

## Guidance

By Pastor Alan Utting



*'Follow the light you have and more will be given.'* Elisabeth Elliot

Over the years, the question I've been asked most frequently by both the young and the old is this: *'How can I know what God is saying in my situation?'* At its core, this question centres on the issue of guidance.

### Consider

At times, we may hold a vision of what we believe God is calling us to do, yet it may not unfold when and the way we expect it to. Sometimes we must release that vision and allow it to die. God often then brings it to life again later in our journey, fulfilling it in His perfect timing.

Consider the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. As the youngest of ten brothers, he had a dream that one day his father and brothers would bow before him. In youthful arrogance, he shared this dream with his family, and unsurprisingly, they were unimpressed. What we carry in our hearts is not always in line with God's timing or His ways. Although Joseph's dream was from God, he still needed to mature before he became the leader God intended him to be. He endured betrayal, slavery, false accusation, and imprisonment, circumstances that could easily have crushed his dream and God's plan. In time however, Joseph was elevated to the position of prime minister of Egypt. Looking back, he recognised that every trial had prepared him for this role. Free from bitterness, he fulfilled the greater purpose of saving both a nation and his family from famine.

Even when the way forward is uncertain, we should trust that God's purposes are unfolding in our lives.

### Promises of God

*'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you'* (Psalm 32:8).

*'In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight'* (Proverbs 3:6).

### Observations

1. God usually expects us to use our own initiative in the everyday matters of life. For example, when deciding what to eat, we simply choose from what is available and then give thanks to God for it.
2. Hudson Taylor, the well-known pioneer missionary to China, once remarked, 'The older I get the harder I find guidance' (reference unknown). This does not mean that God withdraws from us, but rather that He invites us to grow deeper in faith.
3. Just as parents carefully nurture a baby yet allow it to stumble and fall as it learns to walk, so God allows us to mature through challenges and uncertainty. It

is in these moments that we learn to walk with Him by faith. As Hebrews 11:8 says, 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going'.

4. One of my favourite sayings about guidance is, 'God is seldom early, but never late.' I often find myself in a hurry to see results, yet God's timing is always perfect. Saul, however, failed in this very area when fear drove him to act hastily and step outside God's plan (1 Samuel 13:13). I'm never 100% sure of guidance as I move forward but that allows me to trust God by faith.
5. Three aspects of guidance have proven to be most helpful to people over the years:
  - a. Let God speak through His word the 'Bible'. Ps119:105 'Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path'. I don't advise that you simply open the Bible and look for a word for your situation. But through consecutive reading of Scripture with an attitude of prayer allow God to speak to you.
  - b. There should be a 'witness of His Spirit' in your spirit. God often calls us to adventures bigger than ourselves, which may produce some fear, yet there should be a measure of peace. Sometimes it is good to share your thoughts with a trusted spiritual advisor although they may not always be right. Accept change can be frightening! 'Give our Lord the benefit of believing that His hand is leading you. And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete' (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin).
  - c. 'Circumstances.' Acts 16:6-16 Paul wanted to go to Bithynia but the Holy Spirit blocked him. However, at night he had a vision to go to Macedonia. That instead was God's will. At the right time circumstances will pave the way.
6. It is especially important for married couples to find agreement on major matters of guidance, even if it takes time and patience to reach that place together.
7. Be prepared for God to say 'no' even when you are keen to do something. It may in fact be right, but the timing wrong. Fervent impulsive excitement usually proves not to be God's direction.
8. Finally, if you really don't know what to do, God may want you to use your initiative. Ben Carson the famous surgeon suggests 4 questions worth asking:

What is the BEST thing that can happen if I DO this?  
What is the WORST thing that can happen if I DO this?  
What is the BEST thing that can happen if I DON'T do this?  
What is the WORST thing that can happen if I DON'T do this?

## **Resources**

Ben Carson, *Take the risk*

Bob Mumford, *Take another look at guidance*

Bob Sorge, *The fire of delayed answers*

Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day*