

Psalm 143

Additional Bible reading: Acts 16:1-10; 21:17-26

Teach me to do your will (part 3)

Introduction

Going to consider the last four aspects of guidance, and then a post-script.

(7) Our ears must be opened

We must be humble enough to listen to advice, especially from spiritually mature people – though in some cases, people of good will who have sense and want the best for us, even if not Christians, need to be heeded. God has given older Christians gifts of wisdom and experience and maturity. They need to be heard. The Bible itself points us to seek the guidance of trusted Christian friends. **For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers makes victory sure** (Proverbs 11:14). **Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed** (Proverbs 15:22). **For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers** (Proverbs 24:6). We see this in action in Acts 21:23, where Paul in the Temple at Jerusalem accepts the advice he was given to remove suspicion that he despised the Jewish law, and did so by joining with four others in keeping the Nazarite law and paying their expenses. **The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice** (Proverbs 12:15).

None of us is infallible – even the youngest. There is help to be gained by older people who have been on the road longer than we have, and whom we can confide in. How many have entered marriage without talking things over with parents or wise friends? How many are in troubled marriages and bottle it up, never seeking help, because they are too proud? How many people apply to enter Christian service or training college, on their own impulse without discussing it with their minister, office-bearers or Christian friends? How sad it is each time we hear the words “I wish I had listened to the advice I was given when.... But it’s too late now”.

(8) Our eyes must be watching

God guides through circumstances. He orders all affairs in our lives. In our reading from Acts 16, Paul hoped to enter Asia and Bythinia, but was blocked, and instead the way was opened to go to Troas. Then he received the vision of the man at Macedonia telling him to come there. God was in all this. He creates and controls circumstances, blocks the way, and opens other doors. He can use even the ungodly to carry out His will.

God’s guidance comes from all angles – he can influence our health, family responsibilities, He can speak through a letter, a chance conversation, meeting someone, missing a bus, going to a meeting we don’t usually attend, or an invitation

by phone. Be aware that God is in all these things, and watch for His leading at the time (It is often easier to see in hind-sight).

(9) Our spirits must be sensitive

God speaks directly to our hearts. He calls and plants a deep conviction. We become aware of it. It persists and grows louder and more irresistible. Sometimes He confirms that we are taking the right step by implanting deep peace. **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts** (Colossians 3:15). It will act as an umpire and settle disputes in your heart.

But it is so important that this inner conviction is backed up by other things, e.g. the Bible, advice of others, circumstances, for it is all too easy to deceive ourselves. The more these other things come together, the more sure we can be that we are on the right lines.

(10) Our feet must obey

When we are sure that we are in God's will, we should act and move – whether that means applying for that job, making an offer on that house, proposing marriage, speaking to that person. Remember God does not guide us too far ahead. He never shows us the end, just the beginning. We need to obey the light we have, to act on the guidance given. It is not till we act and obey the light that the next step shall be revealed. **The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord** (Psalm 37:23). He guides us one step at a time, the next yard ahead, and not the next mile. Guidance for tomorrow, but not for next year.

So we go forward, trusting God to rule and overrule. We keep asking to be guided aright, and asking to be frustrated if we are going down the wrong path.

Summary of the ten points

Teach me to do your will. He will indeed give us the instruction we ask, provided we go about it the right way. Our hearts need to be assured and our wills surrendered to Him. We need to ask Him in prayer, and be fed on His Word. Our minds should be informed, and we must apply sanctified common sense. Our ears should be open to advice of others. We need to keep our eyes open to His guiding us through our circumstances, and our spirits should be sensitive to His speaking to our hearts. Once He has spoken, we should not delay in following His leading, our feet must be set in motion.

Post-script

Some have asked the question, “Should our dreams be noted as means of guidance?” We might be reluctant to consider this, because of the links between this idea and the Charismatic Movement. Also, we may have our doubts because dreams can be confused, muddled and mysterious. Yet God spoke to the Old Testament Joseph, and the New Testament Joseph, in dreams. Paul received a vision of the man in

Macedonia. Maybe it is safe to consider that God has spoken to us via a dream provided it is backed up by other means of guidance, and so long as we do not act on it alone.

There have been examples in times of Revival of God definitely speaking through dreams. During the 1905 Welsh Revival, the coachman of a well-known gentleman in Anglesey dreamt that his master came forward at a Revival meeting, saying, "I have come forward to show I am not ashamed to confess Christ". The coachman told several people the next morning about his dream. That very evening, in a Revival meeting, he was astonished to see his master step forward and say, "I have come forward to show I am not ashamed to confess Christ". This incident created a great sensation, especially among those to whom the coachman had related his dream earlier in the day.

In the 1921 Revival at Great Yarmouth, the preacher John Troup dreamt he saw a man at Fraserburgh calling on God to send Troup to that town. Therefore he left Yarmouth to go to Fraserburgh, and preached to a crowd in the town square. It was intensely cold, so they concluded the meeting inside the Baptist church. There, Troup was met by the minister and his elders who had just come out of a meeting where they had decided to send to Troup to ask him to come and conduct a mission. Among the elders, Troup saw the face of the man he had seen in his vision.

For months prior to the Lewis Revival of 1949, the parish minister James Murray MacKay and his office bearers had prayed for an outpouring of the Spirit of God. Prayer had gone on in churches and cottages all over the island, often into the small hours of the morning. There was a strong consciousness of God's presence and confidence in Him. They were not praying simply because the church was at a very low ebb, for in fact the church in Lewis then, as indeed now, would have a lot to teach us about spirituality. But they were not satisfied. They were hungry for God, they wanted more of Him.

After some months of this continual prayer, they were forced to act. While the minister was at the Strathpeffer convention, he heard a name mentioned during one of the messages. He returned to his parish to hear that God had revealed to one of the praying group in a vision at night not only that revival was coming, but also the instrument God would use. The person revealed in the vision was the same person mentioned in the meetings at Strathpeffer – Duncan Campbell.

So here are three examples of God speaking and revealing his purposes through dreams.