on a certain matter before they will make a decision about it. This may be right in certain cases, but at the same time we must be careful not to use verses wrongly and to take them out of their true setting. And we must never look for a verse to sup-

port a decision that we may believe to be a wrong one.

Often, if we are in doubt, it is better to trust God and do the more difficult thing. If you are in a very difficult situation where you need Christ's strength before you can win a victory there, do not leave that place before the victory is real. If you are tempted to run away from a tough job, be careful about God's guidance before you leave it. Read the story of Jonah in chapters 1, 2, 3. Jonah found many good reasons for not doing God's will before he was ready to do the difficult job whatever it cost him.

3. God guides through prayer

Prayer is a most important part of seeking God's guidance. But, like Bible reading, prayer is not a magic key which opens all doors. Nor do we automatically receive the things for which we pray.

Prayer is a relationship with God. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him,

and he with me' (Revelation 3: 20). God has promised to come in and 'sup' with those who open their lives to Him. This is a sign of friendship. God loves to talk with those who know Him, and to hear their prayers to Him. Prayer is really for the Christian who has already this relationship with God and for those who are seeking Him. God has not given us prayer as a quick method of getting our own way.

As we get to know our heavenly Father better, so we shall learn to wait on Him in prayer, listening to Him as well as talking to Him. In this way we shall learn to be sensitive to His voice in our hearts and lives.

In prayer we do not simply seek to know what the will of God is. We seek strength to do it. This was shown with great force in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus was facing the cross and tempted to withdraw, He prayed to His Father, 'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him' (Luke 22: 42, 43). So He taught us to pray in Luke 11: 2,

'Thy will be done.' We must be ready to pray this before we can find God's will.

In 2 Kings 19: 14 Hezekiah received a very distressing letter from the King of Assyria. We read that after he had read it he 'went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord'. This is what we must learn to do with our problems. We can spread them out before the Lord in prayer, telling Him the whole situation. Many people find it helpful to write down the problem and the various things they could do. If we have to decide between two jobs or two colleges, we can make two lists with the advantages and disadvantages of each place. Perhaps God's answer is that neither of these is the right one and we must be ready for Him to show us this as well. As you continue to pray, one choice or the other will stand out as the right one. But this does not always happen quickly. The more important the decision, the longer it may take to get God's guidance. We must be careful of saying, 'God has told me to do this', a day or two after first thinking and praying about it.

Learn to look back in your life and thank God for the ways you can see that He has guided you. Then you will be able to look forward and trust Him for the future. You may perhaps live near a large river where you make daily use of the ferry to get from one side of the river to the other. You know that this ferry and the ferryman are reliable, for you have found them to be so over many months. A stranger coming to your town may think the ferryman and his small boat do not look strong enough for the job and he will be really afraid of trusting them to get him safely over. In the same way, as we find that God is trustworthy and that He does guide us in the right way, we learn to go confidently with Him into the future.

Let prayer lead you on to a child-like trust and dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ and He will gradually show His will to you as you pray.

God holds the key to all unknown,
And I am glad,
If other hands should hold the key,
Or if He trusted it to me,
I might be sad.

Do not make a big decision if you are in any way out of touch with the Lord Jesus Christ. The nearer you are to Him the more you will have His mind (Philippians 2 : 5) and the more likely you are to decide rightly. Many people have been helped by the promise in Hosea 6 : 3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.'

One of our most important decisions is whom we should marry. Our whole Christian witness can be spoiled if we decide wrongly here. We should lay these questions and their answers in prayer before the Lord. Does the friendship help me nearer to Christ? Are we both committed to the Lord Jesus Christ as definite, witnessing, worshipping Christians? Do I always urge my friend to live the Christian life more fully? True marriage is based on Christian fellowship, and a true Christian home can only be formed if both partners serve Christ as Master. If you do know Christ as Saviour, *do not consider* a marriage with one who is not a truly born-again Christian. That is the way of disaster. The Bible says, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers'

(2 Corinthians 6 : 14).

Pray steadily about all your friendships. Do not grasp selfishly at them. Receive them gratefully from God. If you seek the friendship of Jesus Christ above all others, He will guide you clearly about friends and marriage. Once again, if you are willing to do His will He will show it to you.

The very dimness of my sight,
Makes me secure,
For groping in my misty way,
I feel His hand, I hear Him say,
'My help is sure.'

4. God guides us through our circumstances

If you are humbly seeking God's will, studying His Word and waiting on Him in prayer, He may use the things in your life to guide you. He often guides us through our abilities. If you are doing well at school, find the work easy and interesting, it may be His will for you to go to University. If you find bookwork difficult but enjoy using your hands, then it is unlikely that God will lead

you to further studies, but He may have a plan for you to become skilled as a mechanic. If you are interested in young people it may be right for you to become a teacher or to teach in Sunday school. God has given us all these gifts and means us to use them to the full. He has given each one of us gifts, talents and ability and it is our task as Christians to find out what we are best suited for. And we should expect just as clear guidance from God about going into a job, say, as a clerk, as into the ministry of the church. Every Christian should feel that his job is a calling from the Lord, even if the job itself seems dull. The Christian is in that office or factory as a representative of Christ and there may be no others there to serve Him. God is a God of order and we should take the circumstances of our life into our thinking when we are praying about the future.

In the same way, God will guide us through other circumstances, our health perhaps, or family responsibilities. In banks or hotels in the city, there are often doors which do not need to be opened. There is

a mechanical arrangement in the floor or the doorpost, enabling the door to swing open without being touched when someone goes near it. Often, as we seek the will of God and truly give our lives to Him, He opens a door like that. At other times He closes a door and it is obvious that we should not try to open it. Paul was in such a place in Acts 16 : 7 where we read, 'And when they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them' (Revised Standard Version).

Like traffic lights in a city street, our circumstances can be at 'green', when we move on from step to step. When the lights go 'red' we stand still, continue to pray, consider our circumstances and seek the guidance of God in Scripture.

5. God guides us through the advice of our elders and Christian friends

The commandments tell us, 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (Exodus 20 : 12). God guides us through our parents and we must be careful to honour them and take

heed of their advice. A certain student was converted to Christ from another religion. His parents forbade him to have anything to do with the church or Christian meetings for his first year at University. He was allowed to read his Bible and say his prayers and this he faithfully did for a whole year. During the second year they allowed him to be baptized and join the church. By honouring his parents in this way that student obeyed God's commands, strengthened his own faith and showed to his parents how real his new faith was.

If you have parents who do not know Jesus Christ as Saviour there will be many times when they do not understand your actions. But you should be very sure of God's will before you make a big decision which will offend them, particularly concerning your marriage. They may have very good reasons which you, as a younger person, do not understand. If you do feel that it is right to act without their approval, pray much about how you talk to them. Do it humbly and kindly. It is easy for young Christians to feel that they suffer for Christ's

sake, when really they are acting wilfully and unwisely.

We all need the advice and help of Christian friends, especially those who are older in the faith. Here again, we must be very certain before we go against the advice of older Christians, especially our minister. The Holy Spirit not only guides Christians personally, but He guides the church of God and what we do affects other believers as well. He also gives to older people wisdom about other people's problems. If we say, 'God has told me to do this and I shall take advice from nobody,' we may only be hiding rebellious hearts. Take your problems to your pastor, or minister or some other senior friend whom you trust. All of us look back and thank God for the good advice of friends. In his first letter, Peter reminds the young Christians to whom he writes that 'ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder' (1 Peter 5 : 5).

6. God guides us in special ways

Sometimes God guides us in special ways, to show us some special need or task or

challenge. We must not be lazy and expect a voice from the sky, when we should be seeking God's will in the Bible, on our knees in prayer, in the circumstances of our lives and through the advice of other people. But He will sometimes give us special guidance if we are in great trouble or difficulty. Some Christians also find that God guides them through dreams or a vision. It is of course very important that we do not use a dream or a vision to excuse a wrong decision, but it could perhaps come to show that our thinking about some matter was correct. Any dream or vision that does not agree with the Word of God cannot be considered as guidance.

God spoke to Peter once in a special way when He was asking him to take the gospel to non-Jewish people. Because this idea seemed wrong to Peter at that time, God sent him a special vision. You can read this story in Acts 10 : 9-20.

GOD DOES NOT GUIDE THROUGH WITCHCRAFT OR JU-JU

We must have it very clear in our minds that God does not guide through any forms of ju-ju, witchcraft, oracles, 'throwing of bones' or any other means used by the medicine men, ju-ju men or witchdoctors. And God does not guide us through astrologers who attempt to foretell things through the stars. These things have different names in different countries but they are all connected with evil and *they are wrong for a Christian*. Read carefully Deuteronomy 18 : 9-11. Some of the names are different from the ones we use today but this passage clearly refers to witchcraft and magic in all forms. 'There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practises divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord' (Deuteronomy 18 : 10-12, Revised Standard Version). The word 'abomination' means something very hateful to God.

KNOWING GOD'S GUIDANCE

It is a very wonderful thing that God has a plan for us. He cares for us enough to be interested in every detail of our lives. And it is wonderful, too, that with careful prayer, and study of the Bible, we can be sure of the next step in that plan. Guidance is not an easy thing, but it is a great adventure with God.

When we are young Christians it is often easier to make decisions than it is later on. This is partly because when we are young in the faith we need to see things very clearly. As we become more mature Christians the Lord is able to test us more and asks us to walk more by faith and less by sight (see 2 Corinthians 5 : 7). He takes away human props and expects us to learn to rely on Him alone. He also uses the experience of getting guidance from Him to show us more of Himself and His ways. As we seek His will for our lives day by day we come to know Him better and are able to walk more closely with Him. He asks of us only an obedient and humble heart, ready like David's ser-

vants who said, ' Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides ' (2 Samuel 15 : 15, Revised Standard Version).

God's ways often seem strange to us and many things happen in our lives which we cannot understand. But if we know the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation we can trust Him, knowing that ' his way is perfect '. One day, when we see Him face to face we shall understand it all.

' For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood ' (1 Corinthians 13 : 12, Revised Standard Version).

SEEKING THE WILL OF GOD

' The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day ' (Proverbs 4 : 18).

' And thine ears shall hear a word behind

thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left' (Isaiah 30 : 21).

' Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord ' (Hosea 6 : 3).

' I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye ' (Psalm 32 : 8).

' And Jesus was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done ' (Luke 22 : 41-42).

' I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God ' (Romans 12 : 1-3).

' Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God ' (Ephesians 5 : 2).

' Enough; this covers all my wants;
And so I rest;
For what I cannot, He can see,
And in His care I safe shall be,
For ever blest.'

Way of Life Booklets

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