

## Divine Guidance:

The Bible teaches that God has a specific plan for each of our lives (Ephesians 2:10). He has planned a career for us, chosen a life-partner for us and even planned where we should live and what we should do each day. In every case, His choice must be the best, for He knows us so well and He takes every factor into consideration. It is wisest then to seek His will in all matters – major as well as minor.

It is not only foolish but dangerous to follow the reasoning of our limited intellects and the dictates of our emotions alone. Unless we are gripped by the conviction that God's plan is indeed the best, we are not likely to be in earnest about seeking it. Many have made shipwreck of their lives by failing to seek the will of God right from their youth. It is indeed "good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lamentations 3:27).

In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus invites us to take His

yoke upon us. What does it mean to take the yoke? Oxen that are used to plough fields are kept together by a yoke upon their necks. When a new ox is to be trained to plough, it is yoked together with an experienced ox. The new one is thus compelled to walk in the same direction and at the same speed as the older ox.

This is what it means to take the yoke of Jesus upon us. We shall have to walk with Jesus in the path that pleases Him, never rushing ahead to do anything without His leading, nor lagging behind when He calls to some new step of obedience.

Few understand this meaning of the yoke. Fewer still are willing to accept it. The ox is forced by its owner to take the yoke upon its neck.

But Jesus invites us. There is no compulsion here. How foolish we are to reject this invitation!

We would rather take the heavy yoke of our own self-will with its accompanying frustrations, defeats, and regrets, than the light yoke of Jesus that brings true liberty and deep rest!

“Come to Me and I will give you rest – all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear My yoke ... and let Me teach you (as the older ox teaches the inexperienced one) ... and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens” (Matthew 11:28–30 - TLB).

We read of Enoch that he “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22) – i.e., he did not rush ahead nor lag behind, but walked in God’s appointed path as one under the yoke – for three hundred years. As a result, God testified that He was pleased with Enoch’s life (Hebrews 11:5). This is the only way that we please God – by living and moving under His yoke, in His perfect will. Only thus shall we be able to stand before Him without regret when He comes again.

Divine guidance cannot be considered by itself apart from our personal relationship with God. Many desire the gifts but not the Giver. If we long for guidance but do not thirst for God Himself, we shall not obtain the guidance we seek. A person must be in fellowship with God in order to

experience His guidance in life.

There are certain other essential conditions to be fulfilled if we are to know God's leading. These prerequisites are mentioned in two passages of Scripture, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Romans 12:1, 2). Let us consider these passages in detail.

Faith:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and mind ... and He will direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

There are many who never come to a knowledge of God's will, because they simply do not believe God will guide them. Faith is a prime prerequisite when we are seeking God's guidance. By faith we mean not merely a mental acceptance of truth but a confidence in God that comes through personal knowledge of Him.

When we lack wisdom (knowledge of God's mind in a certain situation) we are invited to ask God for this and we are promised that He will

grant it to us in abundance – provided we ask in faith. The one who asks without faith invariably receives nothing. (James 1:5–7).

Young believers may feel Divine guidance is available only to the mature who have grown in the knowledge of the Lord for several years. It is no doubt true that the more we walk with God, the better we can discern His mind. Nevertheless it is also true that God desires to guide all His children. What was said to Paul is true for all of us – “God ... has destined and appointed you to come progressively to know His will – that is, to perceive, to recognize more strongly and clearly and to become better and more intimately acquainted with His will...” (Acts 22:14).

A father gladly reveals to his children his desires and plans for them – not only to the older ones but to the younger ones as well. It is the same with our Heavenly Father. God has said in His Word that in this day of the New Covenant (or Testament) all His children – “from the least to the greatest” – will know Him personally. (Hebrews 8:10, 11).

Every one of us can then come to Him “with the full assurance of faith” that He delights to make His will known to His seeking children. In Hebrews 11:6, we are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. The verse goes on to say that those who come to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him.

The evidence of a person’s faith is found in his persistence in prayer. The one who doubts will stop praying very soon. But the one who believes will lay hold of God until he gets an answer. God honours earnestness because it is the product of a strong faith. We cannot receive anything precious from God without intensely desiring it first. “He satisfies (only) the longing soul” (Psalms 107:9).

When Jesus sought the Father’s will in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed again and again “in desperate prayer and the agony of tears” (Hebrews 5:7 - JBP). How casual our seeking is, when compared to that!

We often seek God's will with no more earnestness than we would have when searching for a lost five-paisa coin! No wonder we don't find it. If we value the will of God as the greatest treasure on earth, we will seek it with all our hearts.

If we are consumed with earnest desire to fulfil His will in every area of our lives, God will undoubtedly reveal His mind to us. He cannot but honour a faith that lays hold of Him until it receives an answer. Faith, in the Bible, is often coupled with patience. Both are necessary if we are to inherit God's promises. (Hebrews 6:12, 15).

David exhorts us (no doubt from his own experience), to commit our way to the Lord, trusting in Him and waiting patiently for His time and we are assured that He will not let us down. (Psalms 37:5, 7).

One of the greatest temptations when seeking God's guidance is to fret and become impatient. But the believing heart is a restful one. There are some

decisions for which we don't need to wait for a perfectly clear indication of the mind of the Lord.

For example, if you are seeking the Lord's will as to whether you should commence a journey on the 15th or the 16th of the month, you need not wait indefinitely for a clear word from Him. Yet there are some decisions for which we must wait until we are perfectly clear about the will of God.

The more important the decision, the longer we usually have to wait to be sure of God's will. If we trust in the Lord, we won't be afraid to wait.

We will not seek to grab for ourselves ahead of God's time out of fear that we might lose the best by waiting. God is well able to safeguard the best for us in every realm. When we grab impatiently, we invariably miss the Lord's best.

The Bible says that "he who believes... will not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). In the great "Guidance" Psalm – Psalm 25 – David speaks again and again of waiting on the Lord (verses 3, 5,

21). None who wait for the Lord's time will ever regret having waited, for God "works and shows Himself active on behalf of him who (earnestly) waits for Him." Often, it is only as we wait that God can make His mind clear to us.

Beware of being in a hurry. Impatience always stems from unbelief. It was said of the Israelites in the wilderness that "they did not (earnestly) wait for His plans (to develop) respecting them." (Psalm 106:13). They missed God's best thereby. May God save us from such a tragedy.

Obedience in Every Area:

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6). We are sometimes eager to know God's guidance in one area of our lives, but not so keen on having His direction in other areas. For example, we may earnestly seek God's will in marriage, but may not do so when looking for a job. Or it could be vice-versa.

Or perhaps we may seek God's guidance how and

where to spend our month's annual leave, but may never ask Him how to spend our money. This is because we are inclined to want God's guidance only when it is convenient for us. Selfish motives often lurk, unknown to us, in our hearts.

We seek God's will in some matters because we don't want to make mistakes that might cause us suffering or loss. The motive is not that we might please God but that we might be comfortable and prosperous. Hence we fail to receive God's guidance, for He has promised to guide only those who acknowledge Him in all their ways, those who gladly accept His direction in every area of their lives.

There are many areas in which God's will is already revealed to us in the Scriptures. For instance, the Bible says that God wants us to be holy and thankful: "This is the will of God that you should be consecrated – separated and set apart for pure and holy living."

“Thank God in everything – no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks; for this is the will of God for you (who are) in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18).

Similarly, we are told that God expects us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Romans 13:9). If we have received God’s forgiveness and salvation, we should desire the same for our neighbours. God’s will is clearly revealed in the New Testament: we are to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).

God delights to reveal His mind to those who are unselfishly concerned with the needs of others. If we fail to obey the Lord in these areas where He has already revealed His will, then we cannot expect Him to guide us in other spheres. It is a principle of Divine guidance that God never grants further light to one who ignores the light he already has.

God will not show us the second step before we take the first. “As you go, step by step, I will open up the way before you”, is His promise (Proverbs 4:12). He is interested in our every

step. “The steps of a (good) man are directed and established of the Lord, when He delights in his way and He busies Himself with his every step,” (Psalm 37:23).

Here is another promise of guidance for the obedient: “I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress, (but) don’t be like a senseless horse or mule.”  
(Psalm 32:8, 9)

Unconditional Yieldedness:

“Make a decisive dedication of your bodies – presenting all your members and faculties – as a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to God... so that you may prove (for yourselves) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”  
(Romans 12:1, 2).

Our time, money, talents, families, possessions, minds and bodies – all – belong to our Master and our Lord, for they are His by right of purchase on the Cross. (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

We are therefore encouraged to present our bodies to God, once for all, as a living sacrifice.

This is what it means to present our body as a living sacrifice to God: we must die to our own will and choice as to how and where our body should be used by Him. Only thus can we know His will. Lack of such yieldedness is usually the main reason why we are unable to ascertain God's will. Our yieldedness to the Lord is often with reservations. We are not really willing to accept anything that God may offer.

Many who come to God under the pretext of wanting to know His will really want only His approval of the path they have already chosen for themselves. Hence they receive no answer from Him. How soon our problems of guidance would be solved, if only we gave ourselves without any reserve to our Lord saying, "Lord, I am willing to accept anything, if Thou wilt only assure me that it is Thy will. Choose Thou for me, my Lord. I have no choice of my own in this matter."

A Renewed Mind:

“Do not be conformed to this world ... But be transformed by the (entire) renewal of your mind – by its new ideals and its new attitude – so that you may prove (for yourselves) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”  
(Romans 12:2)

God’s ultimate purpose for us is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son. This is the primary part of His will for all of us. Everything else – whom we should marry, where we should live and work – is secondary. All of God’s dealings with us are directed towards this end – that we might become like Jesus (see Romans 8:28 & 29).

But this can be fulfilled in us only as we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds daily. The more our minds are renewed, the more accurately shall we be able to discern the will of God at life’s crossroads.

For example, when considering a job or a career, a

worldly person will be governed by factors such as salary, promotion-prospects, comfort, ease, convenience, etc. And when contemplating marriage, he will be influenced by points such as family status, caste, dowry available, position in life, physical beauty, or wealth.

A believer's decisions, on the other hand, should be governed primarily by spiritual factors, although other considerations should not be neglected. The glory of God's Name and the extension of His Kingdom should be our first concern. This is why the Lord taught us first to pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come", and only then, "Thy will be done". The process of discerning and eliminating worldly motives is vital if we are to know the will of God.

Such a transformation of our minds will enable us to know what pleases God and what does not please Him, and thus we shall be able to discern His will easily in the different situations we face. God's promise to us in this New Testament age is, "This is the new agreement (testament) ... I

will write My laws in their minds so that they will know what I want them to do without My even telling them ... I will write My laws into their minds so that they will always know My will.” (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16)

Such a renewal will give us an understanding not only of God’s will, but also of His method and of His purpose – we will know, not only what God wants us to do, but also how He wants us to do it, and why. It is because of our ignorance of God’s nature that we fear His will. If we knew Him better, we would rejoice to do His every bidding.

We must also let Him speak to our hearts daily, both through His Word as well as through the discipline of trials that He sends into our lives. Thus we shall find ourselves growingly conformed to the image of our Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

If we neglect daily meditation on God’s Word and prayer-fellowship with the Lord, we will find it extremely difficult to ascertain God’s

mind. Meditation on God's Word can straighten our warped and crooked ways of thinking and make us spiritually minded and sensitive to God's Voice.

Relying on the Holy Spirit:

In contrast to all this, knowing God's will appears to be so much more difficult for us in this day and age. The reason is that God wants us to prove for ourselves what His perfect will is (Romans 12:2). The Holy Spirit now lives in a believer to be his Guide, and He replaces all the external means of guidance that existed in the Old Testament.

External guidance is for the immature. Inward guidance is for the mature – and this is the way God desires to lead all His children today.

When seeking God's will, we need to ascertain what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in our spirits.

It is essential therefore that we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "Do not be vague and thoughtless and foolish, but

understanding and firmly grasping what the will of the Lord is... (therefore) be (ever) filled ... with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:17, 18).

The words in Luke 4:1 are also significant – “Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit ... was led by the (Holy) Spirit.” Throughout His earthly life the Lord Jesus was governed and guided only by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit – never by human coercion or advice or even by sympathetic appeal. This sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit was found among the early Christians too.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find Philip acting on the inner urging of the Spirit and joining the chariot of the Ethiopian statesman (Acts 8:29); Peter obeying the inner voice of the Spirit directing him to go to Cornelius’s house (Acts 10:19, 20); and the leaders in the church at Antioch recognizing the witness of the Holy Spirit in their spirits confirming the call of Saul and Barnabas to foreign missionary service (Acts 13:2). The same Spirit desires to guide each of us today in every decision.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through an inner pressure in our spirits rather than through an audible voice. He urges us inwardly either to take or not to take a certain course of action. Normally, this is the result of much time spent in prayer, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed course of action. However the Holy Spirit may also give us a sudden urge at times to go somewhere or to do something. But sudden impulses to do something ridiculous can come from Devil too – or from ourselves. So we must be careful. The Holy Spirit will in any case never lead us contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

We can distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit by the increasing pressure He produces in our spirits and the growing peace He gives to our minds, as we pray over the matter. “The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6 - NASB).

The Devil’s voice is usually harassing and often

accompanied by threats of judgment, if we do not obey instantly. God invariably gives us sufficient time to consider and be sure of His will. On some occasions the Spirit may lead us to do something our minds cannot fully understand.

If you experience a growing peace in your spirit about a particular course of action, this will usually be a clear indication of what God wants you to do. The Bible says, “Let the peace (which comes) from Christ (through the Holy Spirit), rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts – deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds” (Colossians 3:15)

God used a famine to take Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Acts 11:28–30), where they learned the power of importunate prayer (Acts 12:5). Coming back to Antioch, they imparted this spirit of prayer to their fellow-workers and this finally resulted in the extension of the work to distant regions. (Acts 12:25–13:3)

God makes no mistakes. He is the God of

Providence. We can trust Him to order circumstances for His glory and for our good. We can ask God at times to reveal His will by altering circumstances, when we find an obstacle in our path.

Indeed, He is the One who has the key to every door. When He opens a door, no one can shut it, and when He shuts a door, no one can open it (Revelation 3:7). Even a king's heart can be turned by our God in any direction He chooses (Proverbs 21:1; cf. Ezra 6:22).

God may also lead us contrary to circumstances. When the first wave of persecution swept Jerusalem, the apostles did not run away but prayed for boldness. God filled them with His Spirit and made Jerusalem tremble at the manifestation of His power, for His time had not yet come for the disciples to be scattered. (Acts 4:29–33; 5:11–14).

When Philip left Samaria for the desert road, it was contrary to circumstances, which called for him to

remain in Samaria where he was being greatly used. (Acts 8:26).

The Vocation of God's Choice:

Every believer should be a full-time witness of the Lord Jesus Christ – even if he is not in full-time Christian service. A Christian doctor when asked his profession replied, “My profession is to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ and to bring souls to Him. I work as a doctor to pay the expenses.”

Indeed, he had the right perspective. When vocation is considered from this view-point, we need not fear the possibility of missing God's will. It is when personal advancement and prestige influence our choice that we go astray.

How should a young believer go about the matter of finding God's will in this realm? Where the option of choosing a career is still open before him, he should consider his intellectual aptitude and seek to study for the vocation most fitting to him. He should however select a vocation only after much prayer. In the absence of any check in his spirit after prayer,

he should go ahead and consider the vocation he is most suited for. He should never, in any case allow himself to be pushed into a vocation selected for him by someone else.

Constantly bear in mind the Lord's words in Matthew 9:37 – "The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the labourers are few." In obedience to the Lord's commands in John 4:35, he should seek to get details of the Lord's work in various parts of his country and of the world. He should be ready to go wherever the Lord may have need of him – whether as a teacher, as a nurse or as an engineer, whatever his vocation may be.

We should not therefore be surprised or discouraged when we encounter perplexity. Even the Apostle Paul was often perplexed, but he never despaired and gave up (2 Corinthians 4:8). God may sometimes show us His will only just before we have to make a decision, and may keep us waiting a long time prior to that.

In any case, He will show us only the next step at

each stage. He leads us step by step because He wants us to depend on Him day by day, and to walk by faith and not by sight. When He shows us only one step at a time, we are compelled to lean on Him.

Many times we will have to take a step forward while still not perfectly sure about God's will. This too is a part of the discipline of walking by faith, for certainty can sometimes be the equivalent of walking by sight. God sometimes gives us clear assurances to encourage us lest we faint. But many times He expects us to move forward without visible evidences of His approval. Having ascertained the mind of the Holy Spirit to the best of our knowledge, we should move ahead without waiting indefinitely.

The Bible says, "We should make plans – counting on God to direct us" (Proverbs 16:9)

God can order circumstances to alter our course when we miss the road. But we should not remain in perpetual inaction waiting for spectacular guidance for every move. A ship can be

turned around much quicker when moving than when stationary: so can we.

In Acts 16:6–10, Paul and Silas tried to go into Asia not as a result of any clear leading from the Lord but yet desiring to do His will. They were hindered – perhaps by God-ordered circumstances. Next, they attempted to enter Bithynia. Again their way was blocked. But because they were actively seeking God's will, and not passively waiting for guidance, He led them finally to the place of His choice – Macedonia.

In the smaller details of daily life, guidance is not necessarily a question of constant conscious enquiry. It is a matter of walking in the Spirit. Right relationship with the Lord will lead to right action. In such small details, the guidance of God is not something that we should be acutely aware of all the time. We may be unconscious of it. It is our basic relationship with the Lord that is the important factor, for guidance is a spiritual matter and not a mechanical technique.

## Deliverance from Fear:

Fear of men and of circumstances can make us miss the will of God. Many believers are governed by considerations of security and safety when seeking guidance. They feel that a certain place or occupation is insecure and dangerous, and so rule it out of their minds altogether.

But there is no place or occupation in this world totally free from danger. The safest place in all the world is always the center of God's perfect will. We step into danger only when we step out of God's plan. The one who makes his decisions without seeking God's guidance will be vulnerable to Satan's attacks. But "the one who lives and works in the appointed place of the Most High will be protected by the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalms 91:1).

We need to be delivered too, from the fear of making mistakes. The man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything. We are students in God's school and we shall doubtless go wrong occasionally. But the Lord is

ever near, ready to put things right.

Apart from the Lord Jesus Himself, no man ever learned to walk in God's perfect will without making many mistakes. The greatest saints learned to walk in the will of God just as a child learns to walk – through many falls. The child who is afraid of falling may never learn to walk! We must never let such fear keep us from moving forward.

Walking in God's will may not be easy but it is a great adventure with Him and He has promised to hold us when we fall – “The steps of good men are directed by the Lord.... If they fall it isn't fatal, for the Lord holds them with His Hand.”  
(Psalms 37:23, 24)

Finally, remember that guidance is essentially a personal matter between God and you. The way God led another person may never be the way He wishes to lead you. The broad principles are the same for all believers, but the exact mode varies from individual to individual.

You will only be confused if you seek for the same type of guidance you heard someone else describe in his testimony. Leave it to God how He should guide you. Let your concern be, that you might always be available to Him, to do whatever He desires. He will make it His concern to ensure that you are made aware of His will, and that you are strengthened to fulfil it.

God bless you today and always!