

How God Could Lead You

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The Guidance of God in Finding Rebekah

We think of God as a living God. Does He have a plan for my life or for your life? Could we count on the Lord to guide us in any particular problem that we faced, or in any event that was going to occur? I want to talk about this with you and I am going to base my remarks on an incident that is recorded in Genesis, the 24th chapter.

Now the story here itself is simple. Abraham was a man who believed in God. God had blessed him. As the years were going by, Abraham was getting old, You will remember that Isaac was not born until Abraham was already an old man. So that by the time Isaac was old enough to be married, Abraham was quite a bit older. The problem was that Isaac, the son of his old age, should be married. The custom in those days was for the parents to arrange for the marriage of their children. In this case, Abraham would arrange for the marriage of Isaac. As a matter of fact, he wanted to do that because he wanted Isaac's bride to be one of his own folks.

And so the story goes that Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. As you read along you will find that the servant brought up a practical problem: "Maybe the girl I pick will be unwilling to come?" According to chapter 24, verse 7, Abraham told his servant in words like this: "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." All of which is to say: "God has been with me. God has been good to me. God has watched over me. I have reason to believe that God is going to bless me, and I am satisfied that God will arrange for you to find the girl that you should find." So the servant took ten camels and goods that belonged to his master and went to the country where Abraham's people were.

Now what would he do? We read in verse 12 that he prayed. "And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham." You see, he was asking for blessing upon his project. In fact saying, "Let it come to pass that I will find the girl that should be the bride for Isaac. And if you do this, then I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

I think it is important to notice the circumstances under which this prayer was offered. It was not just that the servant was in need of help. It was not that he was just moving out into a problem that was unknown to him in which he could profit by guidance. But there was a relationship. Abraham belonged to the Lord God. He had obeyed God and in the course of his lifetime God had blessed him. The servant had this in mind, and this gave the servant confidence when he prayed. He said to the Lord, "Now you show me which girl I am to choose and bless me as I approach her, because in so doing you will be doing a kindness to my master."

Now you read on in this 24th chapter of Genesis in verses 15-50 the total story of how it happened. It wound up with the fact that Rebekah was chosen and she was willing to go. That is the simple story. Here is a man going out on a job that involves something that is unknown to him. He realizes that if he is guided right, he will be successful. But he needs help. He asks for help. He prays that God will bless him and guide him for the sake of honoring His name with his master.

I want to draw certain observations from this for you and for me. I am trying to answer the question, "Can we count on God having a personal interest in our affairs? If we come face to face with a problem, is there any reason why we should believe that God would answer prayer so far as we are concerned? Could we find out God's will?" In this case you might ask the question: "Did God have a girl in mind for Isaac? Would He lead the servant to her?"

I want to draw your attention first to the fact that Abraham was a man who believed God and

obeyed God. I think I want to say that, because I am not so sure that this manner of praying for guidance would do for a person who is living his own personal life in his own selfish way. If a man were just doing as he pleased, I cannot feel any confidence to think that he would have the same grounds on which to approach God as Abraham had. In the Book of 1 John we read that if we keep His commandments, then have we confidence when we come to asking what we have in our hearts. With Abraham being a man who believed in God, we can come to the conclusion that anything God would do for him would be for God's own glory. If God would bless Abraham, that would encourage other people to put their trust in Him.

The second observation that I want to make is that the servant believed in God and trusted Him. We want to recognize that this kind of praying and seeking of the will of the Lord is not that you can press a button and get the answer. This is not some automatic procedure. The picture here is of a personal, living God who can be talked to and who can make up His mind, who can will and who can do. Now of course what we are interested in and wondering about is does this living God have in mind what we are to do? Does He have in mind how things are to turn out for us? The servant trusted God and for that reason he could ask in confidence.

A third observation that I want to point out is that what he requested was in the revealed will of God. Isaac should have a bride. The family of Abraham should be continued. In Isaac and his seed all the nations of the world should be blessed. In other words, Isaac was to be married to somebody. Isaac was to be blessed, because the promise had been made to Abraham: "I will bless thee and thy seed." When the servant was asking the will of God, he could know that God had promised to bless Abraham and this was in the blessing of Abraham. God had promised to bless Isaac and this was in the blessing of Isaac. So that when he requested and asked for guidance in the matter of the girl, it was not his own notion. What he requested was in the revealed will of God, something that he knew would further the work that God Himself had in mind to do.

A fourth observation is that neither Abraham nor his servant presumed upon God. Abraham did not claim that he would know, and the servant did not claim that he would know. I can see how the people in the world would say, "Well, a man like that ought to know. God ought to tell him. After all, all he wanted to find was a bride for Isaac, why not give Abraham her name? Why not give the servant her name? All they have to do is go over and send for her and she would come." It is not like that. And Abraham did not ask for that. He did not say to Almighty God, "Tell me which one." He sent the servant. The servant did not say to God, "Name her for me so I will know which one." No, there was no disposition on the part of either Abraham or the servant to be cocksure. They were confident that God would bless them. They expected God to bless them. But they were not cocksure that they would know the answer as they approached God.

Another thing about these men is that the underlying basis in their thinking was the desire to obey God. So far as we can tell there was no disposition on the part of Abraham to be selfish and certainly no disposition to do anybody any harm. He was not malicious. The servant was not selfish and he was not malicious in his request. I think this is very important to remember. On the part of both Abraham and the servant there was a willingness to listen.

We notice in conclusion that God did more than they asked. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Now as you think of this and turn all this over in your mind, you come to the conclusion that the living God does have the personal relation to us in our personal daily affairs. And it is a proper thing, if a heart is right with God, to come to God with the expectations that He will guide us and help us.

The Guidance of God in the Desert

Would it ever be possible for a group of people to be led by the Lord? Is there any way possible to have a group of people agree to do certain things which they believe to be the will of God? I am going to turn to Israel for an example and look at that time in Israel's history that we call the Exodus.

In the great Exodus of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, a vast crowd of people traveled over an unknown route. They had never been that way before. They came into situations in which they did not know for sure what they should do, whether they should go here, whether they should go there, whether they should go further, whether they should not go any further on any given day.

When we are talking about this group of Israel as a whole, you can be thinking to yourself that this is also true of the individual. As far as you are concerned, in a very real sense, you have never traveled the route of this particular day before. Now you may have been in the world a good long time and you may be older or younger, but you have never been over this day before. It is all new to you.

Now Israel, it is true, had Moses who helped them to understand what to do. They looked to him as a leader and he interpreted their circumstances and defined what they were doing and directed them. But Israel also had a certain corroboration of Moses' guidance that came to them in a very particular way. I suppose you have heard many times how they were led by the cloud and the fire, which actually was a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night. In the Book of Numbers, Chapter 9, verses 15-23, you will read a very clear description of the procedure. During the day a cloud would hover over them, and at night a luminous cloud which would look like a pillar of fire would be over them. The procedure was very simple. When the cloud stopped, they would stop. When the cloud settled down, they made camp. They stayed there until the cloud rose. When the cloud rose, they made ready to travel. When the cloud moved, they moved.

Have you ever asked yourself: how did they follow the cloud? Have you ever been outdoors and tried to follow a cloud as it traveled? Isn't it true that the cloud would cast a shadow on the ground? And wouldn't it be true that if you walked in the shadow you would be walking under the cloud? If the cloud moved, it would be seen by the fact that the shadow had moved. So you would travel that way.

Think of that with reference to Israel. You can picture the children of Israel walking in the shade and staying in the shade on every day the sun shone in that desert country. At night, the fire brought light to them. It made it clear before them, and they could walk in the light. We have a song that says "stepping in the light." This is the idea. You can walk in the light at night time, because of the brightness of the light, and walk in the shade in the day time, because the cloud will cast its shadow before you. If you have ever had anybody guide you with a flashlight, you will know that they can throw a light upon your pathway and you can walk where the light is focused on the ground. Now there might be things in the dark on both sides of you, but they do not need to trouble you. If the light is shining in front of you, you can walk in the light.

Remember the question that we are asking. If a group of Christian people want to know the mind of God, is there any reason to think that God would show them His will? I think that this guidance of Israel would indicate that there is. I have already suggested for the moment that they could walk in the shade or walk in the light. Actually I think for you and for me much of this is given to us in Scripture. If a group of people will study the Scriptures, they will learn where the shade is. If they will walk in the shadow of the wings of God, they will be under His wings and they will be doing His will. Or if they walk in the light, as He is in the light, they will have fellowship one with another. That is the way 1 John puts it.

Now I want to draw some lessons from this incident that happened in Israel. First of all, these people were willing to be led. I think this is very important. Every now and again you will find some person

who will come to you and say, "Will you tell me what to do? Will you guide me where I am going?" Sometimes some of us go ahead and give them guidance. Then afterwards we feel badly because they do not go. Now God would know whether they were going to go or not. For a person coming to God and asking Him for guidance the big question is: would you go if He showed you? There is no reason to expect guidance for the folks that are not willing to be led. You know there are some people who ask God for guidance and then they are going to follow the guidance if it is what they want. If the guidance is not what they want, they are not going to do it. Just check off in your mind that God knows beforehand whether He will or will not. If He does show you His will, you can be very sure that He will show you His will with the thought in mind that you are willing to do it. That is the main point.

The second thing that I want to notice here is they looked for tokens of guidance. You see the cloud was something that was seen, and the fire was something that was seen. These people looked for the evidence of how God would guide them, and He did. They were judges in themselves of the tokens that they saw. I mean they, themselves, made the decision. They judged where the shade was and they recognized where the light was. If I asked God to guide me and then shut my eyes, that is not very wise. I say I want the Lord to guide me and I never look around. I never try to see His hands in my affairs. These were people who needed help from God on guidance and they looked for it. It was shown to them. They judged the cloud to be from God and they accepted that light to be from the Lord.

The next thing is that their course, the route they took, was not chosen by their own knowledge of the land. When a man asks God for guidance and looks to God for help, he does not then figure it out for himself and ask God to endorse his own decision. Sometimes people do that very thing. They say, "Well, we must pray about this." So they ask the Lord, "Lord guide us and show us what to do." Then they sit down to figure it out and they are motivated by their own pleasures. They already have in mind what they want to do. So they go ahead and make their plans and then they turn around and say, "Now Lord bless what we are doing. We asked You about it. Now bless us." But the actual decision was their own. The children of Israel were not like that. They had no plan where to go and they did not know any other plan than to follow where God led them. They made no claim to foresee what was going to happen. They looked to God for guidance and when He gave it to them, that is what they took. Their confidence was in God, not in their progress or in their route. It was not that they felt they had been doing very well and would continue going on their way. They trusted in God.

I do not know how much you can make of this, but truly I do notice that they walked in the shade. I think the shade would be mighty fine in that hot country. I know they walked in the light and walking in the light is better than walking in the darkness. In other words, if we do walk in the ways of God, we can expect that His yoke is easy and His burden light. God watched over them in His wisdom and power.

So how would we answer the question: "Can a group of people be led in their daily affairs by the will of God?" We do have the case of Israel and will have to say, "Yes, that can happen. God Himself will actually show His people what He wants them to do."

The Guidance of God in the Life of Moses

If God were leading a person, would that person always get a quick answer whenever he asks God for guidance? Could he expect that God would always show him ahead of time exactly what he should do?

I am going to turn in the Bible to a consideration of Moses. The Bible tells us that Moses was a servant who was faithful in all his house. He was perhaps the outstanding servant in all Scripture, when you do not include the Lord Jesus Christ. We do know that his life was specially marked with the blessing of God. When he was just a baby he was providentially spared. Then as he grew up as a child, he was providentially cared for in the household of Pharaoh. We will remember that as a young man he made the great decision to forsake everything in Egypt that he might serve God. In Hebrews 11:24-27 you will get the description of the decision that Moses made.

One could feel that if anyone ever received guidance, certainly it would be a man like Moses who gave up everything that he might walk with God and serve God. After giving up all the treasures of Egypt would he not be kept from making any mistakes? Should he not expect God to watch over him at all times? Yet when you read the record you will see his first attempt to lead the people was when he was forty years of age. The result was first that an Egyptian was killed. The next day when he wanted to get two Hebrews to stop quarreling, they turned on him. So we would have to say that his first attempt to lead was a tragic failure. How can one understand this? After all had he not turned to serve God? But the story is not finished. Forty years afterwards, forty long years afterwards, we find that God called him.

Now would you not expect a person like this to be able to receive a quick answer any time he needed to know anything from God? If God could lead anybody, would He not lead this man quickly and directly? You know that in all his contest with Pharaoh, God led him step by step. But if you read that story through in the early part of Exodus, you will find that there never was a time when Moses could know for sure what was going to happen. When Pharaoh would not let him do what he asked him to do, then he would talk to God. He constantly checked up with God as to what to do. But the Lord never did tell him days ahead what specific things he was to do. He did tell him how it was going to turn out. He was going to bring those people out of the land of Egypt. But how it was going to be done remained unknown to Moses.

You will remember the crisis at the Red Sea. He started out after the night of the Passover with the children of Israel. They traveled along until they came to the Red Sea. Then they were in a dilemma. Behind them Pharaoh was chasing them to take them back as captives. In front of them was this arm of the Red Sea, this water for which they had no boats and could not cross. They murmured about their lot and they turned to Moses. And Moses went to God.

Now we are going to see how God led him. You would think that God would have shown him ahead of time. Should he not have expected God to keep him and guide him so he would not get into this kind of trouble? The answer to all that is No! No! No! Because God did not show him ahead of time what was going to happen and God did not fix it so that he never would have any trouble. Rather, when he got into the situation he turned to God. Then God dealt with him.

God said to him, "What is that in thine hand?" All the time Moses had a rod. He had been using it as a man would use a cane. He had this rod with him. Suddenly it became significant. The Lord told him to lift this rod over the water and it opened before him. When he was led of God to do it, it was meaningful. Before he was led of God, it would not have mattered if he had hit the water with that rod. The rod did not have any power in it. But it did have power when it was in God's hand.

Then they came out into the desert. First of all there: was bitter water, and the people murmured

against it. Then there was no bread, and the people murmured against him. Then there was no water, and the people murmured. Then there was an enemy who came and attacked. In all these crises he sought the Lord. Moses was a man that continually turned to God. Yet we have evidence of the fact that he never did know at any one time everything that was going to happen in the future.

There came a time when they were going to get ready to enter into the land. Moses was to learn what God's will for them was. They stopped at a place called Mt. Sinai. Moses went to the top of that mountain and stayed there for forty days. That is forty days in prayer. For what? I can see how somebody would say, "Well, why didn't God just tell him?" I do not know. It just takes time. So here is Moses. He is carrying out everything that God wants him to do, and he gets into trouble. When he turns to God, he does not get immediate relief. Forty days it will take to bring this thing up.

From this incident I want to draw certain lessons for you and for me. Because a person is serving God and sincerely wants to do God's will, that is no guarantee that we will not make mistakes. God will see you through, but I certainly cannot promise you will not make mistakes. The blessing we have from God does not mean that He keeps your foot in every single case from stumbling or that He keeps your hand in every single case from making a mistake. Why this is so, I do not know. I have an idea. I think God would have me act according to the best of my capacity for Him, but there is always a challenge for me to learn more about how to do it.

The second thing I want to point out is that because a person is obeying God is no guarantee that he will have special wisdom. Just because you really want to do God's will does not mean you suddenly become real smart. Just because there is no question that you really want to honor God, that does not mean you can trust the first idea that comes to your mind. No, you will need guidance even then. You may have to wait. Moses spent forty days to see and to learn. It is a test for our faith. It draws things out and God knows why He is doing that.

I want you to notice again in this story that Moses' faith is to be seen in his persistence. He stayed up there. Forty days is a long time. He did not even come down at the end of thirty days. He waited until the Lord showed him. Now Moses' confidence is to be seen in his seeking God's will. Moses did not know for sure what it was going to be and he did not know what to do, but he knew God knew. And so he approached God. He did not get an immediate answer. He stayed there.

And then we can remember with appreciation that Moses did receive God's guidance and strength. So we will say when you are seeking to have the blessing of God upon you by way of guidance you can get it. But there is no promise you will get it right away. You may have to take time.

Mistakes in Following the Guidance of God

If a person were yielded to God, could such a person ever step out of the will of God? Would God ever allow one of His own people to make a mistake? I want to draw your attention to two persons that are in the Bible. You will recognize right away that they are among those who really did want to serve God.

First I am going to be thinking about Abraham. I chose him because he is the outstanding example of faith. If ever there was a man who could be spoken of as being faithful it would be Abraham. In fact, the Bible calls him "the friend of God." And yet there was one time in his career when this man actually acted in ways out of the will of God. In the Book of Genesis, Chapter 20, verses 3-16, you find his dealings with a certain king by the name of Abimelech.

The story as it unfolded was very simple. Abraham was a complete stranger in a foreign land. Apparently Sarah, his wife, was a very beautiful woman, and he was afraid that Abimelech would want to take her for his harem. It was against the customs of their culture for the king to take any woman who was somebody else's wife for his harem. But it was a very simple matter to fix it that she would not be another man's wife by just killing the other man. So Abraham could very easily be frightened to think that when Abimelech saw how beautiful Sarah was he would kill Abraham.

We read that Abraham put Sarah up to a trick. He had her tell the truth that gave a wrong impression. He asked Sarah to say that she was his sister. Now the actual fact of the matter is she was his half sister, and the ordinary way of speaking about that would be to say that she was his sister. But of course that was not the whole truth. She was also his wife. This is one of those cases where a man who really is an honest man tells half the truth and wants to get by with something.

Now God intervened in that case, as you will read in verses 3-7. He intervened to keep Abimelech from sinning in the matter, and Sarah was restored to Abraham. Then Abimelech called Abraham in and asked him, "Why did you do this?" I want you to notice that what Abraham did was certainly not the will of God. In other words Abraham was not acting according to faith. He said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place." If you boil it right down you have it – "because I thought." Abraham was acting in his own judgment and he was out of the will of God. You will remember I asked you if a person were a real true believer and sincerely wanted to do the will of God, could such a person ever make a mistake? Here we have Abraham; he did.

I want to use one more example. This is the case of Joshua. Joshua was an outstanding servant of God. I want to draw your attention to what happened to him in his relations with men of the city of Gibeon. You will read this in Joshua 9:3-27. After Joshua had led Israel into victory at Jericho, then at Ai, and in various other parts of the country, the men of Gibeon, we read, "did work wilily." That is, they worked in a cunning fashion. They worked out something tricky. They made as if they had been ambassadors from a far country. And they presented the evidence of how far they had traveled. They had old sacks to carry their provisions, wine bottles that were already bursting and useless because they were so old, old shoes, old garments and dry, moldy bread. When they talked to Joshua they told him their shoes were new when they put them on, their garments were new when they put them on, and the bread was fresh out of the oven.

In the 14th verse of Chapter 9 you read these words: "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." Joshua actually made a treaty with these people and in so doing he imperiled the security of the nation; because he allowed these strangers and these enemies to stay right in the land. He did this thing because of rash acceptance.

These two incidents are rare. I do not know of another case, in the case of Abraham or in case of Joshua, just like this. But I wanted you to see that even though a person were really obedient to God, it is

possible for such a person to make a mistake. But there are things for us to learn about this. In the first place, being a committed believer, really wanting to do the will of God, gives me no favors. Just because I have done the will of God and I have suffered for the Lord gives me no favors. What is true for others is true for me. If I do not walk carefully, I can make a mistake, just like anybody else can.

The second thing I want to say is that the blessing of God and the protection of God is not arbitrary but practical. When you ask God to bless you, that just does not come out of the blue. For instance, if a man is starting on a trip in his car and prays for God's blessing but then he drives too fast, does that make sense? It does not make sense and he is liable to have a wreck. Asking God's blessing is all right if it is genuine and sincere. You might say to me, "Well the praying did not do any good." That is too much to say. But you cannot fix it automatically that you pray to God in the morning and act as you please all day and have it come out all right at night. No, it will not, because actually the blessing of God will be upon me according to what I do.

Let me go on to point out that having a clear conscience in my relation to God does not guarantee that all my actions are wise. I may be just as sincere a Christian as anybody could possibly be. I could have it in mind that I am going to do just exactly what God wants me to do in every way. But that does not mean I will have good sense. I can still do a foolish thing. You know when I will be wise? When I do what He wants me to do. Saying I am going to do it does not make it that way. Saying I belong to Him does not make it that way. But if I yield to Him and follow His will, then I will be wise.

Abraham was certainly a man who believed in God and yet he acted foolishly about Sarah and Abimelech. The history of Joshua, as given in the Bible, is remarkable for the great things that this man did. Yet he could make a mistake and imperil the security of his nation by signing a treaty with people with whom he should not have had any dealings.

Having a clear conscience in your relation to God does not guarantee that all your actions will be wise. And having a clear conscience in your actions, even if you do the thing you think is right does not give you good sense. Finally, following your own judgment can lead you into error. That is what it did with Abraham. He did what he thought was the right thing to do, but he was wrong. If you act on your own judgment, then what you are going to get is your own judgment. If it is worth nothing, you get nothing. It happened with Abraham. It happened with Joshua. It could happen with you and it could happen with me.

Seeking God's Guidance in Prayer

If God were going to lead, would He show all His will at once? We believe God is a living God. We have in mind that God does care about us. Would it take any time to come to know God's will? Now I have several incidents in the Old Testament that I want to use for us to look at and to study.

In the Book of Genesis, the 18th Chapter, is the story that Abraham was praying to God about the destruction of Sodom. In the course of this you might say that Abraham was seeking to know what the possibilities were that Sodom might be spared. I want you to notice that he did not ask God in so many words, "Tell me what you want me to understand." Rather he approached Him in a tentative way, offering various ideas.

So if you look in Chapter 18, verse 23, we find after God had told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?" And then he got an answer for that, "And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake." And then he came down to where he asked Him if there were thirty, and He said He would not do it if there were thirty. Then he asked Him if there were twenty, and He would not do it if there were twenty. Then he asked Him if He would destroy it if there were ten, and He said He would not do it if there were ten.

I want you to notice that Abraham did not come into that situation and ask God to tell him "how many righteous people will there have to be before you spare the city." He decided that he would try with fifty. Then he tried with forty-five. Then he tried with forty. He did this moment by moment. He thought about it and prayed about it, and he went on down until he had ten. And then we read: "The Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham." It does not mean that Abraham necessarily quit. It means that the Lord went His way. The Lord quit.

What I want particularly to bring out at this time is that Abraham did not get an immediate answer. I am proposing that so far as you and I are concerned, if we want to know the will of God about anything, it is not going to be practical for us to ask the Lord, "Tell me now specifically: Yes or No." No, that is not the way in which it goes. We think about it. We consider it. We concern ourselves about it, and we arrive at something that seems to us might do. We try it before God to see if that will be all right.

Let me go on to another incident. This is found in the Book of Judges in the 6th Chapter. This chapter has to do with Gideon. Gideon was a great man of God. He was a man whom God called and whom God blessed and whom God used in a remarkable way. Here Gideon had a call from God to go to battle. The story is well known. I suppose everybody has heard of Gideon's fleece. When he was using that fleece, what did Gideon want to know? Gideon was seeking assurance of victory before he went to battle. He was going to go to battle because he thought God wanted him to go. But he would like to think he was going to win. He thought that if he knew he was going to win it would make his men stronger and would make the whole matter easier. I want you to notice that he did not come before God and say, "Will you give me the victory? Won't you give me the victory?" That is not how it was done.

You will remember how he did it. He said, "I am going to put a fleece out on the ground. If you want me to go, tonight have it so that the fleece will have the dew upon it and that all around about it the ground will be dry." You will remember that when day came the ground was dry but the fleece had so

much water in it that he could wring the water out of the fleece. Then we find that Gideon came back and asked God not to take offense at him. But he said, "Let us do it again and this time let the fleece be dry and all the ground around it be wet with dew," the exact opposite. And it turned out just exactly as he had asked. Then he concluded from that that God was going to be with him. Maybe you would not want to do it that way. Maybe you would have some other way that you might think of. But I want you to notice that here is a man whom God used.

Now let us think of one more instance. This is in the Book of I Kings in the 18th Chapter, verses 41-46. Here we have the case of Elijah. This is part of the event on Mt. Carmel. You will remember at the end of Elijah's experience on Mt. Carmel that he promised that the drought would be broken. For three and a half years it had not rained, but he had promised to Ahab that it would rain that day. We find that Elijah went up to the top of Mt. Carmel and got on his knees and bowed his head between his knees and began to pray. And he prayed and prayed and prayed. Then he sent his servant to look. What was the servant to look for? The servant was to look for evidence that God would send the rain as He had promised. The evidence was going to be a cloud, and he was to look for a cloud. See how reasonable this is. See how in getting to know God's will, and in seeking to find out God's will, you pay attention to the practical situation. Why a cloud? Because rain comes from clouds. That is why he told him to look for a cloud. And more than that – this is of great interest to me – he told him to look towards the sea for a cloud. Why look towards the sea? Because actually that is where the rain comes from. The water would come from the ocean and would be taken up into the clouds and they would have rain. So he told his assistant to look for the clouds and this he did.

There will be people who will say, "Well, if God is going to do it, He can do it under any circumstances whatever." Some people think they are honoring God when they say, "I just believe God can do anything. I believe He can make it rain out of a blue sky." Now I would not want to ever be quoted as saying there is something that God could not do, but I just do not expect that God would make it rain out of a blue sky. Rain comes out of clouds. Now God might bring the cloud up and He might cause the clouds to rain. Sometimes the clouds do not rain, and He might cause the clouds to rain. But the rain is going to come from the clouds, and the clouds are going to come from the sea. This is true even in God's will.

So let us have in mind that if God were going to lead, there is no reason to expect that He will show everything at once. There is rather reason to think that I may need to seek His face and to wait before Him, to consider things before Him and to pray before Him. In the case of Abraham, you will remember he started with fifty, went to forty- five, went to forty, then thirty, then twenty, then to ten. What is this? This is a man seeking to know the mind of God, probing this way, that way. There might be another way of doing it. I do not know. What we want to see here is that God does not show immediately all He is going to do at once, even to His own people. It takes time to find out the mind of God about your affairs.

How To Know The Will Of God

How would you know the will of God in a particular matter? How would a group of Christians know what God wanted them to do in making some specific decision or choice? Throughout the Old Testament there was a common practice referred to as "casting lots." So far as I can tell, this matter of casting lots was very similar to what we have today when someone tosses a coin. It is a question of letting the decision depend upon the chance happening of something. For instance a coin has two sides to it. We call them heads or tails. And when that coin is flipped and comes down, it only can rest on one side. The side that is up can be the decision. Long ago there was a custom called casting lots. This was the procedure that was used in selecting the man who was to take the place of Judas, the twelfth apostle.

We read about this in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. The story goes that Peter had gotten up and had told the gathered disciples that they needed to have twelve apostles. They only had eleven. They were to decide which of the group would be the man chosen to be the twelfth apostle. There were certain preliminaries that they went through. They evidently had agreed that there were certain characteristics that were necessary. Now there were not many people to choose from, but it would have to be someone who had been in the company from the time that the Lord Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan until the time He was raised from the dead. They eliminated everyone else from the group, and finally they found two. So in verse 23 we read: "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." Now the question was, which one of these two?

This is the type of situation that we are now considering. How would you know the will of God about that? How did they go about it? As we look at this and break it down, we have it clear in our minds that the group as a whole exercised their judgment as far as possible. Suppose a group of you were trying to decide what is the will of God to do? Whom shall you choose, who shall you appoint? The first thing to have in mind is that there will be some judgment that you can exercise on the basis of obvious known qualifications or characteristics. The group exercised judgment as far as they possibly could.

Now I want to notice that this is not the kind of thing that was decided by flipping coins. They did not just line the men up and flip coins to see which one would be chosen. That is not the way it was done. The first thing they did was to exercise their judgment as far as they possibly could. I want you to notice too that this group believed that God knew both men. "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men." They knew that God knew both of these men that were before them, and God would have in mind which one of these two should be an apostle. Also they had in mind that God had already chosen him. Look at verse 24 : "And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." So really they were just wondering what the will of God was, as the will of God would already be made up.

Actually, so far as you and I are concerned, we might have a little difficulty with that. Some of us would have this kind of feeling, "Well, if God had already made up His mind, why was it necessary for them to make a choice?" Apparently it is to be understood that God had already in His own mind chosen which one of the two He wanted to have as an apostle, but on the other hand, such a person would have to be designated and they would be the ones that were to exercise their choice. Some part of it was in their hands.

The next thing I want you to notice about this is that this group prayed. This procedure and the use of the casting of lots was not a mechanical matter. They did not do this just without thought. They prayed about it. They wanted God to take over, and in this particular situation they acknowledged God as God. I think that they would indicate something like this. When they prayed about this they had committed themselves to take whatever the choice was. The situation was set up in such a way that if God would

favor them by showing the one He would choose by the way in which He would control the chance falling of lots, His will would be done. So the group gave forth their lot

I have already told you that this is somewhat obscure. I do not know of anybody who has ever been able to describe absolutely just how this was done. I think it is very similar to what we call "rolling dice." Or I have thought for myself, it is more like flipping a coin, It was used by Moses when he cast lots to make certain decisions and used by Joshua when he was trying to find out who had caused the defeat of Ai.

Now having made all this talk about it, perhaps I ought to tell you at once, that so far as the New Testament is concerned, this is the last time that this method was used. I only wanted to bring to your mind that these apostles were not the kind of people who would go by some mechanical, automatic chance. Now this is not to say that they did not pick men after this. They did. In Acts 13 we see an entirely different way in which a man was chosen.

In Acts 13, beginning with the first verse we read : "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers." One of them was called Barnabas and then there are a list of men the last of which is called Saul. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." You see how that selection was made. The Holy Spirit made the selection. The Holy Spirit guided them in the decision that they were to make. That situation is different than that in the first chapter. I do not think that the people in the church at Antioch were necessarily any more sincere than the apostles were in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. But there was a difference. The incident that happened in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. with the casting of lots, occurred before the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. They could not have had the help of the Holy Spirit in their hearts to the extent that they did afterwards.

Much of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a Christian is still to be learned by many of us. Perhaps the great truth of it will not ever be spelled out fully in so many words. One or another of us will learn more or less of this great truth. But one thing is sure: after the time of Pentecost, they never again used such a mechanical system as the casting of lots. But they did do such things as having prayer. In prayer, waiting before the Lord, they felt inwardly guided by the Holy Spirit. "This is the way, walk ye in it." Here was a case where actually two men were definitely specified. "Separate me, Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Now we may observe that this calls for communion with the Lord. It says "they ministered unto the Lord," and I think that would mean that they worshipped Him. They were praying and fasting. These were people spiritually attuned to God; wanting to know what they should do. This emphasizes their fellowship with God and with one another. In such a setting the Holy Spirit guided them.

So, we would say as to how a group could be led, if they were truly Christian people, they would be led in prayer , waiting upon the Lord and seeing how they were led in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Back of it all is the fact that God does have in mind what should be done. He does know what He wants done and He can show it to His people and reveal it to them.

Being Led In The Will Of God

If you had the desire in your heart, in a given situation, to do exactly what God wanted you to do, could you expect that He would lead you? How would He lead you?

I want to direct your attention to an incident in the New Testament. We have the record of a case where a man was definitely led by the Lord as to what he ought to do. I am going to turn in the Book of Acts to the 8th chapter and take up the incident of the way Philip was led to speak to the Ethiopian. If you will turn to Chapter 8, verse 26, you will see how this all began. This is what we read: "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south." This phrase, "the angel of the Lord," remains obscure so far as we are concerned. We do not know for sure what sort of creature this was. We know that angels are creatures of God, but just exactly what kind of person this was, we do not know. Was this a present form; something like the form of a man. like those angels that sat at the open tomb? Was it such a person as the disciples had speaking to them on the day of the Ascension when two men robed in white spoke to them? It does not tell us. The word "angel" means "messenger." It does not mean necessarily that this angel had a body. The angel of the Lord would have been one who communicated this message to Philip in the Spirit.

The word "spake" does not necessarily mean audible words. It may have been, but it does not necessarily mean that kind of thing. The communication could have been made through the Spirit. In other words, Philip could have felt in his heart this was what was being said to him. I will talk more about that as we go along. Again someone could say, "Maybe it was a vision?" Well, it might have been. but it does not say that it was. All it tells us is that the angel of the Lord, a messenger of the Lord, communicated unto Philip. Maybe it was a voice? I do not know. I do not think so. I do not think it was a voice and I do not think it was a vision, because on other occasions when voices were heard, it was named. When visions were seen, these things were described. Perhaps it was in his consciousness. I am going to suggest to you that it probably came to him while he was praying. The reason I am dwelling upon this is that this is the start of the whole business. He felt inwardly led, as if he had been definitely told what to do. "Arise, go toward the south." That is what he did. He got up and went. He had a definite intimation given to him that this is what he should do.

In verse 29 you read: "Then the Spirit said unto Philip [This brings us directly to the Holy Spirit], Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." You might well keep in mind that it is a function of the Holy Spirit to take the things of Christ and show them unto us. It is not straining the matter at all to intimate to you that when the Spirit conveyed guidance to Philip, He could have been taking the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and conveying it to Philip. The Spirit is not any different than the living Lord Jesus Christ guiding him. In any case here again the "saying" is not necessarily audible words, the kind of thing other people could have heard. It does not mean a voice came from heaven. It could well be in his consciousness. "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Now that was specific. There was another chariot there on the highway and Philip felt in some way that he was definitely commissioned to go there.

Now let me suggest something to you about this whole thing. It is quite possible that Philip was looking for an opportunity to serve. You should not rule that out. Philip was an evangelist. He was actually busily engaged in the matter of teaching and preaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip was already looking for people. So it is quite possible that while Philip was traveling along this highway, he was actually thinking in terms of this. And when the direction was "Go near, join thyself to this chariot," you can have in mind this is the kind of man who is already looking for a chariot to go to, or someone that he could talk to. It is possible that, as he traveled, he was in prayer, and that this came to him while he was in the atmosphere of prayer. It is also possible that he was asking for guidance. He may well in his heart

and spirit have been thinking all the way along, "What will thou have me to do, Lord ?" If you and I are going to make use of this, we should have in mind that the guidance that we are reading about came to a man like Philip, who was already committed to the Lord, already serving the Lord.

I want also to draw your attention to the prompt response. In verse 30 you read: "And Philip ran thither to him." This is the case of a man who was eager. There is no indication that Philip was acting automatically or mechanically. His further procedure from here on shows intelligent action.

We read in verse 35 for example: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." He told him how this passage he was reading in Isaiah was referring to Jesus of Nazareth. Now all that the man requested of him about that passage in Isaiah was a simple yes or no answer. He asked him in verse 34: "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" But notice that Philip "preached unto him Jesus." How long it took him I do not know. How far they travelled while that was going on, I do not know. But you know it took some time. In other words, Philip did not just press a button and then came the answer .

In verse 39 you read: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." He did not take him up in the sky. He did not catch him away as in a cloud, but He led him away. It is almost like He snatched him away. I think the picture would be that Philip very likely wanted to continue talking to this Ethiopian. Do you not imagine that with a new convert like that that Philip would want to talk more and more about the Lord ? Apparently the expression, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip," indicates direct intervention to guide Philip away from this man. All the way through this incident Philip is being led just as if someone reached out, took him by the hand and led him.

In this there are some things for us to learn with reference to being guided of the Lord. To be led specifically by the Lord, a person must be committed to the Lord. Philip was a man who was wanting to obey the Lord. If I am going to look for the Lord to guide me about some specific thing, I could ask myself this, "Am I already minded to do God's will? Am I in the way of doing God's will?"

In the second place, to be led specifically in a definite situation, a person must be in the process of obeying. This kind of call does not come to a disobedient person. This kind of call does not come to an unrelated person. The Lord does not tell you what to do and then you decide whether or not you will.

In my own experience, I can remember vividly a very important time in my life. I wanted the Lord to guide me definitely. The first big issue that came up was whether or not I was willing to do the Lord's will. It was made very clear to me personally that if I was not willing to do the Lord's will, there was no point in asking Him. You know the Lord does not waste Himself that way. If I was not minded to do His will, there was no point in my asking Him what r ought to do. But if I was minded and was committed to do His will, then I should be aware that the Lord Himself is watching over me.

If you and I have trust in the Lord, are minded to do the things that are pleasing to the Lord, and so far as we know, are already doing what the Lord wants us to do, are active in this and ready and willing to respond, I think you and I could expect to be led. That is how it happened with Philip.

Being Led Into Unexpected Conduct

Would a Christian ever be led to act by the Lord in a way that would be contrary to what he had previously thought right? Something that you might even have thought was not the right thing to do, but your mind would be changed by the Lord so that you would find yourself doing something you had never done before? We are going to look into the Bible for an instance like this. We find it in the Book of Acts. If you will open your Bible to Acts, Chapter 10, you will see the incident where Peter was led to go to Cornelius.

For us to have the whole picture in mind, let me tell you that in those days it would not be proper for any Jew to go into the house of a man that was a Gentile. He certainly would not go in there to eat and he would not go in there for social relationship. Normally speaking, Jews just did not go into the house of Gentiles. That was the general situation. Now the early Christians were all Jews. They had been preaching the Gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem and to the people in Samaria. But there came a time in the history of the Church when the Lord would have them go out and start speaking to the Gentiles. Some one of them must do it, and Peter was the one chosen.

The situation developed that while Peter was in Joppa he was called to go to the house of a Gentile by the name of Cornelius. I want you to notice how Peter was led to go. Peter, as a Jew, would have every natural habit against going to the house of a Gentile. Peter went up on the housetop, which was a kind of a roof garden, to pray while he was waiting for his noon meal. We read in 10:9 that it was the sixth hour, which is to say, just at noon. He was anxious to eat and was waiting for food. As you read on you will see that Peter had a vision. The vision was about food. In the vision he was directed to eat food that he would ordinarily, as a Jew, consider unclean. Today we would say it was not kosher. In the vision this food was let down before him, as if it were on a big sheet, and he was told to rise up and take some of this meat and eat it. His answer was, "No, I have never done that." This happened three times. Each time that the vision came with this food in front of him, he was told, "Rise Peter; kill, and eat." And Peter said, "No. That food that is there before me is from animals that are not proper. That is not the kind of meat I should eat." And each time he would hear "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common." If God has cleansed it, don't say it is not fit. Then it would go away.

Up till then I am not sure that Peter had learned anything, but now I want you to see what else happened. While he was thinking on it, he was given to understand that several men would come up to the door asking for him. He was told to go with them, asking no question. So as it turned out, they came to the door, just the way in which he had seen in the vision, and under the circumstances he went. I want you to notice however, that he took with him witnesses. We understand that he took several men with him to watch, because he was going to go to the home of a Gentile. They could see exactly what it was that he was going to do. He went to the house of Cornelius, found Cornelius there and in the course of their relationship he began to tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ. As he told him the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius. Peter then said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" And he went ahead and baptized the Gentile. We all recognize that that was the opening of the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. In it all Peter had to be made ready and willing to go to the house of the Gentile and preach to him, contrary to his natural feeling. He was led to go. This is in answer to the question which was raised at the beginning.

Now I want you to notice certain factors about this. This kind of guidance would not come to just anybody. This is the kind of guidance that the Lord will give to those who are responsive to Him. He is personally guiding them. You will remember that Peter was under orders to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The Lord Jesus after His Resurrection, before His Ascension, had told

the disciples that they were to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Peter had this in his heart and mind. At the particular time that this happened, Peter was obeying the Lord. He was down there in Joppa teaching and preaching. He was being used to win people to the Lord. At the same time Peter was unconsciously bound by tradition to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. There was nothing spiritual about that. It was a social tradition. This would hamper the exercise of himself as a minister of the Gospel. The Gospel was intended for everybody.

It was now about to be revealed through Peter's conduct that the Gospel is for everybody including the Gentiles. Here was a man, Peter, who had the Gospel in his heart. He is the one that can share with other people. He was under a negative restraint that he did not know he had. He did not realize that deep down in his heart he was subject to this restraint and that he had definitely been conditioned not to do this kind of thing. Yet this social restraint that he had would have kept him from carrying out the Gospel as it was planned.

Another thing to notice about this is that Peter was hungry and wanted to eat. Some psychologists will notice right away, "Well, there it is. He had a vision about food. That is natural. The Lord follows it on through." I imagine many times people without any spiritual significance, when they have been hungry, have dreamed about food. I suspect that anybody that would be dying of thirst, in the time that he was asleep, would possibly be dreaming that he had plenty of water to drink. This is not irregular, and it would show that the Lord was using a very normal process in this case, a natural psychological process. Nothing is wrong about that.

Peter received specific evidence of the authenticity of the message. You will remember that when he saw this vision three times, each time the word was said, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common." At that time, Peter did not know what it meant. Now he was told, "Three men are at the gate asking for you." Sure enough they appeared. That would have given him a feeling of the authenticity of the whole revelation. It would tie it down to something being actually real.

He did not recognize the meaning of the vision even then. He knew he should go with these men. He went and took six men with him so that they would be able to testify that he had done only what the Lord led him to do. It was not until he was speaking in the house of Cornelius and the Holy Spirit came on those people that he recognized the meaning of the words, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common." Here God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, and although it was the Jewish custom to say that the Gentiles were not clean, that they were not fit company, God had blessed them. The significance of what he had seen and heard in the vision came upon him with conviction when he was actually involved in it.

Now notice, for our own selves, such guidance is rare. You do not have instances like this often. You and I should not necessarily be expecting it. If you are already doing the will of God and moving forward in it, you could expect some such guidance as this. It is verified by events. If you have an idea come to you in the night and it stands absolutely alone, unrelated to anything else, it is not like this story. Peter was brought along in the will of the Lord by certain events that corroborated the guidance that he had.

Being Misled By Circumstances

Men who do not believe in God would certainly expect no guidance. Such people in looking forward realize that they might be fortunate and might be unfortunate. They speak of good luck and bad luck. Then there will be some people who will try to guide themselves in their own judgment. They will have good judgment or bad judgment. And I suspect that some people will trust their intuition. They would say that they have a hunch about this or a hunch about that. Maybe there will be some people that will use fortune tellers, astrologers or something of that nature; because everybody will realize the danger of moving forward into the unknown. Certainly tomorrow and the next day and the next day are not known to us. No man knows what a day will bring forth. The same is true with people. When you think about trusting people and choosing people for this or for that, how do you know what they are going to do? You could easily make a mistake and you could, in the same way, make the right decisions.

Is there some power that supervises our lives? Is there anyone who, actually watching over us, has in mind where He wants us to go? For the Christian, this would be God. God brings His will to pass. And if you believe that there is a general manager of all affairs in which you are involved, you could not help but wonder if your choice is going to be good or whether it is going to be bad, according to the plan that the manager is putting over.

Often when we are looking ahead, we look for signs to try to figure out if this trip is going to be lucky or unlucky. But it is possible to be misled. We can be fooled. I want to draw your attention to one incident we have in the Bible where someone tried to figure out what was going to happen and made a mistake. I am thinking of Acts, Chapter 27, beginning at verse 9. Paul was being taken across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome as a prisoner. There was some question as to whether or not it was too late in the year to make a trip. In those days the sailing of the Mediterranean was with sail boats. They depended upon the good winds to blow them across. And they could not stand too much of a storm.

Now Paul warned them that it was too late. We read, "Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous [because it was that time of the year when the storms came on], because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives." In other words, if we travel now we will be in danger and in peril. Now verse 11: "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter. . . . And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete." Now this is a very familiar saying amongst us. When wondering whether you should do something or not, and then for a moment the condition seems to be favorable, we comment to each other, "The south wind blew softly." The weather was fine. The wind was in the right place, and so they assumed that all would be well.

What you actually have here is something to warn everyone of us. Wishful thinking can lead us astray. You see, the truth is back there in verse 12 that the haven, the harbor, was not commodious to winter in. It was not a big harbor, they did not have a big town there. They did not have good accommodations, and frankly the ship's crew did not want to stay there in the first place. They wanted to go on, and this is what was involved in the whole thing. So when they were looking for signs and "the south wind blew softly" they thought they had the sign and they set out. Actually they nearly lost their lives. We cannot help but feel as we read the whole story that if it had not been for Paul's praying, they might have lost their lives. Apparently Paul received word from the Lord that God would spare them under certain conditions, and He did.

Now I have another incident in the Book of Acts that I will refer to. Paul was traveling alone from Caesarea to Jerusalem and a certain prophet by the name of Agabus warned him not to go. He came to Paul and told him that by the Holy Spirit he foresaw that Paul was going to have trouble. I personally think that this would happen while he was praying. While praying for and thinking about Paul, his heart would become burdened and he would feel that he was certainly going to have trouble. This man, Agabus, took Paul's belt and tied his own feet together. He hobbled himself in this object lesson. He showed himself to Paul and everybody else and said the Holy Spirit told him that "the man that owns this belt is going to be tied just like this." He would be actually made a prisoner. Agabus was warning him not to go. There were others who did the same thing at this time.

Now here is an interesting thing. They were saying if you go, you will get into trouble. It was the truth. Paul did get into trouble. But would that be the reason Paul would not go? They urgently warned Paul not to go. Why? That he should save himself. Was that what Paul was in the world to do? Was he in the world to save himself? Now had Paul been concerned for himself, he would not have gone to Jerusalem. But Paul had a commission to go to Jerusalem. He felt in his heart and soul that that was the thing that the Lord wanted him to do.

What I am trying to say here, by contrast with the shipmaster we were talking about, is that here the signs were bad. It looked as though he was going to get into trouble, and we know he did get into trouble. But you see basically, Paul wanted to serve the Lord. He understood serving the Lord would take him to Jerusalem. To Jerusalem, he would go. And Paul said, "I am willing to die in Jerusalem for the Lord's sake. Do not try to stop me. I am going right on through." Do you see how different that was from the shipmaster? The shipmaster waited until he got favorable conditions. But the truth of the matter is that the shipmaster did not want to stay where they were. The harbor was not big enough, and it was not comfortable. In this other instance they came to Paul and told him the signs were bad, and they were bad. You are going to get into trouble, and he did get into trouble. But he went because basically what he really wanted to do was to serve the Lord.

So when you and I look about guidance, we ought to check what do we really want. We cannot go by conditions or circumstances. You and I could be fooled. If we really want to go, it will not make so much difference what the conditions are like or anything else. And if we do not want to go, we will find some reason for staying. Conditions are not really the thing that should determine. If you and I were planning to go to church, to church we will go. If it rains, it rains. Now if we do not want to go to church anyway, we are just really not interested. When it rains, we will say, "Oh no, we cannot go now, because the weather is bad." You see the truth of the matter is we did not want to go in the first place. In this matter of being led by the Lord, it is a very important thing to have in mind what you really want to do.

Discovering The Leading of God

If a man were a servant of God and really trusted in God, would you expect him always to know exactly what God wanted him to do? I want you to look in Acts, Chapter 16:6-10 This is an incident where you find Paul trying to find out what God would want him to do. Paul was a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He was a man who had had wonderful answer, to prayer, and a man who had had personal fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This was a regular daily experience with Paul.

Here is the way the story unfolds. Paul and a company of others were on a missionary journey. "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." While they were wondering where to go next they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia. We pause here for a moment and ask, "How would the Holy Ghost forbid them?" Do you suppose they heard a voice? Do you suppose they saw a vision? Do you think they read it in a book? In the 7th verse: "After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia but the Spirit suffered them not." Here you have the same idea.

The reason I am asking this question is that you and I, if we are believer, in the Lord Jesus Christ, could be led that way. Here is Paul on missionary work. He is traveling, and he want, to go forward. We have already seen two places he could not go.

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Paul had a vision. In this vision, he saw this man of Macedonia, calling on him, "Come over and help us." Evidently he came and told the company, because while the record tells us that Paul had the vision, when you read on from there the plural pronoun *we* is used. "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." This was the first entry into Europe. You will remember they went to the city of Philippi, and there Lydia believed, and afterwards the Philippian jailor.

A person trusting in God may not know where to go next. Paul was an obedient servant but he ran out of direction. He had gone as far as he could go in the will of the Lord without more information. If I am an obedient Christian, ready to do the will of God about anything, could I expect that every morning I would know exactly what I was going to do that day? Would I be able to tell you at the beginning of the week exactly where I would wind up at the end of the week? A person trusting in God, as we can see here with Paul, may not know where to go next.

The second thing I want to point out about this is that a person trusting in God, as Paul here, will seek guidance from God. Now when you read that they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to go down into Asia, that obviously means to me they wanted to go into Asia. That is, they had figured it out. They had finished preaching at a certain place. Naturally they would look ahead. They evidently planned the possibility of going down into Asia Minor. Personally, I think they were praying people. As they prayed, they would get no clearance in their hearts and minds to go. So as they continued in prayer, it was made clear to them that the Holy Spirit said, "No, you are not going into Asia." Now will you notice He did not tell them where to go. We read that "they assayed to go into Bithynia." That language means they tried it. They organized themselves to go into Bithynia. "But the Spirit suffered them not." Again, I think this would be in praying. Now what I see in this is that Paul and his company were seeking approval from the Lord. They could have gone on into Asia Minor, I suspect. They could have gone over into Bithynia. But they would not go anywhere that the Lord did not give them clearance, that He would not encourage them to go. And He apparently did not want them to go.

Another thing I want to draw your attention to is that a person trusting in God and obeying Him may be minded to go in a direction which would not be in the will of God. Here is Paul wanting to serve the Lord. No doubt about his mind. No doubt about his heart. No doubt about his intentions. He evidently had planned to go into Asia Minor, but it was not what God wanted him to do. Then he decided that he wanted to go into Bithynia. I imagine as they figured it out, they thought to themselves, "That is a good field." "But the Spirit suffered them not." A person trusting in God will not proceed if God does not approve.

Another point we can see in this is that a person trusting in God may receive guidance from God even through a dream, even in a vision. I realize how uncertain this is. I am satisfied that a great many of us have dreams many times that have no special significance. You might well ask yourself, "How would you know? What kind of a dream would you have that would specially indicate that this is the will of God?" There never has been any description of that in the Bible. But the use of dreams and the use of visions in the Bible is very common. It is one of the ways God has of conveying His mind and heart.

How would He communicate? Personally, I think something like this. Paul had a dream. When he came and told the others, it clicked. The thing that he saw in the dream fitted the situation in which they were, and they gathered assuredly. They considered it. They thought about it. They took the insight that came in Paul's vision, and pointing it forward into the situation, it clicked with them that they should go to Macedonia. So they assuredly gathered that this was the Lord's call.

A person trusting in God will move into new areas as the way is opened before him. He wants to serve, and he is ready to go forward. But that does not mean that in every case he will know exactly what to do.

How Shall I Trust God About My Family?

Is God interested in our families? Have I any reason to believe that God would be interested in the kind of home I have? I wonder whether we realize that the idea of family in our society is actually derived from the Bible. I want to talk to you about that by raising this question – Can you count on it that God is directly interested in your home, and is there any way in which you could act about your home that would bring the blessing of God?

Families of course begin with marriage. A man and a woman come together, they marry and start a family. Right at that point we could ask does God have any interest in whom a boy marries or a girl marries? Immediately we would say that if the boy or girl is a Christian, he may very well keep in mind that according to the New Testament he is free to marry anyone whom he will, only in the Lord. Now that is the way it reads – "Only in the Lord." And I would like to say with all sympathy and with all my heart to any young person, if you are a Christian and you are interested in having the blessing of God upon your life and upon your home, by all means keep yourself to the point where you will marry a Christian. If you marry a person who is not a Christian you cannot possibly expect that you will have the blessing of God in your home that you yourself would want and that you could have.

When you come together as husband and wife in the Christian home, is there anything that you should have in mind so far as God is concerned? One of the first things from God's point of view is that husband and wife are equal to each other. Actually the husband is considered in the Bible in various ways as being the head of the house. We have that idea in our culture. If the man's name is Smith, we call him Mr. Smith, and we call his wife Mrs. Smith. You see the name is Smith, but his name is the one that counts. That is just an indication of the very way in which we understand it. The man is the provider and the wife is the helper. If you want to say that she is the comforter that will help, because she certainly can do it. And this would seem to indicate that, so far as God is concerned, the normal idea of blessing would be if the wife helps the husband to be what he could be, what he might be as a man.

The Scriptures themselves will say something definite to the husband, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." This has in mind that a husband is to seek the welfare of his wife, keep her needs in mind. watch over her with the protection that he can give and take care of her in any way that he possibly can. "Husbands love your wives." This does not mean love them only when they are lovable, or love them when they are lovely, although it is a great help if the woman is a nice woman, and if she is kind and if she is sweet. A Christian man will accept a certain responsibility about the woman who is his wife, and he will seek her welfare seriously and genuinely in any way he can.

The Bible has something to say to the wife, "Obey your own husbands in the Lord." Now a good many people flinch when that word obey comes out. I think all that that has in mind is work along with him, follow him, help him in anything that he is doing. And do this as unto the Lord. If husband and wife come together in a normal home, you can expect children. And the children are called a blessing from the Lord. Now we look to see what the Bible has to say about them. First of all the Bible says something to the children, "Obey your parents . . . Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise." The child should be obedient to the parents, should follow the parents' guidance. That is the normal expectation. 'On the other hand, the Bible would say that children should not be provoked, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." There are several different ways in which a man could provoke a child. I think one would be if the father demands things of the children that he will not do himself. The father insists the children act in a certain way, but he does not act that way himself. Or something like this: we will say that Monday he doesn't complain about a certain thing, Tuesday he doesn't complain about it, Wednesday he doesn't complain about it, Thursday he doesn't say anything about it. Maybe on Friday

something happens down at the office, and he just gets to feeling bad. He comes home and suddenly he complains about something that he has allowed all week long. He shows inconsistency. You don't object. You don't object. You don't object. And all of a sudden you object, and you want the child to change immediately. That is provoking to a child.

By the way, I can say to parents in passing, it is no particular help from the standpoint of being a parent to be soft with your child. But you can be fair, considerate and kind and that will always be good. Now children should be disciplined. They should be chastened for good. The Bible would always bring out that "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction" shall cure him.

In addition to that we are told that children should be brought up in the faith. Christian parents will bring the children up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and that will include such things as family worship. There will be a worship of God in the home and there will be a going to Sunday School and to church. You will have children who do not want to do it. Well, that's not surprising. Your children don't want to wash their faces either. They don't want to wear shoes. There are lots of things they don't want to do. They don't want to go to bed at night. They don't want to get up in the morning. So they don't want to go to Sunday School. That's normal. So they don't want to share in prayer. That's normal. They may not even want to say their prayers at night. Well, that's normal. Do you let them do as they please in other things? Let's be sensible about this. Act the same all the way around so far as this is concerned.

Suppose there is trouble. Suppose husband and wife do not get along and you have real trouble. What then? In the seventh chapter of I Corinthians you will find that Paul says that if you are married to a wife, seek not to be loosed. If the woman is married, seek not to be loosed. It is possible that the unbelieving may depart and in that case you let him depart. "A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases," but there is a strong indication that the Christian would not do the departing. If there is trouble of any sort, do not seek any change.

What shall we do if there is sickness in the home? What did David do when his child was sick? He prayed. He prayed to God. As it happened, the child died and then David washed his face and went about his work. People will say, "Well that's a strange thing, while the child was alive you were praying all the time. Now the child is dead; you have washed your face and changed your clothing and have gone about your work as if everything were all right." David answered, "I know he is not coming back. I know I am going to be with him." If your child is sick, you pray to God but you trust God. Remember this about your child. He is not going to live down here forever. You are not going to live down here forever. If your child is going to pass away, if your God is going to take your child, just you keep in mind that your Heavenly Father knows best.

And what about his fortune and his welfare? What about your child's experience day in and day out? Trust them to God. Commit them to God. As long as you have breath and you have loved ones and you carry them in your heart, carry them to God. Turn to God about all things and understand one thing, that your Almighty God in heaven will do more than you ask or think. If something happens to your family that seems to be hard and heavy, remember that God thinks more about them than you do. He loves them more than you do. You can be perfectly sure that even if it is real trouble, God's hand is upon you for good. You can trust the Lord. So if you will follow these things that I have suggested in your daily life and in your family life and take all these things as from the Lord, you can have the blessing of God upon your home.

How Shall I Trust God In Shame And Disgrace?

What I am going to talk about is something that will not happen every day and perhaps not happen to everybody. I could wish it would never happen. Yet some people have to endure what I would call shame and disgrace. It may be that it is our own shame. In some way we have been judged to have failed in something we ought to have done, or to be guilty of doing something we ought not to have done, and it is of such a nature that we only could use the word shame. It may be the shame of our loved ones. In our family something may have happened that makes us just feel ashamed. Is there any help from God at a time when this sort of thing takes place?

Now there is one thing we should understand right at once. There are people in the world that are not kind. Some people actually take a malicious delight in seeing others put to shame. Still society has rules that it follows by which it protects its important values. In cases when conduct threatens to hurt these values that we all hold, we have the recourse that "e may condemn and despise the person who has broken the rules of society. In other words, a person can fall into shame and disgrace because society will defend its values.

Shame and disgrace come from other men. In contrast, we can be guilty before God and we can be condemned before God. But when we use the word shame we are thinking about the way we look in the eyes of man. When we are thinking of the word disgrace we are thinking of the way in which people treat us. Actually shame and disgrace in a very real sense is a case of judging somebody as guilty and then stoning them because of it. Such a thing for example happened to Joseph. He was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife. She told the kind of a story that is easy to believe. She said that he came into her room and molested her. Now we know the truth of the story and nothing like that happened. She took advantage of the situation, but who would believe that? When the story had been told in that day and time what sort of chance did Joseph have to get the truth told? That he was falsely accused is true, but the shame was real and the disgrace was real. And he was thrown into prison, and that was real, and he was left there.

I can remember a young student that was falsely accused of seeking to molest high school children. Actually a man driving a certain car of a certain color was known to have parked his car near a high school and to have made advances to some of the children in that high school. Now it happened that the student I have in mind drove a car of the same make and of the same color, and he also parked his car at that high school. Actually he was courting one of the young high school teachers. His own schedule was such that he was able to come over there to high school and take her home. The day came that the police picked this young student up. They did not believe his story. The high school teacher came and said he told the truth, but the police listened to the neighbors and the neighbors said that this man in this car had actually done this thing. The student was ashamed. It was several years before the man who actually had been the criminal in the case was caught and he confessed to the matter. It was established that he owned a car of that make and color and that he had been at that high school. All these matters were brought out in court and they established that this young man, this student, was innocent. But can you understand that his name would never be actually fully cleared from a thing like that? It is like a smear that stays on a man.

Sometimes the wrong may actually have occurred. Something may have actually been done that was wrong. The worst that you could say for it is that it is sin, and you and r know that God forgives sin. But when there is shame and disgrace attached to it, what can one do?

I am going to suggest several things that you can do according to the Bible. You could trust God. Whether you are responsible or someone else is responsible, whether shame has come to your family or in some way you feel shame is coming upon you, humbly submit yourself to God. Don't fight against God about this thing. Trust Almighty God about this. There will be a reason why He will let this happen to

you. Confess your own weakness. If you have an absolutely clear conscience; keep it before God. If by any chance you do not have a clear conscience, then confess any involvement to God, yield to His will and take your refuge in Him. Remember that He is ready to receive you. You see, all sin is open and known to God. I suppose any sin is shameful to Him if you want to put it that way, but He forgives. Remember that the judgment of men is not the judgment of God. There will be a day coming when you will leave this world and its shame be- hind you. It will stay down here in the grave where your body is laid. Now it is true that shame may prevent certain benefits. You may not have the satisfaction of certain honor that you would very much desire. It will produce a certain humility. I realize that. But you can still put your whole trust in God.

Sometimes I think that shame and disgrace work al- most like a disfigurement. Perhaps once in a while you see somebody who throughout life has to carry a birth mark. It may be that there is a disfigurement in the face or that someone is crippled. You may have to cut off an arm or a leg. In some way there is actually a blemish that will last as long as that person lives. It may actually hinder that person's life. It may mean that he will get no comfort from men. Let me tell you something. The Lord will share your shame. You can put your trust in God. God would not treat you that way; He is touched with all the feelings of your infirmities. If you are suffering in shame and disgrace, read the Psalms. You will be surprised how many of them were written from the depths of despair and of misery.

By the way, if it's one of your own, perhaps a child of yours, that has done some shameful thing, by all means do not forsake that child. Draw near to him. How about yourself? Would you want God to turn away from you? It makes me think of the story that we read in the New Testament of the woman that was taken in adultery. Certainly that was a shameful thing. And you remember how they brought her before the Lord Jesus Christ and asked Him whether or not she should be stoned. Now the casting of stones would be just like putting her to shame. You remember what the Lord Jesus said? "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And you will remember that no one did. And then He said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

God would not forsake you. How will God deal with you? Well you deal with the other person like that and trust in God.

How Shall I Trust God In Criticism And Ridicule?

If you ever do anything worthwhile, somebody is going to criticize you. If you ever have anything that is worth anything, somebody is going to envy you. It is too bad it's that way. It would seem to us that everybody would be happy to have something worthwhile. Why can't people just be glad? You will have to look into human nature to see the answer to that. Is there any help from God about that?

Some of us will almost be inclined to think that if God were going to take care of us He ought to protect us from that kind of thing. I am sure that some people would have the feeling that if you do what is right and good that God would surely protect you. Well now there is a sense in which God will take care of you, and there is a last chance and a final sense in which He will certainly watch over you forever and ever. But, so far as this world is concerned, we will have to say that "the servant is not greater than his master." Our Lord Jesus Christ was perfect, and they criticized Him. They ridiculed, opposed and envied Him. They are going to do it to you and to me.

The first two people born into this world of human parents were Cain and Abel. And right there with the first two brothers Cain killed Abel because he had envy in his heart. Today we have laws that prevent the killing part. The result is that we are protected from physical violence, but there is no law that I know of that can stop people from criticizing us. Take for instance the case of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was one of the children of Jacob, and Jacob loved him. He gave him a coat of many colors. Joseph was in a sense preferred above his brethren. That will happen over and over again. It may happen to you. All in the world that is necessary is that you be what you should be, that you do what you should do; and just as surely there will be people who will criticize you.

Now take the case of Moses. He was a great leader for the people of Israel, and through him Israel was blessed in many, many ways. But there came a day when his sister, Miriam, envied him and criticized him. The result was that Miriam herself was stricken with leprosy and the progress of the whole nation was slowed down while Miriam was under this judgment of God. Also there was Korah and his sons who broke out into open rebellion against Moses, because they claimed Moses took too much authority. And then there was the occasion when they came to Kadesh Barnea and all the people would not go forward. They turned on Moses and accused him of having brought them out there just because he wanted to kill them. In spite of every good thing Moses had done for them, in spite of all the burden that he had borne for them, they turned on him and would have stoned him to death.

Take the case of David. David as a young man came to Saul at a time when the army of Israel was encamped against the Philistines. The great giant of the Philistines, Goliath, would come out and challenge the Israelite army asking if anyone man would come out and fight with him. They would settle the whole issue right then and there. David came along and heard that and immediately said, "Why doesn't someone go out and fight him?" The result was that he was brought before Saul, and Saul encouraged him and authorized him to go out and fight against Goliath. You remember how it turned out. David killed Goliath, and then he became very popular. The people made up songs about him, and in these songs they said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Of course that gave David a very high degree of popularity. And we read that Saul eyed David from that day onward. He was jealous of him and tried to kill him again and again.

In the book of Esther, do you remember Esther's uncle Mordecai who was a Jew? There was a counselor of the king by the name of Haman, and this man Haman hated Mordecai. Why? Because Mordecai was wise, and Haman feared he was wiser than he and that maybe Mordecai would get his job. So Haman actually tried to get Mordecai killed. The way, he thought, was to engineer it so that all the Jews would be killed, and Mordecai would then be killed. Mordecai found out about it and persuaded

Esther to go into the presence of the king and tell him the whole story. So it worked out that the Jews were not killed. Haman actually was killed, but Mordecai had all that trouble. It was all brought upon him by this man who just was jealous of him. What could he do? Put his trust in God.

Abel put his trust in God; Cain killed him but Abel, "being dead yet speaketh." Joseph put his trust in God. His brethren sold him. But when the time came, Joseph did good. When the brothers asked him to go easy on them, he told them they had meant it for evil when they sold him, but God meant it for good. Moses, a meek man, just put his trust in God; David put his total confidence in God at all times. This man Mordecai did the same. You can be absolutely sure, whatever is your situation, that Almighty God knows about it and that He can take care of it in His own way.

There is a New Testament person that brings all of this to our minds. You will remember the case of Mary. On two different occasions Mary was criticized. One of the times she was criticized by her sister, Martha. Martha complained that Mary left her to do all the housework. She came to the Lord Jesus claiming that Mary was neglecting her work because all she was doing was just listening to Him. Jesus answered telling her that Mary had chosen rightly, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." The Lord defended her, but Mary was criticized. You will also remember that when she was anointing Him she was criticized then. There were people who said, "Why did she want to do that? Why did she want to waste all that ointment? She could have sold that and given the money to the poor." Her conduct was accused of being in bad judgment because the person who was criticizing her was actually envious of her and wanted her place.

We are reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ who "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." "When he was reviled, reviled not again." You and I should try and prepare ourselves so that we will not be surprised. If we find that people are opposed to us or criticizing us when we have done something that is good, depend upon it that they "that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." What can a person do? Trust God. Absolutely put your trust in God. He knows about it, and the trouble you have is not a sign that God has forsaken you. You will find that God will be with you in the day of trouble and will keep you.

How Shall I Trust God In Sickness And Death

Some years ago while I was pastor in Dallas, Texas, I received a phone call from a friend of mine to go to the hospital and to visit a certain couple. The man was very sick and the wife was a stranger in the city. So I came on up to meet the woman. She immediately rushed to me with great eagerness, thanking me for coming and urging me to come in now and to pray for her husband. I don't remember the words that I said, but I know that I prayed as it would be in my heart to pray for a stranger who seemed to be dying. When we came out from his room, this wife turned to me almost in a fury. She practically flew at me and shouted, "But you didn't pray that he would get well." Well, as a matter of fact when I thought back over it I figured she was right. I probably did not pray that he would get well. I was taken back by her manner and I said, "Well, perhaps I didn't. Did you want me to pray that he should live?" I don't remember the exact words, but she gave me to understand that that was what she called me over for. "I thought that if you would come and pray for him that you would pray that he should live."

This raises a question to my mind that I want to discuss with you. Do you think that when we go to pray for anybody we should pray that he should get well? James 5:14-15 says, "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Now does that say that if the elders will gather round this man and pray for him that he will get well? Does raising him up mean that He will raise him up in this world to live longer here? Or does this mean that the Lord shall raise him up in spirit and make him able to endure the pangs of death as they come upon him as he is taken into the Lord's presence?

When it comes to praying for sick people, you can sympathize with the friends and relatives who naturally want their loved one to continue to live. But does it follow that we should ask God to make all people well? Is this how I am to understand sickness and death? Am I to think that when there is sickness that this is a case of God having forgotten? Does it mean that God has His back turned? And when there is a case of death does this mean that God has failed? Now the moment I say it I think you would at once agree with me, "Oh no, that's not what we mean." Well if that is not what we mean, then what do we mean? And what should we do when there is a case of sickness. even sickness unto death? I am going to suggest to you that it would be important to know what the will of God is. Sometimes it will be the will of God that this person would get well. But sometimes it may be the will of God that the time has come for this person to go with Him. Sometimes this sickness is for a purpose.

Do you remember Hezekiah ? Isaiah went to him when he was sick and told him that he was going to die. Isaiah told Hezekiah to set his affairs in order because God was going to take his soul. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept. He did not want to die. And because he was a believing man and had dealings with God, God hearkened unto him. God gave him fifteen years. During that fifteen years the life of Hezekiah was blemished with vanity and pride. He sinned in a way that he had never sinned before, and certain dire consequences followed in his life. I don't think this necessarily means that God punished. I would think that I should learn from this that it would have been better to have had God's way. It does not follow that it would be better if a person lived longer in this world. It is better to live as long in this world as it is God's plan that a person live.

Then what shall we do with reference to those who are sick? Does it mean we should not pray for them? Certainly we shall pray for them. But before we pray that they get well, let us say, "if it be Thy will." And let us have very clearly in mind that if it is the will of God to take this person, it is far better that they go to be with God than that they be alive in this world without God. Let us yield ourselves into the will of God about a matter like this.

In our own family we had a baby boy that was taken from us when he was just seventeen months old. The sickness that took him struck him very suddenly and unexpectedly. He had been well and strong in a remarkable way from the time he came home from the hospital when he was about five days old until this time. As far as we could see, he was perfectly healthy and well. Suddenly it seemed to us that he wasn't looking so well. We took him to the doctor to see if the doctor would prescribe something for him and found to our great shock and amazement that the child was stricken with leukemia and would live only several days. On the very first night when we knew that he had leukemia and in the opinion of the doctors would probably not live, I remember going to the Lord in prayer, seeking the mind of the Lord to know whether this child should live. It came very clearly to me that if I would insist on the child living, it would be as if I were to take responsibility for that child's life. Now I have great faith in the providence of God. I really believe that God does well. But do you know that I could not bring myself to ask God to spare this child because I said so. I wanted God's will to be done, and we were given peace, as much as one can have when your heart is broken. We were given, peace about the going of this child because we felt that the child was in the hands of God.

When I was first starting out in the ministry of the Word, I was an acting pastor in a church in Winnipeg, Canada. A woman of about forty-two was suddenly stricken with an infection in her blood stream. She died in three days from the time she first went to see her doctor. On the first day that she knew that she was going to die, she sent for me. It was the first time I had ever gone to talk to anybody who was on the verge of death. I remember with what fear and trembling I went into her bedroom to talk to her for fear she would ask me something I would not understand. I found her very quiet, very peaceful and quite cheerful about things, although she was leaving her husband and two little girls, eleven and thirteen years of age. While we were in conversation it seemed to me that she should be crying, or she should somehow be wishing she did not have to go, or in some way being upset emotionally. But she was not. I asked her if she didn't have something she wanted to ask me. Presently she turned to me and she said, "Do you mean, am I afraid to die?" And I said, "Yes, don't you have some feeling about it?" And then she said to me, very quietly and with joy, "You taught me to say, 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,'" and she went through the 23rd Psalm. I learned something then that I have cherished ever since – when people have faith, when they believe in God, the matter of passing out of this world and going into His presence is not such a dreadful thing. I remember another one of my friends that I saw just a day or two before she died. She made this comment to me: "There are lots worse things than dying."

No, so far as you and I are concerned when it comes to sickness and death, let us trust God. What our friends who do belong to Christ need is strength – strength of spirit to endure the physical weakness that comes with the passing away of one's strength and even of one's life. You can be quite sure that the living Lord Jesus Christ is waiting for them with open arms. Don't ever be too sorry about the person who is going to be with the Lord. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."

How Shall I Trust God In Accident Or Loss?

Some years ago I experienced the first automobile accident that I was ever in. I had driven for many years in which I had never so much as bumped anybody's fender. I felt in my heart that I had been blessed of God with good fortune and also that I had been a careful driver. Then there came one morning when my wife and I were on a trip through the mountains. Coming down a mountain side when it had been raining and the pavement was slick and wet, I saw a car making the turn into the road below us and coming up to meet us. I did not like the fact that I was going about twenty miles an hour and I wished I was going even slower. I stepped on the brakes. It turned out that at that particular time I was driving a car that had a mechanical feature that once in a while the brakes would lock. On this occasion one of the front wheels froze. The car began to skid right over across the highway, head on into the car that I was meeting. I was terrified to see something happen that I had often dreaded might occur when someone else might skid into me. We had a terrific collision, and people in the car were hurt considerably. My wife suffered a severe gash in her forehead, and in the other car the man's wife suffered a severe gash in her scalp. It was altogether a very unhappy experience. Our cars were practically wrecked. We were fortunate that we weren't hurt worse than that, but it was my first experience in an automobile accident. In this particular case I was utterly helpless, although actually so far as the situation went, I was at fault.

That morning we had done as we ordinarily do when we are on a trip. In our morning devotion and prayer, we had definitely committed ourselves to the Lord. We had asked Him again, as we do each time, that He would watch over us and that He would guide us and that our travels that day would be under His personal control. Now in a situation like that, when I was not going fast, and was not driving carelessly (as a matter of fact if I had not put my foot on the brakes, I probably would have gotten by this other car all right), this happened. How shall I understand such an accident in the will of God? Am I to think that God did not hear us when we prayed?

Some years ago we had in this country what we called the *Depression*, with the result that a great many good people lost their jobs. And folks who had been living for years in a comfortable fashion suddenly found themselves without money enough for ordinary food. People really did not have money to buy the food to eat. I was living in Dallas, Texas, at the time and I remember a man coming to our home selling silk hose. That doesn't seem so strange, except that this man trying to sell my wife a pair of silk hose was a man who had been a bank manager. He had owned a portion of a bank and had been the manager for over ten or fifteen years. Now he was down to the place where he was out doing this because he had a wife and child and they simply did not have any food in the house. This was a good man. I mean he was a Christian man. Because he was an honest man, he had put everything he owned in trying to save his bank from failure so that the people who had deposited money in it would not lose every penny of their money. The bank went broke, and he lost everything he had right down to even the money with which to buy food. What should we say for a man like that? Does this mean that God has forgotten him? When there is loss of that kind shall we say that God was unable to help him?

I once had an unusual experience. A woman came to me to ask for advice. She dearly loved her husband, but her husband was a man who had rather impractical ideas in business. She had inherited some money. Her husband was in a certain line of business and every now and again he would get the idea he wanted to go on his own. It would involve investing money, buying machinery and doing the things necessary to set up a business of his own. Whenever he made his plans they always looked good. When she came to me he had just tried for the third time to go into business on his own and had just failed for the third time. She came to ask me what she ought to do. Should she now in her own way clamp down and give him to understand that she would never again finance him in anything or should she go on and lose

more money? We talked about it for some extent. These were good people, members of the church. The man was an officer in the church; the woman was very active in the church, and I really believed them to be sincere Christian people. How was the woman to understand the will of God in these things? Was God blessing them? Was God watching over them and taking care of them when they were suffering loss of this kind?

We estimated at her and his age that she had about enough money to pay him out of two more failures and that when they were both ready to leave this world she probably would not have any money left for the rest of the family. I asked her, "Do you mind putting up the money for him?" She said, "No I really don't care. I'm just wondering what is wise." So we tried to work that out the best that we could. But with these repeated failures did that mean that God was not being favorable, that He was not watching over them? How shall we understand God and His blessing in time of accidents or in a time of loss?

I recall another incident. I was in the home of a mother who had one son and he had gone off to war. He had served in the Air Corps in the Pacific Theatre during combat and had been unhurt. After having come out of the army for a length of time, he had reenlisted and had gone over during the time of the occupation of Europe. Our forces were flying over the blockades of Berlin, and he had flown all the necessary missions to have completed his whole time of service. He was waiting over there for a trip home. He had three days to wait until he would have passage on the plane. On one of those days he went out with a friend just to put in the time. He wasn't even flying the plane. He just went along as a companion to another man and the plane crashed and the boy was killed. He was the only son. The father and mother had just doted on him and were looking forward to the time when he would come home to be with them. Should we say to this mother that God's hand was not in this, that God somehow had neglected the boy?

One time a pastor had heard me say that God is in control of all things and that God is to be trusted at all times. He came to me rather sternly, "Do you mean to tell me that God has His hand in everything that happens?" And I quietly said to him, "Yes, I really believe that." He said, "Right now I am going to try and help a mother. She just had word from the War Department that her son was killed in combat in Europe. You mean to tell me that I can go and tell her that God had a hand in that?" I remember how I turned on him almost with fury. I said, "Do you mean to tell me that you are going to go and tell her anything else than that? Are you going to tell that woman that our Father in heaven is a well meaning person that does not have any power; that He just means all right but He can't do what He wants to do? Far better for you to tell her that His hand was in it for reasons good and sufficient to Him."

We don't understand everything about this world. The ways of God are past finding out. But God is to be trusted in all accidents, in all loss. Put your trust in the Lord. Listen. When you are living in this world you are running the chances of an accident. Just living in this world you are liable to get hurt. You're going to die sooner or later. Don't be afraid about that. Put your trust in God. God made the world. God made you, and God will take care of you.