

***ARE WE LOOKING FOR THE KIND OF GUIDANCE
DISPLAYED BY A RADIO CONTROLLED CAR?***

As we approach the subject of guidance, we need to bear in mind that guidance is not an end in itself. For the Christian, the perfectly guided life, is that in which we are least aware of the guidance, and most aware of the GUIDE. Read Ps 32 and you will see that this Guidance which God has promised, is God involving Himself in the lives of His people in as close fellowship as they will permit. It is for those who by His grace know the blessedness of sins forgiven, and who remain open and honest with God. At times it involves His heavy hand of chastening upon His children, until it brings them to repentance, forgiveness, cleansing and restoration to the joy of fellowship with Him.

To know that God has a plan for our lives, and will guide us, is good. Better still is a heart's desire to know Him and His will, and to set out to do it. But there remains a desperate need to UNDERSTAND how God has chosen to make His will known to us, so that walking with Him becomes a daily experience. Lack of that understanding is wrecking lives, not only with the casual decisions of young converts, but also with decisions made by professed spiritual leaders with a high public profile, who have agonised for manifest Holy Spirit guidance. Their basic error is that of Naaman, in 2 Ki 5:11-12. They have approached the whole matter from the point of view of WHAT THEY THINK IT OUGHT TO BE, what THEY WANT it to be, both as to method, and purpose, and IGNORED what Scripture reveals as being God's way of guiding.

purpose of education is to so train children that they will do what is obviously right, and good without hesitation, and not waste time and intellectual or emotional energy fretting over making decisions to do what they know they ought to do"

- The PLAIN WORDS OF SCRIPTURE give specific directions for many situations. It is our business to set ourselves to learn what Scripture says. If not aware of a relevant Scripture we should ask the help of those who know God's word better than we do. When God has spoken, it is insolent for a child of God to argue, or ask Him for guidance. He has already given His verdict. Yet I know of a child of God who had once lived enthusiastically and sacrificially for Him, and claimed spectacular miraculous answers to prayer, leaving her Christian husband, to live with another woman's husband, excusing her action by saying that she had asked God to tell her if it would be wrong AND HE HAD NOT DONE SO!

Sadly, it may take years before God's KINDNESS in such commands as "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" or "Thou shalt not commit adultery," becomes obvious to all. But, His loving kindness IS THERE all the time. It is for us to trust His love, and wisdom in making His laws, and trust His power to enable us to do His will. We should not need bitter experiences to teach us that.

- Many features of modern life are not mentioned in the Bible, but from what is written there we can grasp SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES that will enable us to know and do the will of God eg. In 1953 we encouraged a Brother, Elias Kerr, to take the Gospel to an isolated Maori settlement. Before long the R.C. Priest also began to visit there just ahead of him to warn the people not to listen to him. One day as Elias drove out there he found the Priest's car stuck in the ditch. Instead of rejoicing that the Lord had handicapped his rival, he acted on Ex 23:5 "Help up the ass of him that hateth thee" With his help, the car was soon back on the road. The Priest got there first. It so happened (and God doesn't guarantee it will) that he received a great welcome from everyone that day, and the priest no longer hindered his visits.

Him does anything exist, Col 1:15-17. In the next verses Paul goes on to make clear, this is relevant to each individual believer, his guilty past, God's gracious intervention in it, and his present responsibility to live to the glory of God in every situation, moment by moment.

- God's children are always totally under God's care - nothing in Heaven, earth, or hell can, even momentarily, SEPARATE us from His love, Rom 8:31-39. As we learn from Job, God sets the limits on our painful testing, and overrules it all for our ultimate good. And there is no possibility that WE can sneak anything past Him either - our bodies being the temples of God the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor 6:19.

We shall ALL reap the harvest of ALL we sow, Gal 6:7-10. The sowing process involves our every word or action, and culminates with our being totally manifested/ displayed at the judgment seat of Christ. This is a strong incentive for us to want to know the will of God, and to do every moment what pleases Him, 2 Cor 5:7-10. And this is done, as it says there, only "BY FAITH."

- To "Live by Faith," means that we accept "THE FAITH" delivered once and for all to the saints, Jude 3, as God's full and final word for us in all situations. Secondly we trust ourselves to the God who is revealed in Scripture, and to His will, aiming at living daily in the love of our Lord and in obedient fellowship with Him, John 15:10. Rom 14:23 makes it clear that anything less than doing what we believe God wants us to do is sin.

It's easy to say "Of course, that's taken for granted, but my problem is..." Sorry NO! It must not be taken for granted. Guidance isn't a magic pill for moments of conscious sickness or need. It is a matter of SPIRITUAL HEALTH enjoyed, as health always is, largely unconsciously, and maintained by a healthy lifestyle. To experience God's guidance without the painful "bit and bridle" of Ps 32 we need to live a God-oriented life. Such a life is maintained by regular and adequate time spent with the Lord, in His Word, and in prayer.

• God has designed and produced each one of us, over-ruling our heredity, environment, etc and we live in His inescapable presence, Ps 139:1-18. He has shaped and equipped each of us for a specific role in His eternal purposes - Jer 1:4-5, 1 Cor 12:18, etc. He works in each Believer to enable us to WANT to please Him, and enable us to DO His will. Realising this should mean that we seek to please Him with something of the joyful awe "Fear and trembling" of a four year old girl privileged to carry Mother's best cup filled with tea to an honoured guest, Phil 2:12-13. It is salutary to see in the verses that follow what marks out those who are in fact doing His will.

This should produce confident peace as we concentrate on keeping our eyes on the Lord, as we tackle the normal routines of each day, expecting further directions to come from Him, without fretting about them. But if in human unbelief and folly we begin to demand that we FEEL His working in us to WILL, and FEEL Him working in and through us, and FEEL certain that we KNOW what we should do next, the very knowledge of His gracious, wonderful involvement in our lives will produce panic, rather than peace.

The moment we take our eyes off the Lord, and direct them at ourselves, our feelings, our consciousness of guidance, our importance in the matter, we begin to fret - "God's glory and MY FULFILMENT are involved. It's vital that I should KNOW at every moment precisely what God's will is, and DO it. But, it's so bewildering. If only I KNEW WHAT GOD'S WILL WAS, I'd do it. I must NOT DO ANY THING until I'm sure!"

Often we are tempted to say:

IF ONLY I COULD FIND HIS WILL,
MY TROUBLES WOULD BE OVER!

That's NONSENSE. It is not God's will that we should be always sure of His detailed will. His concern is that we be WILLING to do His will, and commit ourselves to doing what we already know to do Phil 3:16

2 Cor 3:18 ensures that we stumbling infants learn to WALK, step by step, by FAITH, 2 Cor 5:7.

And it simply isn't true that if only we knew the will of God we'd have no problems -that's blasphemous nonsense, suggesting that God was failing us. He says that if we are WILLING TO DO HIS WILL, we shall know what to believe, John 7:17. And if our hearts are willing, whatever we offer to Him is acceptable and accepted, 2 Cor 8:12

Does that make it seem all the more bewildering? It needn't be.

WE ARE NOT FACED WITH A TRACKLESS WILDERNESS OF INFINITE CHOICES

• IT'S NOT A WILDERNESS- God made it, and He made us for it, perfectly equipping us to discover and do His will, and become what He wants us to be. (Mind you that's not to say it is easy or painless. The "FALL" was one step off the cliff edge that took us a long way down. The provision of the path back cost God the Son His being made sin for us, so that we could be made righteous in Him. Learning to experience this righteousness in fellowship with Him, is step by step back up a long and painful climb - lightened by the Lord's patient presence and help. If life seems a maze to you, cheer up! The Lord designed that maze for the specific purpose of giving you the chance to learn to share life with Him, and become like Him, as you make a succession of choices to do so.

• IT'S NOT TRACKLESS - THERE IS A MAP- God's Word. But make sure you hold it right way up - God and His will at the top, where North stands on earth's maps. If you put SELF at the top and try to use the map to work out from it how to get what YOU want, you should be disappointed! It gives us the record of the paths trodden by the Saints of God, and above all by The Lord Himself.

• God's Universe is a MORAL and rational one. We live in a world of predictable Cause & Effect, Sowing & Reaping - Incidentally, it was because the Christianised Western World believed this that they alone in the history of mankind were able to make concerted scientific progress. If you want a crop of carrots, you sow carrot seed.

If you want quarrelsome, unprincipled children, who will despise their parents, and adults in general, all you need to do as parents is to keep quarrelling in front of them, speak critically of each other, and connive at their deceiving of the other parent. Since the "Fall" the results can be guaranteed when we set a BAD example, as human nature is wilfully blind to the long term disaster caused by the pleasure of giving way right now to greed, lust, anger, spite, cowardice, or pride. This world is full of ESAU S.

GUIDANCE QUESTION: What will be the reasonable, likely consequence of this action? Will it be what GOD WANTS? Or at a lower level - Will I be happy with the harvest? (Such "Guidance Questions" will be placed at the end of each section to help us ask the question which will focus our thoughts and so help us see His will in the matter dealt with.)

• We have been given a ROLE to play in this world. that role was set out right at the beginning, Gen 1:26

(a) to RULE, have dominion, take responsibility for what is going on around about us in the whole of creation. So when driving through the Lewis Pass we find a boulder on the road, we don't have to pray "Lord shall I run into it, or drive round it?" We KNOW to drive round it, watching for oncoming traffic. AND we know to park safely and roll it out of the way of others. WE dare not ignore a fallen electric power line, smoke seeping out under the eaves of a neighbour's house, a suffering animal, a screaming child, or a shoplifting one, or a bully. We know that we are responsible to do something about it. We ARE our brother's keeper, and answerable to God for what happens to the animals, plants, fish, etc.

The same is true in any occupation, and GOD EXPECTS IT OF US. The Lord Himself showed the way, as He "Went about DOING GOOD," Acts 10:38 So "Let us do good to ALL men, and especially to the household of faith," Gal 6:10

GUIDANCE QUESTION: In what way does God want me to use my strength and intelligence to fulfil my role in this situation?

(c) Finally, the general statement that in God's sight it is not good for us to live alone, Gen 2:18 needs to be noted as we face questions about our life in relation to others. And, specifically we don't need to ask whether we should hold our marriages lightly, or whether we should look to the family and friends we grew up with for support against our spouse. "LEAVE & CLEAVE," 2:24 God says bluntly. If we fail to do this, we will face His judgment on our rebellion against HIS will, as well as be the author of much disaster and distress in life here.

The "Fall" cancels none of our obligations to our Creator and His creation - it sharpens them. The NEEDS became desperate. The blessing of Redemption in Christ sharpens them, still more, providing as it does the new nature, grace and strength to meet the needs.

Gen 3:16-19 gives us men the alternatives -WORK, OR STARVE! Unlike the fish and creeping things that have none to RULE/ TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for them, Hab 1:14, God says, THAT, is the husband/father's role among men. He is to take loving initiative, thought, and action for those under his care, Eph 5:22-33 In fact "If any man PROVIDE NOT FOR HIS OWN, he is worse than an infidel, he has denied the faith," 1 Tim 5:8

Us men do not have to ask God for guidance as to whether we should meet the physical, spiritual, or social needs of our family. Our Lord condemned those who pretended that GIVING TO GOD, excused them from their family obligation, Mk 7:9-13 Besides, HUSBAND, Isa 54:4-10 and FATHER Mt 6:26-33 Eph 3:14-15, etc, are names belonging to God. Our behaviour in those roles commends those aspects of God, to our family, or not.

Titus 2:3-5 requires older women to offer, and younger women to accept, help in mastering the skills of living in loving friendship- Philo with husband and children.

GUIDANCE QUESTION: Which option will isolate me from others? Which best fulfil my God-given role in relation to those who are "My own?" Will this action COMMEND God to those for whom I am His representative?

LIFE IS NOT TRAC KLE SS- THERE IS A MAP

(And some rather detailed instructions go with it.)

- SCRIPTURE. We have along record of God's dealings with men, and the consequences. This record has been compiled by our all-wise God for the specific purpose of providing us with teaching examples, 1 Cor 10:1-13. We have no excuse for repeating their mistakes, or for failing to imitate their right choices, for the consequences are on record. This is part of the benefit we reap as those "On whom the fulfilment of the ages has come."

- THE LIFE OF CHRIST. Better than laws, types, examples, and general principles are the Gospels. They are the record of GOD'S WILL FOR MANKIND WALKING THIS EARTH, for more than 30 years, eating and drinking, working and resting, rejoicing and sorrowing, popular and rejected, praised and despised, speaking and being silent, sharing life with a cross section of humanity. ALL in perfect unbroken fellowship with the Father in Heaven as the expressible image of His person. God's will for us in our daily living IS A PERSON - how heart warming! And He invites us to deny self, take up our cross daily, and to follow HIM, Matt 16:23-26. And, in Christ, He provides all we need for this, and it is Christ Himself who is with us as we respond Matt 28:18-20.

How sad it is that we somehow seem to hanker after the kind of guidance provided for radio-controlled toy cars, and sigh "If only my machinery was set

GUIDANCE QUESTION: If I choose this, or that, what Biblical character will I be following? Above all will it conform to the pattern of life that my Lord displayed? (eg 1Pet 2:21-24)

MIRACLES AND THEIR PLACE IN RELATION TO THE MAP

There is a MAP, BUT ARE YOU AND I USING IT? That demands spiritual, rational, and moral effort. It's easy to sit back and say, for instance, "If only God would GUIDE ME. I want a miracle LORD! THEN, all my problems would be over."

Well? God DOES work miracles - He struck the chains off Peter in prison, opened the doors, put the guards to sleep - But Peter had to put his own shoes on, stand up, put his coat on, walk out, and then was left to make up his mind where to go Acts 12

God IS in the miracle business, but is that what you need right now? God has promised "WISDOM" if we know we need it, and ask. The toll free "HOT LINE" is open, always. BUT, just as manufacturers who guarantee their product, and offer follow-up guidance as to its assembly and use, expect us to at least READ the instructions that come with it, and TRY to follow them, BEFORE asking for help -- so, in John 15, answers to prayer are assured to those who "Abide in Christ," whose "Word abides in them." The least we can do is to "In our hearts set apart Christ as LORD," 1 Pet 3:15, and set our hearts and minds to learn His will by learning what God's Word says. And with the Holy Spirit's help learn to apply it - not waiting until an emergency need arises, either. Having a book or swimming lessons in your pocket when the boat sinks, isn't much use. Waiting until your life is in a serious mess is even more tragic.

It IS NATURAL for us to want spectacular guidance, unmistakable assurance of His will - and I might add it would be QUOTABLE AND CONVINCING TO OTHERS, and competitive with theirs. How easily it could feed assertive and competitive PRIDE. While my lips murmured piously of the Lord's grace to me, my heart and my manner could have been shouting "SEE I'M RIGHT,

God's miraculous intervention solves all problems. Let's have a "Marriage and Family Life Enrichment Seminar," from Genesis. (Marriage and family life ARE intended to be rich and joyful, 1 Tim 6:17; 4:1-5.)

GOD has granted a MIRACLE baby - Isaac - to geriatrics. He is brought up by Abraham the Friend of God, to be fully aware of God's wonderful promises, and his place in the scheme of Salvation. As a teenager, God has dramatically taught Isaac the need to yield his life to Him, and to receive it back in resurrection from the dead, when a substitute dies for him. God has provided Isaac with a wife, by a tear answer to prayer for guidance. And to remind them of His place in their lives, and the importance of their children, only after a long wait, God miraculously provides them with sons. Miraculously God answers Rebekah's request for information, and tells them which son is to inherit the covenant promise and blessing.

With all that direct intervention by God, how could anything possibly go wrong? The moment comes when ISAAC is to exercise his great spiritual role and to publicly associate himself with the passing on of the Covenant Promise and Blessing of God, and to do all he can to help his successor take up that role worthily before God. It shouldn't have been hard to get it right - only two sons to choose between, and Rebekah could not have failed to mention that God had chosen HER favourite, Jacob.

How does Isaac prepare for this supreme moment? Prayer? Sacrifice? Meditation on God's Grace and promises? Well no, what he FEELS he needs to do it properly is a meal of stewed venison! He enjoys stewed venison, and the son who gets stewed venison for him is the one who deserves the BLESSING! He needed another meal of it first. (Maybe the value Esau placed on a meal of lentil soup/his birthright isn't surprising, Gen 25:29-34)

What does REBEKAH do? Trust God, and her husband, and remind him what God has said on the subject? No, she wasn't as good at deer stalking as Esau, but she was an expert cook, and could cook goat meat so that Isaac couldn't tell it from venison stew. It wasn't worth the bother usually, as Isaac speaks of venison stew as special. But she'd do it to deceive her husband, and

effects.

And Rebekah, poor woman, because she got what she wanted by her own efforts, faced with the reward of having one son murdered and the other a murderer, had to do on herself to never see again in this life her favourite son. If only Rebekah had been prepared to cook her husband's favourite meal more often, and talk over God's purposes for their sons. If only Isaac had been willing to listen to his wife. (Maybe in modern homes they are still closely connected!) If only they had learned not to play favourites with their sons.

If only EVERY CHRISTIAN PARENT WOULD READ THE STORY AND LEARN FROM IT THAT EVEN A SUCCESSION OF GOD'S MIRACULOUS INTERVENTIONS IN A FAMILY can do little for those who won't learn to want and seek His will.

GUIDANCE QUESTIONS. As I ask God for help to know His will for my family, am I USING the help He has already provided in the person of my spouse? Parents? Children? Will I be happy if they follow my priorities in the choice I'm making. As I look to God to lay His hand upon my family, am I wriggling out from under the responsibilities He has made plain to me?

BEWARE OF BEING MANOEUVERED INTO A CHECKMATE

It is so easy to ignore the need of prayer for guidance and obedience to what we know, until it is too late. Little decisions made lightly may allow one to drift into a position where even the Grace of God Almighty can righteously save only a few shreds for Glory, 1 Cor 3:12-15

One of the most distressing jokes I know is about the motoring tourist lost in the wilds of rural Ireland asking a local how to get to Dublin. It runs "Sure now, and you'll be driving straight ahead to the cross roads, turning right and going over the hill till ye get to the stream. Cross it and drive on down the valley - Do you understand? NO? Well maybe ye'd better turn right back and when you come to the public house, turn left .." Finally after trying one long set of

from which it will be easier for me to see the further will of God? Is my choice a logical step ahead on the Heavenward road?

WE DO NOT FACE AN INFINITE NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVES

Always there are two, and two only - the same two - although we may call them by a variety of names: "What I FEEL like doing/ what I suspect I OUGHT to do" "The SENSIBLE alternative/ the SACRIFICIAL one." "What EVERYBODY DOES/ the unreasonable demands of Scripture." "What makes sense to us youngfolks/ what the ELDERS/PARENTS/PREACHERS expect." OR "What us oldies FEEL COMFORTABLE with/ what these youngstirrers demand!" "What will preserve self - self image, reputation, popularity, importance/ what will crucify self.

Behind every convenient smoke-screen, it boils down simply to ME, or CHRIST, God or the Devil, Sowing to the FLESH, or the SPIRIT Gal 5:13-26 6:7-10

Scripture is plain and blunt: keep life for self= lose it forever. Yield life to Christ= have it and Him for ever. Gain the world= lose one's soul, Mk 8:34-38 Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and have all else desirable added, Mt 6:33 Delight self in the Lord, and be GIVEN the desires of our heart, Ps 37:4, in God's good time and way.

GUIDANCE QUESTION: Which of the TWO alternatives lie at the back of the choice I am making? Do I WANT to choose God's will in every specific decision, or only in general? If the latter, it will not be possible to do so, without the former.

This is simple and straightforward in Scripture, but how complicated the world, the flesh, and the devil make it seem. And NO, IT DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY GET EASIER WITH AGE & BIBLE LEARNING! We may merely get better at pious self-deception, and fraudulent evasion of the plain words of Scripture. Trusting in our God-given wisdom acquired over years of His faithfulness can seem a desirable alternative to humbling ourselves

Two examples of the abjectness of human nature which apparently seeking for guidance

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, famous U.S.A. Scientist, scholar etc. records a crisis in his life which sadly seems to have sent him safely on his way to Hell. He'd been brought up to be a vegetarian. As a youth on a fishing boat he watched hungrily as his companions feasted on fish day after day, until one day he thought "These fish eat each other so why shouldn't I eat them!" Fair enough too, but, as he wrote, "I gave thanks to Almighty God, that He had created man with the intelligence needed to be able always to find a good excuse for doing what he wants to do" To which all pious hypocrites may well say "AMEN!"

The Bible Class Youth of a village church in Germany many years ago, showed less false piety. They wanted to go to town for the annual fair. Their parents said that IF the Pastor approved of their going they could. When they asked the Pastor, he spoke of the evils associated with fairs, the dangers and temptations they would expose themselves to, the waste of time and money at best. It was no place for anyone who wanted to please God, and grow up Godly... But when he reached the stage of saying "I don't exactly FORBID you to go but.. They rushed off together shouting jubilantly "Pastor says we're to GO! Pastor says we're to GO!"

Both those stories make me uncomfortable. I hope they make YOU uncomfortable. They expose the root of our problem. DO I REALLY WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH? Do I really WANT to know God's will in the matter? He says "TODAY, if you ARE WILLING/WISH/DESIRE to hear my voice, harden not your heart," Heb 4:7 etc.

It is so easy (as Balaam found) not to take God's first quiet "NO" as final, and harden our hearts by keeping on asking for guidance. We too may get a seeming "YES" if we persist, and God may not bother to make a donkey speak to us. THAT miracle was wasted on Balaam, as was his pious prayer "Let me die the death of the righteous." As he was unwilling to LIVE the life of the righteous, he died with their enemies after rather successfully teaching them how to corrupt the people of God, Rev 21:4; Num 31:16 etc.

an Linn's's car. The minister had a young girl who isn't a Christian, but she's so sweet and attractive I'm sure she'll become one if she marries me. Give me the sign that she's Your choice for me, that when I ask her out for a date, she says 'Yes.'"

- By choosing to go to a Church where you can enjoy yourself, and the preacher's good to listen to, but leaves your life unchanged, Ezek 33:32

- Simplest of all, BY MAKING THE DECISION FAST, while you're too excited to think straight, and your conscience hasn't had time to wake up. God's still small voice hasn't a hope of being heard, when our body or our "friends" are shouting at us. Adrenalin flow, whether triggered by anger, sexual desire, or merely fear, drains the blood from our brain, into our muscles ready for instant vigorous action. FINE, if we don't need to THINK. But if we've programmed our thinking by socialising with the goddess and watching TV. entertainment that glories in God-ignoring/self-debasing sexual immorality etc. sin is almost a reflex action when faced with an instant decision.

GUIDANCE QUESTION. Do I WANT to do God's will in this matter? Questions that help us find that answer are: Have I taken TIME to look carefully at the likely outcomes, as they will seem at His Coming? Is my choice in this detail, obviously part of what I know to be His over-all will for my life?

HOW TO FIGHT TEMPTATION AND WIN

A part from the obvious one - don't FEED it - the best way to deal with sinful thought propositions is not to fight them desperately - that merely makes them more important

To keep saying I must not think about... doesn't help you to forget it

Ask too, "How would it affect my parents/ children, family, Godly friends, godless neighbours, my fellowship with God, and usefulness in His service? His reputation in the world?"

IF we really FACE a temptation in the light of God's presence and God's Word, or even with the normal intelligence with which we face a Menu when dining out, it will be cut down to size.

Above all we need to pray constantly, and simply "Lord help me to will to do your will." Amen.

YOU AND I HAVE COMPANIONS ON THE WAY

• Let Bible Heroes be your personal hero-friends. Fellowship with them will often keep us on the right road. We have the gallery of the O.T. heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11 to set us noble models -and the heroes recorded in the N.T., AND the recorded heroes of Church history, as well as those we have had fellowship with since childhood. The Bible is far more than an object lesson book for examples. Its characters can become very real Hero-friends for us to identify with.

A favourite story of mine is that of Richard Grossetete, Bishop of Lincoln, a follower of Wickliffe. As a small boy in a band of vagrants his bright face was noticed by a passing minor nobleman who took charge of him and his education. When years later the king of England, noticing him at Court, sneered saying "Doesn't it seem odd to you that someone of YOUR background should be permitted to mix with nobility and royalty?"

His cheerful response is worth noticing "As to my upbringing your Majesty, it was of the highest. Abraham the friend of God, Moses the servant of God and the Holy patriarchs were my childhood companions. I was reared in the company of that man after God's own heart, King David, of Wise Solomon, brave Daniel, and in the blessed company of Our Lord, the Lord of Glory Himself and His holy Apostles. Therefore to mix in the company of an earthly sovereign seems no great thing to me!"

When every company hopes to keep going along toward glory, the only decision we make is likely to divide us from them, divide our home, divide our assembly, the alarm bells should start ringing loud and clear.

But surely GOD COMES FIRST! His glory COMES FIRST! Obedience to HIS WORD is to be our goal! Of course, AND IT STATES PLAINLY THAT WE MUST MAKE EVERY ENDEAVOUR TO STAY IN FELLOWSHIP WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, Rom 14:1-4; 1 Cor 12:21-26 Eph 4:2-16 Phil 4:2-9, Col 3:1-17, etc. It is tragically easy to identify my ego, my ideas, my convictions, my glory, with God's.

A certain rather villainous Caribbean Dictator, General Trujillo misruled his country for many years under the motto "GOD, and TRUJILLO!" To criticise his Government was treated as blasphemy against God, as well as insubordination against himself.

The Pharisees and Chief Priests were condemned by the Lord for putting God's temple before their parents. They were more concerned to earn a reputation for self-righteousness by fussy extensions of God's Laws, than they were for His glory or the needs of His people, so they condemned Him for WORKING/healing on the Sabbath, and in the name of God, they crucified Him.

Those of us who have even a little knowledge of Church History will know how fallible the judgment of even the Godly has been.

Lord Shaftesbury was a man of God but he didn't hesitate to proclaim that General Booth was Antichrist, because his Salvation Army was "Borrowing the tricks of the Music Hall," to gain a hearing for the Gospel.

The history of our fellowships show that eagerness to adhere to "NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES" in "BROTHERLY UNITY" has been used as an excuse for division, slander, and generally unchristian attitudes and actions. If even a George Muller could write cheerfully that he had brushed aside J.N. Darby's attempt at reconciliation/re-uniting the "Brethren" with the words "I have at this moment only ten minutes time, having an important engagement before me, and as you have acted so wickedly in this matter I cannot NOW enter upon it as I have no time." how WE must beware of thinking "I MUST

are embarrassing and they've certainly been that way. It comes when dealing with a pupil who'd brought along pornographic material, acted or spoken indecently, etc. If their first response to my question "Do you think THAT was all right?" was "Yes" - and it usually was, my second question was "What's Mum's phone number? I'll get her to come down to discuss it."

It was amazing how quickly they decided that what they'd done wouldn't pass muster with Mum, and I could say "Right, if it's not good enough for her - it's not good enough for school," and they would agree. That at times we are insensitive to what the LORD would think of our actions, (which SHOULD BE our guide,) we can thank God for the help we gain from a wholesome respect for what our fellow-humans would think!

GUIDANCE QUESTIONS: Which alternative would I be happiest for my fellow-believers to know I had chosen? How will it affect the Lord's reputation?"

- Finally, our fellow-believers are a great help in guiding us as to what our gifts are, and how best we may use them.

As we read in 1 Cor 12, God has given us the gifts that HE has chosen for each of us, and He has chosen those gifts because the body of Christ NEEDS them to be exercised. So, IF we have a gift, it will meet the needs of the local congregation, and as we try to exercise what we believe to be our gifts, they are likely to be the best judges of whether what we are doing is meeting a need or not.

It is ODD, that our urge/guidance to preach and teach is often much greater than the urge/guidance other people have to LISTEN to us! Well, ODD until we remember that this is a fallen world, and Satan's idea of being the one about whom everything revolves, has a natural appeal to us all.

The may be rushed, but sitting down and evangelising the lost, or teaching and shepherding the young believer, or restoring the unhappy, unappreciative backslider is less likely to be. Is that because there is no applauding audience?

We may think that it must have been wonderful in the early church to be an inspired prophet - but they still had to take responsibility for what they said. And they were to let the listeners judge whether they should be speaking or not, and to sit down smartly if someone else was judged to be the one God had given the next message, 1 Cor 14:29-33 The HEARERS, especially the Elders, are the best judges of the NATURE of our gifts, the TRUTH of what we are saying, as compared with Scripture, the LOVE, (which alone gives it any value, 1 Cor 13:1-3) with which it is spoken, and its USEFULNESS in meeting the needs of the flock. Godly humility, understanding of God's purposes, and a desire that He, not we, should be glorified, is needed for assessing the potential value TO GOD'S ETERNAL WORK, of any contribution. The first step towards such a desirable state is for us to seek and welcome the counsel of our fellow Believers

GUIDANCE QUESTION: Am I eager to play any and every part, hidden or visible, popular or unpopular, prominent or humble, so as to contribute to the upbuilding of the body of Christ, in meeting the needs of my fellow believers. Do I acknowledge that they, especially the elders, are the best judge of the details of what God wants me to do?

(It may help some readers for me to give my own experience in this. Almost all that I have ever done in the way of service - rather varied minor service - has been initiated by the suggestions of other believers, and persisted in only by their continued encouragement. This may sound weak/cowardly, something to be ashamed of. In a sense it is. But the Lord has comforted me by assuring me that I'm doing what He told the servant who received the ONE pound he should have done, Luke 19:23.

What gift God has given me, I am "putting in the bark" handing it over to be used at the discretion of, and on the responsibility of, the elders and leaders in the church. God's grace has sustained me in this, and continues to grant some fruitfulness while some other more independent and confident companions have fallen by the way. To those eager to serve the Lord I would urge Heb 13:7, assured that if you are faithful in what others commit to your care - though it seems trivial, and of no spiritual consequence - you make it possible that the Lord Himself may specifically and directly place some of His work under your immediate responsibility, Luke 16:10-12)

don't like what preachers and elders tell me, or if it gets a bit dull, I move on somewhere where I can feel spiritually happy and at home. Surely I just need to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance - after all we 'Have an anointing, and there is no need for anyone to teach us,'" 1 John 2:20-27.

- Each of us is indeed "Born of the Spirit," John 3:6-8, and He indwells and leads us as a "Spirit of Sonship," Rom 8:14-17. Our Lord patterned that life, as one of KNOWING AND DOING THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD, Matt 4:1-10, etc and near its end called us to the same life of obedience to Him, and abiding in His love, John 15:9-12

- Any thought that this makes us independent of our fellow Believers is countered by that fact that when we were INDIVIDUALLY BORN of the Spirit we were all also BAPTISED by the Spirit into the body of Christ into a life of mutual dependence and blessing, 1 Cor 12:13, and urged to maintain and contribute to that fellowship, Eph 4:15-16; Heb 10:25

It IS blessedly true that alone in a deep dungeon, a desert island, or in the isolation of losing sight and hearing, God Himself could and would be with us to guide, comfort and strengthen. But there is no suggestion in Scripture that God the Holy Spirit will give clear, instant easy guidance for those who do not care enough to ask.. seek.. knock.. as a normal pattern of life. Nor does it teach that God will so speak to those too rebellious to "Obey them that have the rule over you," Heb 13:17, or who refuse the counsel of caring Christian friends.

In Acts 21:10-14, it was God the Holy Spirit who used such to make it clear to Paul what would happen if he went to Jerusalem. That it was, or wasn't God's choice for him to go there is not our business/ not made clear to us, but Paul's motive in choosing to go there is. AND while we do not read that God afterwards reassured Paul that his choice was right, that purpose of heart was rewarded by God's assurance that He would be with him to continue to fulfil God's will/ Paul's desire.

should not need it. Certainly it reminds us that God's work committed to human hands/human responsibility, requires from all of us a determined commitment to unity. And that God's work need not cease, but may even expand, when leaders disagree. Right through both examples runs the theme of MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, WITH AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.

As individuals we cannot expect or demand instant, independent, effortless guidance on the matters that concern us. Especially if we are selfish, careless children of God with little interest in receiving guidance about things which concern Him, and are ignoring His previous witness to us. Herod killed John Baptist, and Jesus spoke not a word to him, Luke 239.

A special message, or special messenger from God, is not what we need, either. Remember the blunt words of Abraham "If they will not heed Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if someone rose from the dead and came to them," Luke 162931.

GUIDANCE QUESTIONS: Am I giving God the Holy Spirit ample opportunity to teach me what the Bible says to me, and what He is saying to me through my fellow believers? Am I keeping myself tuned in to His voice by doing even the smallest things He brings to my notice, or am I so grieving Him in things that seem little to me, that when a crisis comes I cannot hear His voice?

Remember, as Psalm 139 teaches, GOD gives us our hereditary, our environment, past and present, our abilities, our opportunities for service, and best of all He gives us Himself in all of these. Whether we do the will of God, or not, depends on one thing alone - OUR WILLINGNESS -both at the moment of crisis/choice, and during the run upto it. As at the Olympics, to be out of step when we need to take the leap, is to be doomed to fail.

SHOULD UNCERTAINTY AS TO GOD'S WILL PARALYSE US?

from my appetite, the effects on my digestion, etc. as I go along

HUNGER plays a part - but it isn't GOD. God provides the food - but I'm prepared to go to work and earn money to buy it, and even to push a trolley around a supermarket. But money, and shopping strategy aren't God. We timetable regular meal times - but meal routines aren't God. It is my Lordship/stewardship to nourish the body God has given me, adequately and wisely so that it will be as useful as possible to me and Him - but healthy nutrition isn't my God. GOD alone is God of my eating, free to over-rule my routines. I must keep my eyes on Him, and eat thankfully and joyfully, and appreciatively - and appreciate the work my wife puts into it- IT DOES ME GOOD, AND GOD IS GLORIFIED.

THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS NOT JUST THE SAME IN MY LIFE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE. Human decisions/efforts are involved, but I am to keep my eye on the Lord, Ps 123:1-2. I must keep my ear tuned into His voice, from His Word/ by His Spirit, whether it comes direct from Bible reading, Prayer, the store of memory, a trained conscience, or through fellow believers and co-workers

It is utter folly, and dangerous for us to be turning our eyes inward, preoccupied with a frantic search of our thoughts and feelings in the hope of finding there indications of God's guidance. Our safety lies in continuing to walk with the Lord in the ways we have already learnt, Phil 3:16

We are to press on as urgently as we can, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith in which we live, Heb 12:1-3.

Incidentally, if you have ever climbed through trackless "bush" you will have found that as long as you are climbing uphill, reaching the summit is no problem. Returning downhill, the alternatives offered are a continuous bewilderment, and it is difficult to come out at any chosen goal. Spiritually, our goal IS uphill, Phil 3:14. To AIM uphill is our responsibility.

Paralysing preoccupation with being certain of God's will in the daily affairs of our lives is an insult to our God. That's SELF preoccupation, taking ourselves too seriously, forgetting that we are CHILDREN, of such a Father, that we can in all things with prayer and thanksgiving, be freed from such worrying. And by setting our minds on what is good and honorable, know the assured, joyful presence of both the peace of God, and the God of peace in the life of each day, Phil 4:4-9.

It is so easy for us to say "YES" to this, in theory, but in practice merely add frequent desperate pleas for help, to our desperate worrying, and panic attempts to push things toward the solution we see as desirable. We are tempted to try to tell God what needs to be done, and fret at His slowness in responding. We need to stop and remember that He is infinite wisdom, love, holiness, righteousness and power. That He has HIS purposes and plans for us, and that He is to us, Father, and Lord.

Prayer is not needed to inform Him, or to move His heart to do something for us. Prayer is needed for us to place ourselves, and all our concerns, hopes, and fears into His hands, to set Him free to work all His will, in accordance with His Character. And our THANKSGIVING which accompanies that prayer for guidance and enabling, amounts to our LEAVING THE MATTER WITH HIM, CONFIDENT IN HIM, AND OUR ACCEPTANCE OF HIS SOLUTION.

We may, or may not, get what we wanted, but we are in the hands of One able to do what is GOOD for us, abundantly beyond our every thought or imagination, Eph 3:20 There will be delightful surprises, and bitter disappointments. Yet in it all, we will have the privilege of standing with the God of Glory, in His purposes, His joys and sorrows - BECAUSE HE STANDS WITH US, moment by moment, right where we are, in all OUR joys and sorrows, Is 63:9. He will be the comfort, enabling, and wisdom we need, to equip us so that we can stand with Him to share that role in the lives around us, 2 Cor 1: 3-4.

guidance we WALK by faith, and walking is done a step at a time, each step, a step towards the Lord and His will, to the best of our knowledge, and starting from right where we are, where-ever that is. The past, even the best of it, fell short of the glory of God, and was not free from sin. Having handed it over to the cleansing blood of Christ, we are to forget it. And as we set out to walk in the light, in fellowship with one another, 1 John 17, we are free to do so, as each new day, God pleads with us from Hebrews 4:7, "TODAY.. hear my voice"

ONLY WHEN WE GO FORWARD IN FAITH IS GUIDANCE POSSIBLE

So, whether in confident certainty, or in timid hesitancy (those states of mind have far more to do with our natural temperament, than they have with guidance) we must KEEP MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH, expecting God to guide us. No one can steer a boat that's tied to the wharf.

If we as individuals or as fellowships insist on remaining firmly tied to where we are, and what we've always done, there is no point in pretending to ask God to guide us. We can become so afraid of change, so afraid to let go the security of traditional routines, determinedly "Holding fast" that nothing can guide us.

At the other extreme, no one can steer a drifting boat. Unless we are prepared to put an effort into living for God, an effort to do something to please Him, to move out in faith, and try to meet needs, to put His commands into practice - how can we ask God to guide us!

A WILLINGNESS TO DO GOD'S WILL MAKES DOING IT POSSIBLE

If we desire to do His will, how dare we suggest that it is impossible for us. We have His faithful assurance that God Himself in all his loving kindness, wisdom, and power is in us, working in us both a WILLINGNESS to do His glorious will, and the ABILITY TO ACTUALLY do it. With the AWE of that fact, and a TREMBLING awareness of our inadequacy and the fumbling nature

free from discontented grumbling, and self assertive arguing, pure in heart before God in its desire to please Him, and giving the goddess no excuse for blame or criticism of us. Giving them no excuse either for not believing the "Word of life," we offer them, because it is obvious to them that we are already living that life, in response to that "Word."

To live like that may seem humdrum, and unexciting - when around is the mass of humanity is revelling in the pleasures God has provided, but rejecting the light of His presence, have twisted them from the demanding simplicity and creative wholesomeness of His intention, into more sophisticated, exotic, and perverse forms, that deprave and destroy the user. And it is neither comfortable for us nor for them for us to "SHINE AS LIGHTS" among such fleshly desirable darkness. But that light of ours comes from the eternal glory, reflects it, and leads on to the eternal glory, for us, and for all who will respond.

We should not be over-awed by the opposition of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, because God assures us in Romans 8 that the ultimate triumph of Christ-likeness is assured to those He foreknew, called, and in response now Love Him, AND ALREADY ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS THAT GOOD for us, Rom 8:28-30 as we work together with God with that in view.

The time of humiliation and rejection is limited for us, as it was for our Lord. He is with us in it now, and we will be with Him forever in Glory. We can do no better than to echo the words of Jude 24 - God's last word to us before the Revelation - "Now to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only God, our Saviour, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, both now, and forever, AMEN!"

BUT WHAT ABOUT SPECIFIC DIRECT GUIDANCE

Don't I believe in God giving specific guidance? God breaking into lives in unexpected ways, directly revealing His will? Giving spiritual insight when it

excitement of falling in love, and its consummation in living together to be repeated endlessly. It is not disparaging birthdays, or falling in love and marrying or dramatic experiences of guidance, to say that they cannot be the stuff daily life is made of, and that it is unhealthy for us to want them to be

SCRIPTURE EXAMPLES OF GUIDANCE

- MOSES. Scripture Shows the miracle of God's guidance in the first 40 years of Moses' life as being all so natural. God used a mother's conviction that her baby was too beautiful and valuable to be thrown away, a sister's care and wit, the natural compassionate response of a young woman's nature (still there, beneath the dress and decorum of even an Egyptian Princess/goddess) when suddenly faced with a tearful babe.

Later, having made a decision to take sides with God, His people and purposes, and it all working out wrong Moses fed blindly into the wilderness. What then? God provided a well, and the opportunity for Moses, in all his helpless despair, to do the decent manly thing and help some unknown shepherdesses. And that ordinary kind-hearted action of an ordinary man provided him with a wife and a home for the next 40 years, plus invaluable wilderness experience for the 40 years that followed.

- To Rebekah at the well, it was the natural response of a generous and hospitable nature that she should go beyond the request made to her, and to hurry and draw water for the camels as well. Only AFTERWARDS covered in gold jewellery, pledged as bride to a wealthy and important man, with a place in God's eternal purposes, did she realize that it was a miracle asked for, by Abraham's servant, and granted.

THE LORD's life as a whole was in one sense, a miracle. His sinless blessed, and blessing, walking of the roads of Galilee was no less a miracle than His once walking on water. Yet, how simply and naturally He walked, and talked, and lived. How simply and naturally everything "happened," whether it was a sensational miracle to those around or simply something that didn't interrupt a

(Below is an additional thought added as a result of a delay in the production of this booklet that resulted from a printer "happening" to chew up a page. It may be a useful contrast to the question with which we began - "Are we looking for the kind of guidance displayed by a radio controlled car?")

Is it reasonable for us to expect to USE GOD as a guidance machine FOR OUR PURPOSES?

His eternal purpose is that we should become like His Son, so that we can enjoy fellowship with Him forever.

Each uncertainty and problem we face is an invitation to spend time with Him, so that we reach a decision in fellowship with Him - a decision by which we take a step forward towards the fulfilment of His glorious goal.

A goal that will ultimately cost us ALL, as it cost Him ALL.

Luke 9:22, 26 Romans 8:13-39 Gal 2:20

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

< reading >

Our UNDERSTANDING of Scripture is always limited. Our LOVE for the Lord and His Word/ His revealed will is also limited, but we are still responsible to pass on what we are learning and to welcome correction and instruction from one another.

Equally, we are ashamed that in daily living we fall so short of a triumphant demonstration of what we have come to understand to be God's truth, and will. Still, Scripture encourages us to confess not only our faults/ shortcomings, James 4:5, 16 but also the grace of God to us. All that is required of a testimony is given in Heb 1:3, 18

Life in Gods will is a succession of seeking His Fellowship in Bible reading, prayer, sharing with others in witness, worship, and service. Plus, whatever responsibilities home, work, and community life brings us. "A boring round of the drudgery of doing what everyone else expects of us," is how our natural self might sum it up presently, if we chose that point of view. And we are tempted to do so once the first glow of conversion fades into the realities of learning to live in the love of the Lord, John 1:50

It has been setting my eyes and heart on the Lord in the round of the ordinary affairs of life that has made Col 3 become increasingly real to me. CONSCIOUSLY enjoying the reality of it has been the FRUIT produced from time to time in its season, when my eyes have been on the Lord and the task, not the desired experience. Or to use the figure of 2 Cor 4:5-12, life has been bruising rather than idyllic, and I remain a fragile, common vessel of clay. But when I have fixed my eyes on the Lord, in His Word, and in witnessing for Him, the transforming light and warmth of His sunshine has become real. CONSCIOUSNESS of this experience has again and again SHATTERED it by taking my eyes off the Lord onto myself. I have learnt from the Lord in Scripture that His will for us in this body is to WALK BY OBEDIENT FAITH, a humdrum blessing not day dream over, or agonise after, conscious supernatural intervention.

In and through this I can look back and praise a Faithful God who has kept His promises, and guided me. Too often I have been legalistic, and trusted my intelligence to understand what Gods Word said and meant, and trusted my dogged persistence to achieve it. Too often I've under-valued the simple reading of Gods promises, and simply looking to Him in petition and praise trusting Him to make it happen. Too much drudgery of denying self, too little delighting self in the Lord.

The overwhelming impression though is the INFINITE ocean of provision in Christ, facing the empty cup of my need. The INFINITE loving parental patience of my Heavenly Father as He encouraged my growth in His fellowship, and appreciated my feeblest efforts to please Him. While it is that WHOLE impression that is important, specific, guiding intervention by God may at some critical point set the pattern. The place Bible study plays in my life is not simply

single, at times I could find 40 hours a week for Bible reading, study, memorising something to be proud of - and need to repent of the pride. Something that became routine, and the need to realise that routine had something of the value of the flywheel in old steam engines - it kept one going on until the position was reached when a fresh input of illumination, power, and enjoyment became possible and appropriate.

As I sit at this moment I am conscious of the glorious privilege of having fellowship with the Lord, His Truth, and His people - AND of the hardness of the chair, the tedium of being sitting and the frustration of clumsy fingers fumbling with a keyboard, and of my all too limited skill with a Word Processor. My body/mind tells me it would prefer an easy chair, a change of scene, the relaxation of a novel, of gardening. But the heaviest cost in all that anyone attempts for God is the awareness that try as one may there is the uncertainty as to whether one is in step with God's will, and the certainty of the total inadequacy of one's best attempts.

Meanwhile God's gifts are stewardships placed under our control, and for which we have to make room among the other claims upon our time, and interest. And God has never stepped in to tell me HOW TO USE WHAT HE TEACHES ME, nor given me CONFIDENT ASSURANCE OF WHEN I SHOULD USE IT - for that He has left me dependent largely on my brethren telling me what THEY think I should do.

At first I was convinced that singleness and freedom for Bible study was to be my permanent state. But after some years I was shaken loose by restlessness, awareness of possible problems, but above all the realisation that the very withdrawal from life into the world of Bible, books and study that made rapid growth in Bible Knowledge possible, also put me out of step with the majority of other people to whom I could minister. While it looked sacrificial, my natural self revelled in the isolation, the sense of superiority, and the intellectual excitement of study. Socialising, swimming, driving cars, would have been more of a "Denying self, taking up the cross daily!"

of the moment move it.)

Having chosen Marriage, and family, it soon became clear as 1 Cor 7 says we had committed ourselves to each other's needs, and the need to seek God's will together. I lost the freedom to spend so much time in Bible Study, in isolation from the realities of life that enables one to lay down the law for others, unrealistically, Luke 11: 46

I gained the glorious/ humiliating opportunity to put in practice what the Bible taught faced with the constant need to find from God's Word the guidance needed for family life. With a Godly helpmeet, even struggling to find God's will through the difficult times is a blessing. And the rejoicing in the blessings is more real, and realistic. Preparation of a message is richer for sharing in its preparation, along with sharing in doing the dishes. Standing up to speak God's word in the presence of wife and family helps preaching and practice go hand in hand.

God HAS guided through circumstances. I'm not sensitive to cold, but one night kept fretting and fussing too cold to set to Bible study until the thought that I was glad I wasn't out in that southerly sleet, prompted me to put a gift into an envelope to ensure that a servant of God had a heater in her car. I did not know that she had bought a new car, but decided not to "waste" the money needed for the heater, unless it was provided specifically for that purpose.

The more sensitive we are to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ready to provide for them what WE feel the need of, James 2:15-16 the less often God will have to intervene in such a specific way.

Gods using my obedience as a step to that man's salvation was His Sovereign at I havenoright to demand such guidance before I am willing to act, BUT that one demonstration of what He could do with even reluctant obedience has been a constant reminder that I should LIVE BY HIS WORD. In my case it was both a verse, and a scriptural principle, but God can speak through a scripture that is irrelevant to others

A Christian husband came into my office at school one Friday night with "Where's my wife? Where's my kids? I know it's my fault that they've gone, I've been pre-occupied with working to pay off the mortgage." His name was David. Next week he returned, no longer frantic but at peace. He'd confessed his sin to the Lord and claimed forgiveness, gone back to the Baptist church he'd drifted from, been praying and reading his Bible, and had taken the verse "I will build again the house of David" as Gods promise to him. To apply it to ALL David's would be silly, but God can give personal assurance and encouragement by such means. He was encouraged, and in six months it WAS a happy united home. THE ONLY SUCH HAPPY OUTCOME in my school experience

Have I reached? Will I reach? a stage of Christian maturity when confident certainty of Gods will becomes the norm, replacing responsibility to look to the Lord in helpless patient prayer, Bible study, and to do what one already knows ceases. Never, in this world. The person who believes that he has acquired sufficient wisdom is the ultimate fool, Prov 26:12 Trusting in the Lord to guide us, will always be trusting in the Lord and doing the good we already know to do to the limit of our understanding and strength, increasingly conscious of personal imperfection, but increasingly confident if anything is ever needed, the Lord will reveal it, Ps 37:3-9, Phil 3:12-16

Yes, GOD HAS GUIDED US. But looking back we see that His wise, loving faithfulness in guiding has been shown generally in gentle and inconspicuous ways. Our "happening" to think of His or that when we needed to. The pressure on our conscience when like Peter we felt the Lord's eyes on us, when we were denying Him, or in the mood to do so.

the warm, relaxed atmosphere of joyful fellowship in searching the Scriptures together I remarked to my wife "You know I don't think that anyone would have said anything different, if the Lord Himself had been there with us." Then realised that of course that meant that He HAD been with us, and allowed to direct our thinking feeding and words.)

In our "Ministry" of Gods Word, it is reasonable for us to expect that He wants us to make efficient use of those studies which He has laid on our hearts. If we have been asked to lead a study on John for the Bible Reading it may well become the basis for a Gospel message, a Sunday School lesson, or a conversation with a hitch-hiker, later in the week.

Nine lepers out of ten saw no need to come to the Lord to thank Him. Those who have had their needs met from the Lord through the words we have spoken are equally unlikely to do so. Yet from those who do express their thanks, we find that ministry which flowed naturally out of our current fellowship with the Lord, by His gracious will "just happened" to meet needs of which we were unaware.

Like Naaman (2 Ki 5:11-15) we find it hard to take un-spectacular guidance but as we look back we gladly confess that our Lord "Has done all things well." And when we reach the Eternal Glory, and gaze in awe and worship on the face of our LORD, we will realise that no frequent, spectacular, obvious, mechanical guidance could have brought us there to be in that state, and we will confess in wonder, and adoration "Thy GENTLENESS has made me great," Ps 18:35

Amen. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!

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(Criticism, correction, and addition welcomed.)

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