



Which Way?



WHICH WAY?

Were you ever like Tom or Mary Jane or Cathy?

Tom wondered whether he should stay at home and help his father or go to the city and take an upgrading course.

Mary Jane couldn't decide whether or not to go with Billy. Billy was a nice fellow and she liked him. But he didn't seem very interested in going to church.

Cathy worked at the clinic as an interpreter. The job was all right but it didn't pay much. Likely she could get a better paying job if she went to the city. She wanted to go to the city but was fearful about leaving home.

If you had a problem like one of these teens, maybe you went to a friend to get help with your decision. Then your friend told you that you should pray together about it. That was a good place to start. Then how did you know what God was telling you to do?

Here are some ways to know how God guides us.

By His Word

God always guides by His Word. Psalm 23:2 says, "He leads me" (NIV). God will never tell us to do anything that is against His Word in the Bible. For example, the Bible says very clearly that Christians are to give their whole lives to the Lord. Romans 12:1 says, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (NIV).

No Christian needs special guidance to know that he should not have bitterness or evil speaking in his life. God's great command is that Christians should love one another even as Christ loved us. So then, when the Bible speaks directly to our lives, we should not look any further for direction.

Sometimes God shows us the meaning of a Bible



passage right at the time we need it to answer a hard question. We might have read these verses many times and even memorized them, but never fully understood them. But when we ask God for an answer to our question, He reveals it to us by helping us understand the familiar verses.

CIRCUMSTANCES

God would not usually lead a blind man to become an airplane pilot. God would not usually lead a deaf girl to become a secretary in a big office. In cases like these, the circumstances would give some direction about the way that God is guiding.

But we should be careful about circumstances. In the Old Testament there is a story about Joshua and a tribe of people called the Gibeonites in the land of Canaan. God told Joshua not to make any deals with people in the new land. He must destroy them all. But the Gibeonites tricked Joshua. When they came to talk to Joshua, they told him that they were from a faraway country. They had some old dried-out bread in their packs to prove it. They said that this bread had been still hot from the oven when they put it in their packs to leave home.

They wanted to make a deal with Joshua so that he would not kill them as God had told him to do. Joshua and the other Israelites decided to believe the Gibeonites because they saw the old dried-out bread (the circumstances). Joshua 9:14 says that the Israelites believed them because of their food and did not ask advice from the Lord. The Israelites made a deal with their enemies and God had to punish them for it.

From this story we learn that we should test circumstances by prayer and by waiting on God. This will give God time to show us whether the circumstances are part of His leading or whether it is Satan trying to lead us the wrong way.





THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Many years ago a pastor named Mr. Brown had a gift from God for healing sick people. Always before he prayed for the sick person, he would pray to God to find out if it was God's will to heal the sick one. At first when he started to pray in this way it would take him hours to find out God's will. After two or three years of praying to God in this way, he found that he could know God's will about the sick person in just a few minutes. He learned by experience to know God's thoughts about the sick person.

This story shows that we need to pray to God often and get to know God well. We learn to know another person by being with him a lot. It is in the same way that we get to know God by prayer.

There are great dangers in our spiritual lives. Other evil spirits will speak to us and try to lead us the wrong way. The Bible tells us to test the spirits to see whether they are of God (1 John 4:1).

How do you know what another person's voice sounds like? Can I describe it for you so that you will recognize it when you hear it? No. You will only learn to know that voice by listening to that person speak for a while. This is how you will learn to know God's voice, by listening to Him speak through His Spirit as you pray and read His Word.

NO EASY WAY

When God teaches, He teaches in His school and uses His rules. We must start in grade one and go through all the lessons. God tests every part of our lives. He tests our prayer life, our patience, our knowledge of the Bible, our pride, and many other things. He wants to see if we are willing to give up everything that comes from our own selves and to put our faith in Him. Sometimes we come to a place where we need to decide between one of two things.

Sometimes we just don't know which way to go. Then as we pray and wait on God, He will finally show us the way to take.

WAITING

Did you ever get a pail of water that was so muddy that you couldn't see into it? What could you do to make it clear? If you let it set for a while the mud would go to the bottom and the water would get clear. Then you could see through it. The main thing you had to do was wait.

This is also true about looking for God's guidance. When we have a big question in our minds we often cannot see any answers. We try to look through the problem the same way that we tried to look into the pail of muddy water, but we cannot see anything. The thing to do is wait. Soon the mud will begin to settle to the bottom. Then we will be able to see into the question. God will show us the important things in the question and we will be able to see the answer.

Satan often tries to mix us up by making us get in a hurry. It is wise to wait on the Lord. Isaiah 28:16 says, "Whoever believes will not act hastily" (NKJV).

THE USUAL AND THE UNUSUAL

We read in the Bible many times that God used unusual things to guide people. God gave Paul a vision to tell him to go to a place called Macedonia to preach. God used a special star to guide the wise men to the place where Jesus was born.

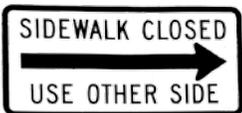
But we should also remember that God guides us by things that are usual and ordinary as well as by things that are unusual. In the New Testament we read that Paul was laughed at and beaten for preaching the gospel in a town. Sometimes the men took him and threw him out of town. This was sometimes God's way to get him to go to another town to preach. God didn't use anything miraculous, just human circumstances.

The prophet Samuel in the Old Testament once told King Saul, "From this time on your decisions should be based on whatever seems best under the circumstances, for the Lord will guide you" (1 Samuel 10:7, LB). When God guides us in this way, He leads us one step after another.

A STEP AT A TIME

God guides us one step at a time. We often want to know what God plans for us a long time in the future. But knowing everything that God has for us in our future is not real faith. To have real faith in God we should be happy just to let Him lead from one step to the next.

Maybe you have had an experience like this. You have prayed and prayed to God to guide you. You have been waiting for God to give you the whole answer, to show you how it will come out in the end. Finally God shows you just one little step. After that He shows you another little step. What God wants is that you put your faith in Him and be willing to trust Him to guide



you as each small step is made. This is real day-to-day faith.

Do you remember the story of Abraham in the Old Testament? God told him to leave his home town and go to another country. The Bible tells us that Abraham took his family and went, even though he didn't know where he was supposed to go. He just trusted God to show him the place. After Abraham travelled around for many years, God finally showed him the place. That is how the Jews came to live in the land of Israel as they still do today.



Often we don't think that God is really leading us. But if we look back over the things that have happened, we suddenly see how each little step helped to get us to the place where God wants us.

STOPS

Sometimes God will put a big stop sign in our way. We may plan to go somewhere and think that it is God's will. Suddenly God puts a stop sign in the way.

Maybe we lost our wallet with all our money and the bus ticket. Why did God allow that to happen? We must pray and wait on God for the answer. It may be that it is better to go at another time.

Perhaps God is testing our faith so that we can serve Him better when we finally get to the place where we wanted to go.

If we try to go ahead on our own after God has stopped us, we are disobedient. God will have to use something bigger to stop us.



GUIDANCE AGREES

When God guides us He sometimes uses a number of different ways. These must agree with one another.

In the New Testament, God led Saul to Ananias so that Saul could be healed of his blindness. But God also told Ananias that he was to help Saul.

God will sometimes lead us into a new place of work for Him. At the same time He may cause us to dislike the old work that we used to do for Him.

Sometimes God will lead a number of Christians to pray about the same thing. You may think that you are the only person praying about something. Later you find others who have been praying about the same thing. Then you know that God has been leading. Matthew 18:19 tells us that if two believers agree on something, it will be given to them.



BE CAREFUL OF SHORTCUTS

One time a group of people were walking along a snowy mountain path. Suddenly the man in the lead made a sharp turn to the right. Everyone followed the leading man except one. This one man thought that it would be faster to go straight ahead. The leading man ran and stopped him just in time. His next step would have been onto a thin crust of snow over a deep hole in the mountain. The shortcut would have taken that man to his death.



Christians sometimes get in a hurry too. We see a quick way to get something done. We may think that God is too slow in giving us guidance, so we go ahead in our own way. But it is always better to go around the long way with God than it is to go the shortcut without Him.

LISTEN CAREFULLY FOR GOD'S VOICE

Jesus told Simon Peter that flesh and blood (human wisdom) could not reveal to Peter who Jesus was. Only the Spirit of God could do that (see Matthew 16:17).

You should not put your whole trust in the advice of your friend when you decide about something. If you listen to all of your friends you will soon have so much advice that you really won't know which way to go. It is wise to get advice from a few trustworthy friends who in turn trust God. But you must make the final decision yourself. God does not always show His plans for your life to other people.

You can help a little baby learn to walk by holding his hand for a while. After a few steps the baby must learn to go by himself. He will fall a few times, but he will soon learn to walk alone. Each Christian must learn to hear God's Spirit speaking to him.



GUIDANCE IS SURE

Sometimes we think that God is never going to help us. We have waited so long for an answer and nothing has happened.

King David once said, "My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning" (Psalms 130:6, NKJV). He knew how it was to wait all through the night and to watch for the morning light to come.



Here are four ways that people watch:

1. They watch in darkness.
2. They watch for something that comes slowly.

3. They watch for something that is sure to come.
4. They watch for something which, when it does come, brings the light of day.

This is the way it is for all who wait for guidance. Everything seems dark all around us. Even when we see a little light on the horizon it seems to come very slowly. But we do know that morning always comes after the dark of night. When morning does come it is bright and everything looks different.

When God shows us His direction it is very clear and bright. We just know that nothing could be better. Then we almost forget the dark and difficult times we endured while we waited and watched.

OTHER FAMILY RESOURCES FROM NYM MINISTRIES:

A Time to Be Pure: Controlling Youthful Passions
 Breaking the Cycle: Saying No to Family Violence
 Choose Life: Saying No to Suicide
 Custom Adoption
 Family Fraud: The Deception of the Common-Law Relationship
 Freedom from Destructive Spirits
 Hosea: A Broken and Restored Marriage
 How to Spend a Day in Prayer
 Master Your Anger
 Taming the Tiger: Discussions on Sexuality for Young Men
 Tell...Your Grandchildren
 The Single Mother and Her Children
 The Widow and Her Children
 When Bonding is Broken: Understanding Reactive Attachment Disorder
 When Dad and Mom Don't Love Each Other
 Winning the Struggle
 Today's Native Father (free quarterly newsletter)
 Accepting Myself in the Image of God
 Family Studies
 Fathers' Studies
 Mothers' Studies
 Solomon's Song: The Delights of Marital Intimacy
 Youth Studies: Preparation for Partnership

NOTES

Many of these thoughts came from a tract called *Guidance* by James H. McConkey.

Quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), New International Version (NIV), and Living Bible (LB).

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