

HOW GOD GUIDES US

James Dobson's story about his time in college. He practiced every day to be the best at his sport and eventually he won the school trophy for tennis. He had a chance to return to his school years later. They had done some renovations to the main lobby and as a result had thrown out all the old trophies. His highest goal turned out to be garbage. If you live long enough life has a way of trashing your trophies. There are things that seem so important at the moment. Later when seen in a different light they are ultimately meaningless. If you want to bear lasting fruit in your life, you must follow God's plans and priorities.

When we follow God's will for our lives we will bear fruit that will last. One of the most important things we must do as Christians is to follow God's will for our lives. George Truett said, "The greatest knowledge is to know God's will, the greatest work is to do God's will. Success is knowing God's will and being right in the center of it. "

Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Today we are continuing in our series Walking in His will. God has a plan for your life. The question I want to ask you this morning is whether you know what that plan is?

Col 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

So how do we know what God's will is for your life? To answer this question we must understand how God guides us.

Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert,

We see over and over again in the life of Jesus that He was led by the Spirit in everything that He did. How does that work? How are we "led by the Spirit"?

1. Commanding Scripture

The first way we hear God's voice is through His word. The Bible is God's love letter to us. His general plan and will for our lives is clearly communicated to us in it's pages. For example, you do not need to ask God if it is His will for you to commit adultery. The answer is clearly NO. If you feel led to do something that the Bible declares wrong then it is not God calling you to it! There are many things that God has laid out in His word for our direction and these are things that are black and white. The problem often is that we do not read it.

Psalm 119:24 Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors

While we can know God's general will through the Bible, often the specifics are left up to us. The more the Bible is within us the more the Spirit can use it to shape our decisions. When we face crossroads in life there are times when God's word seems to leap off the page at us indicating the direction we should go.

A man was hiking along a narrow ledge. Suddenly, his foot slipped, and he tumbled over the edge and fell about 30 feet, until he grabbed onto a single branch jutting straight out from the cliff. There he dangled in space. Immediately, he hollered, "Help! Help!" He listened with all his might, but there was no reply. Then he hollered, "Does anyone hear me? Is there anybody up there?" A few seconds passed, and then a deep booming voice replied, "This is God. Just let go of the branch, and I will catch you." The hiker closed his eyes, thought for a moment, and then said, "Is there anybody else up there?" If God has said it, if it is in black in white in the bible, you do it.

2. Counsel of the Saints

When discerning the will of God in your life it is often a good idea to ask people who are spiritually mature and who know you well. God often speaks to us through other people. I learned this when I was dating Naomi. I already believed that God wanted me to marry her, but I wanted to be sure so I asked the people who were in my life that were spiritually mature and who knew me what they thought.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice

This does not mean that we must always follow the opinions of people. Ultimately God must be the one who calls the shots. There are times when God will call us to go "against the flow" and we must be willing to obey even if everyone around us tells us that it is a bad idea. E.g. going into ministry. However, it is important to listen to the counsel of the saints. E.g. man who wanted to preach.

A farmer became a pastor, but his preaching was terrible and his ministry wasn't very successful. After several years a pastoral review committee was called together to meet with the pastor. They asked him, "Tell us about how you were called". The man began to tell how one day out on his farm, the weather was nice, but everyone knew that a rain was coming. All of a sudden he heard a voice booming from within "Go PC". He inquired of the Lord, "What do you mean?", but again all the farmer heard from within was "Go PC". And so, explained the man, "I packed up and left my farm and began to go "PC" - to "Preach Christ". The review committee studied his sermons; examined his ministry and gave him the following report: "Young man we agree with you, that on that day on your farm you did hear the voice of the Lord saying "Go PC". However, after that we wholeheartedly disagree with your interpretation of the Lord's calling. We surmise, my good man, that when you heard "go PC" it was the Lord telling you to "go Plant Corn".

3. Common Sense

When discerning the will of God for our lives it is important that we don't simply turn off our brains. God gave us our minds and expects that we use them.

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. 9 Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you

God made each one of us and infused in us certain interests, natural abilities and passion. Sometimes when deciding God's will for us the answer lies in the choice that simply makes the most sense for us in terms of who we are and how we are made.

I heard of one Cockney from the East End of London, who was not a churchgoer. And he had a real dilemma because he was in love with two very beautiful women. And he couldn't decide. One was called Sharon, and she was blonde and very beautiful, and the other was called Maria, and she was a brunette and also very beautiful. And he wasn't a churchgoer, but not knowing whether it was Sharon or Maria, Sharon or Maria, he thought, 'Well, I'll go into a church and pray.' So he went into a local Catholic church and he knelt down by the altar and he said to the Lord—being a Cockney East Ender, he said: 'oom shall I 'ave?' And he looked up, and he looked at the stained-glass window and he saw in gold letters: Ave Maria! That is an example of a guy who did not use common sense!

And if we're asking the question 'Well, what is God calling us into?' the questions to ask are: 'Well, what's my temperament, what's my personality, what's my education, what are my skills, what am I good at, what do I like doing, what are my gifts?'

God hasn't given us gifts in order that they should be wasted but, as John Stott writes, 'to be discerned, cultivated and exercised, so that rather than being frustrated we should be fulfilled.'

For example, often young people struggle with what they should do with their life.

Things you like (desire of your heart)

Things you are able to do (gifting and talents)

Things you have permission to do (morally right)

Things you can earn a living at (being self supporting)

Things that are important (making an impact on the world)

Things that build God's kingdom (being a witness wherever you are)

4. Circumstantial Signs

God is in ultimate control of everything. Sometimes He opens doors and sometimes He closes them. Circumstances and timing can be indicators for us of God's direction.

Prov 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps

Years ago we invited Graham Kendrick to do a worship night called the Night of Joy in Kuwait. It was during the summer. There are never any clouds or wind in summer, the weather is always the same. We used to laugh looking at the weather report – it would say 49 degrees Celsius and sunny – for 6 months! That night we sang a song about God's Spirit blowing through the land. As we started to sing that song suddenly the wind started blowing. It grew stronger and stronger until it almost blew down our projection screen, then it went away and the song ended. What are the odds of that?

There are many times in my life when I have been at a crossroads trying to make a decision and then just at the right time someone said something or something happened that confirmed the choice I should make.

A professor at a US Bible College was devoted to helping believers in communist lands. He studied Russian at Oxford and his old Russian teacher who was now living in Paris. One day his teacher sent him a letter he had received because he thought it would interest him. It detailed how religious leaders in Russia were beaten up and persecuted. The letter was written from Ukraine and the professor read it he knew he was hearing the true voice of the persecuted church. The letter was signed Varnavva and Pronina. Several years later in 1964 he had a chance to visit Moscow.

On his first evening there he happened to meet a man who told him that the old St. Paul church had been destroyed. He took a taxi and, arriving at dusk, walked around the rubble of what used to be the church. While there he saw 2 women climbing over the fence. He told them who he was and asked them who they were. They introduced themselves as Varnavva and Pronina. The letter had been received through a friend in Paris. The population of Russia at the time was over 40 million. Ukraine is more than 800 miles from Moscow. Had he not met the man and heard about the church or arrived or departed minutes later or earlier they would never have met.

5. Compelling Spirit

God speaks differently to all of us. His guidance is very personal. As we grow in our relationship with God we learn to hear His voice in a way that we can understand. Often we hear God's voice the clearest when we align our hearts with His in worship and prayer.

Acts 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

This passage does not say how God indicated this or exactly how it happened. Often this is through a strong desire to do something. Sometimes this is through dreams and visions.

About 3 years ago a friend who I had worked with in Kuwait asked if I knew of any pastor positions opening up in Ontario. Because of that I went to the Christian Careers Canada website. While I was on that site I saw the ad for the Lead Pastor position here at Bramalea Baptist Church. I remember thinking to myself that my friend would not be a good fit for this position, but that I think I would be perfect for it. I didn't think anything of it. I was at a church and things were going well. I was not looking for a new job and did not want to move, but God had other plans. I could not get this church off my mind. Day after day God kept compelling me to do something about it, so I sent a resume and really didn't hear anything back for a few weeks so I thought I was off the hook. Of course God had other plans so, as a result, I am here today.

God speaks to us when we pray. Prayer is a two-way conversation. It's not just a question of us sort of pouring out our requests to God and then going off without ever listening. In chapter 1 Habakkuk begins by asking the question "Why do the wicked prosper". God replies by telling him that He is allowing the nation of Babylon to prosper because he is about to use it. Habakkuk then asks the second question "How can you use such a wicked nation to do your business". Then he positions himself to wait and listen for God's answer:

Hab 2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. 2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."

Sometimes God guides in other more unusual ways—sometimes through a prophecy, or visions, or pictures, or angels, or some people hear an audible voice, or even dreams. The important thing is that we test this guidance with the other points I have mentioned. Does it line up with the Bible? What do my spiritually mature friends think of it? Does it make sense? Has God confirmed it through circumstantial signs?

Test the spirits to see whether they're from God. Does it promote love? You know, God is love—if it's not a loving idea, then it won't come from God.

Often we seek God's will for us for all the wrong reasons. Often our desire is not so much to know God's will but to know the future since it is something we fear. We must be very careful not to approach God like a crystal ball seeking to know things ahead. God does not reveal to us the future but shows us the present. We ask for floodlights and He gives us a candle. We have the light we need for today and we are to walk in that light. Trusting for God to lead helps us with our faith as well as helps us to mature personally through making choices of our own.

God does have a plan for every person here. Would you like to know what that plan is?

This is God's will for you - that you grow in your relationship with Jesus and you serve Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. If you focus on this and then follow the desires of your heart, the leading of the Holy Spirit and the good counsel of spiritual elders then you will be safe. God's plan for you is to get into a small group. To take our intentional discipleship track. To find a place of service.

There was a man who got lost in the desert. After wandering around for a long time his throat became very dry, about that time he saw a little shack in the distance. He made his way over to the shack and found a water pump with a small jug of water and a note.

The note read: "pour all the water into the top of the pump to prime it, if you do this you will get all the water you need". Now the man had a choice to make, if he trusted the note and poured the water in and it worked he would have all the water he needed. If it didn't work he would still be thirsty and he might die. Or he could choose to drink the water in the jug and get immediate satisfaction, but it might not be enough and he still might die. After thinking about it the man decided to risk it. He poured the entire jug into the pump and began to work the handle, at first nothing happened and he got a little scared but he kept going and water started coming out. So much water came out he drank all he wanted, took a shower, and filled all the containers he could find. Because he was willing to give up momentary satisfaction, he got all the water he needed. Now the note also said: after you have finished, please refill the jug for the next traveler." The man refilled the jug and added to the note: " Please prime the pump, believe me it works"!

We have the same choice to make, do we hold on to what we have because we don't believe there are better things in store for us, and settle for immediate satisfaction? Or do we trust God and give up all that we have to get what God has promised us? I think the choice is obvious. We need to pour in all the water, trust God with everything. Then once we have experienced what God has to offer, the living water, we need to tell other people, "Go ahead prime the pump, believe me it works"!

I can tell you from experience today to listen to God's will – it works! It worked for me, and it will work for you.