

Committed Christian Life

Walking by Faith



*But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 Peter 3:18

7

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Walking by Faith

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The foundational principle of Kingdom living is faith. Many Christians have believed in Christ for their salvation, they have repented and accepted by faith the work of Christ's atonement, but they seem to stop there. Trusting God for eternal life, and trusting Him in earthly life become two dissociated concepts. In this lesson the specific issue of "walking" in faith is addressed, seeking what Scriptures teach in this critical area. We will also cover the directly related area of God's guidance because it must be grounded in a *living, active* faith. Many of the decisions we make reflect our level of active faith.

This lesson is taken from the course *Committed Christian Life*. Other lessons in this course are:

- 1) "The Goal and Process of the Christian Life"
Do you know what the goal is? Are you struggling to be a "good" Christian? Learn what God wants to do in and through you in this supernatural life we are called to.
- 2) "The Power for the Spiritual Life"
Learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to unbelievers and believers and the three commands God's Word gives us about the Holy Spirit.
- 3) "The War "
We are in a spiritual battle with a determined enemy. Learn about the evil one's tactics and how to be victorious.
- 4) "Prayer: Worship and Praise"
Prayer is an expression of our relationship to God. Learn a fresh focus as you seek His face before you seek His hand.
- 5) "Prayer: Petition and Intercession"
Now with Almighty God in focus learn the joys of intercession. Included are the basic principles of prayer, hindrances to prayer and the importance of corporate prayer.
- 6) "Alive and Powerful — The Word Of God"
The Bible is our main source of communication from our Heavenly Father and the food of our spiritual lives. Learn how to make the most of this living, powerful resource.
- 8) "Spiritual Transformation"
What God has promised is that He will transform us by the power of His Holy Spirit so that we become like Him. This lesson will begin to answer the question: As a result of my walk with Christ, what changes in my character should take place?

- 9) “Understanding Suffering”
Learn the five purposes of suffering and how our response to suffering will make or break us. We alone decide whether suffering will drive us to bitterness, or to spiritual maturity.
- 10) “Fellowship in the Family”
Learn how to help build unity in the church, our “family”, how to deal with conflict and how to practice fellowship that honors Christ and brings joy to our hearts.
- 11) “Ministering To Your Fellowman”
This lesson which will challenge you as to examine how you can serve others. It will open your eyes to why God has given you gifts from His Holy Spirit, and how important it is for you to minister to those around you.
- 12) “Redeeming The Time”
What does the Bible say about work and how we should use our time? Do you know what your priorities are and do you set goals that reflect that? This lesson will help you redeem the time.
- 13) “Preparing for Revival”
There is much talk about revival, but little evidence of it. Take a look at the history of revivals and the principles we can use to bring revival now, here—in our own lives, in our church, in Ukraine.

Introduction

When we speak of the Christian life, we have to speak about faith. There is no Christianity if there is no faith. Our Lord Jesus talked about faith. He commended some for their faith, gently rebuked His disciples when they lacked faith. And we are admonished to walk by faith. Make it your goal as you work through this lesson to grow in faith, to become unshakeable in your faith, to rest joyfully in your Sovereign Lord and to find His guidance for each step of your journey.

As you do this lesson, for the greatest benefit to your spiritual journey right now, we recommend three things:

- 1) Keep a spiritual journal, at least while you work your way through this lesson. This should include people and needs you are praying for, answers God gives and where you are reading in your Bible and what God is teaching you.
- 2) Make a goal to have a daily quiet time with the Lord. If you are in a leadership position we would challenge you to set aside an hour a day for one month. However if you do not already have a regular quiet time, start with a daily goal that you are willing to practice for one month.
- 3) Memorize 4 Bible verses. We suggest you choose 4 verses from Hebrews 11—the famous chapter on faith.

Throughout this lesson there are various questions, exercises and assignments that will help you interact with the material and apply it to your own life situation. Note that at the end of this lesson there is an answer key so that you may check your understanding of the material covered.

Use a notebook to write out your answers to the exercises. This is your “thinking” notebook so that you can put down your own answers and thoughts on what you are learning. Our learning is reinforced by writing it down so this is an excellent tool as you pursue growth in your personal life.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Faith in God
- II. Challenges to Faith
 - A. Unbelief
 - B. Fear
 - C. Doubt
 - D. Worry
 - E. Independence
- III. Increasing Your Faith
 - A. Worship and Praise
 - B. Knowing Scripture
 - C. Thankfulness
 - D. Practicing Faith
- IV. Guidance in the Life of a Believer
 - A. Means of Receiving Guidance
 - B. Conditions for Receiving Guidance
 - C. Problem Areas in Guidance
- V. Steps to Knowing God’s Will

Conclusion

LESSON OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson you should be able to:

1. Define faith.
2. List and explain five challenges to faith.
3. Explain four ways by which we can increase our faith.
4. Relate and apply Biblical illustrations of faith to your own life.
5. List and explain five means God uses to guide us.
6. Explain the conditions for guidance from God.
7. Explain the role of circumstances, open doors, and “fleeces” in the process of decision making.
8. Identify key steps to knowing God’s will.
9. Make decisions based on what was learned about guidance.

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

1. Review the Lesson Outline and study the objectives
2. Read this lesson and do the questions and exercises, referring to the Bible and appendices as requested.
3. Reading assignments in this lesson:
Appendix A -- Excerpts from *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*--
Chapter 3, “The Life Defined”
Chapter 6 “Difficulties Concerning Faith”,
Chapter 11 “Difficulties Concerning Guidance”
Chapter 14 “Doubts” (an optional reading)
Appendix B — Excerpts from *Deeper Christian Life*,
Chapter 2 “Privilege and Experience”
Chapter 6 “The Presence of Christ”(an optional reading).
Appendix C — Excerpt from *Absolute Surrender*,
Chapter 8. “Kept by the Power of God”
4. Be faithful in having your Quiet Time and using your spiritual journal.
5. Memorize four verses, or more, from Hebrews 11. If you have worked on other lessons in the Committed Christian Life course then you should have already memorized a number of verses from Hebrews 11. They should become even more meaningful to you during this lesson.
6. To encourage and deepen your own faith select one example of faith from Hebrews 11 and make applications to your personal life (Project 1).
7. During your Quiet Time seek God’s guidance for a particular decision you are facing right now, using what you have learned in this lesson on seeking God’s will (Project 2).

I. Faith in God



Before you begin this lesson read Chapter 6 “Difficulties Concerning Faith” found in Appendix A. It covers important issues of faith that every believer needs to deal with in his Christian walk.

Faith is a word so common in the Christian life that we barely give it thought. Everyone knows what faith is! “It’s ... well, it’s what we believe! I mean, well, we believe in God, you know. His plan

of salvation, stuff like that.” And as with many words, familiarity causes it to lose meaning after awhile. We know we believe. We know our sins are forgiven and we are going to heaven. We know that there are doctrines and other things--more or less. But the question is, do we see faith as being active in our lives, or is it something passive and from the past? Are we defining faith as “what we believe”? Or as “believing”?

Our definition for faith in this lesson is “the trustful human response to God’s self-revelation via His words and His actions”.¹ Let us look at the Scriptures to gain a deeper understanding of faith.



Question 1 Read Habakkuk 2:3-4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38. What do they state about faith?

This is God’s truth both in the Old and New Testaments. You have been memorizing Hebrews 11 for several weeks and so have become familiar with the list of people who did this: they lived by faith. Let’s turn to Hebrews 11 as we define faith. In this chapter the examples of faith we see show that the essence of faith is to trust in what God says and does--a response to His Person expressed in word and deed. This faith can be seen in all interpersonal relationships: if your friend tells you he will meet you tomorrow evening, you trust that he will be there because he has given you his word. The degree of your trust is directly related to your perception of his character: how he previously fulfilled his promises. If he has kept his promises a number of times, then you will expect to meet him at the time appointed.

The most important factor in faith is the object. Faith is a by-product of focusing on the object. Faith itself does nothing for you. As you look upon the object, if it is a reliable object, your faith grows because you see your faith confirmed. For example, suppose you had been in an automobile wreck and were lying on the road. Both a carpenter and a doctor come to you and offer their services. One glance at the doctor would inspire a response of trust. You would not have to force yourself to choose to believe and trust the doctor and his help as opposed to that of the carpenter. Because you have not had a previous relationship with him your faith in the doctor will only be justified when there are results. Your faith will not make you well but rather whether or not your faith was correctly placed in this unknown doctor. The value of your faith is directly related to the object.

Hebrews 11:1 states: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”



Question 2 What are the two nouns used to describe faith?

Synonyms to these words used in different Bible translations include *confirmation, proof, certainty, reality, substance, evidence*. This is not talking about “hoping for the best” or “taking a leap into the dark”. This is speaking of something solid and definite in our lives.

What is the basis of our faith? In Christianity our faith is in God. And what God is that? It is the God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. He has specifically chosen to record what He wants us to know about Himself. We have already referred in previous lessons to the fact that in the Bible we see exactly who He is by statements about Him, and from Him, as well as His actions. If you do not know who God is, then your faith will be a weak one indeed. But as you come to know Him better, as you understand His character as revealed in the Scriptures and as you come to experience personally who He is, then your faith will become well grounded. It will have the *assurance* and *conviction* that we have just been speaking of, unseen though He is. And on that basis we have faith in His promises: that He can and will do what He has said. Your faith in God will increase

¹ D. Mark Parks, “Faith, Faithfulness” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003) 547

directly in proportion to your knowledge and understanding of who He is and your growing relationship with Him.

Christ told us that we only need the faith of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6). Whatever the size and source of that “mustard” seed of which Jesus spoke, we know the wonders of what can grow from a seed. If you refer back to “Difficulties Concerning Faith” from *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* you will be encouraged by what a simple act faith is. And God has given us so much “evidence” for our faith: a whole book that explains who He is, what He does, His plans for us. Faith is not a “possession” that we use at the right time. It is focusing on a Person and simply trusting Him—for salvation, for provision, for direction, for growth—for all things. As we make small steps of faith they lead to bigger and bigger steps as we move ahead and seek Him, learn of Him and see Him in action in our lives.

After this initial understanding of faith the author of Hebrews goes on to state and exemplify its importance. It is the way the men of old gained approval (Heb. 11:2). These men of old (our ancestors in the faith) found favor with God. How did they do it? They did it by faith. And who were these people? This chapter lists liars, prostitutes, adulterers, and others who were personal failures in some aspect of their walk with God. Yet, they are given special recognition in Scripture because they had gained approval through living by faith. These were not super saints. These were ordinary men and women who lived extraordinary lives. The Bible is very honest with us, actually more honest often than we are ourselves. If we had the task of choosing examples of faith we would have most likely looked for people who never seemed to mess up, and if they had, we would cover up those details! God makes certain in the details He provides that we understand it was not great people doing the extraordinary, but a great God acting through ordinary and even weak people.

The writer goes on to tell us in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. Whatever else we are, whatever else we do or do not do, the one thing that must characterize our lives is trust if we are going to please Him. This is God’s measuring stick for leaders—not whether they preach well, or have large churches or impressive ministries. Some leaders who seem to accomplish great things for God are actually just operating in their own strength. Unfortunately, many Christians are more interested in impressing men than in pleasing God. This verse should focus our attention on the questions: “For which audience are we playing? Whom are we trying to please by our actions?”



Exercise 1

Define faith. Write out your definition of faith. How would you explain faith to someone else? Find or make up and write down at least two illustrations exemplifying what faith is.

II. Challenges to Faith

So if faith is so simple, why is it so hard? We will now discuss hindrances to faith, or as the title to this section says: “challenges”.

A. Unbelief

Unbelief is the antonym for faith. We usually would associate unbelief with an unbeliever. But it seems that many believers squander their lives in unbelief. They have believed in and accepted Christ’s atonement for their sins, but seem to have a hard time believing His promises or instruc-

tions or His goodness. It is definitely a dangerous state to be in, and is far from the abundant life that Christ has promised us.



Read Chapter 2 of *Deeper Christian Life*, “Privilege and Experience” in Appendix B..



Question 3 What parable is used in this chapter?



Question 4 According to the author what are the two areas of privilege we have as sons of God?



Question 5 Why did the older son not receive a young goat to slaughter and celebrate with?



Question 6 Who often receives the blame when the believer does not have full fellowship with God or seem to receive blessings from His abundance?



Question 7 If we are not experiencing the fulfillment and enjoyment of all of God’s promises, what is the cause?



Question 8 Read Numbers 14:1-11, which is the end of the story of the twelve men spying out the Promised Land. What was it that kept Israel from going into this wonderful place?

Andrew Murray says, “So God in His love is ever willing to impart blessing; and He is omnipotent in His love.”² Do you believe that statement? Or is there a rock of unbelief in your heart because God has not done things your way, or because you have just never believed that His promises were for you? Many times our words and our actions do not match. We say we believe certain things about God, for instance that He is love, but we act like He is a slave driver, or some disconnected deity who has little interest in our life here on earth. May God help us to root out this sin or else there will be nothing left but a powerless, joyless Christianity.

B. Fear

Fear is often the main reason we hold back from doing what God asks us. We can definitely say that where there is fear in our lives there is a lack of faith. This is undoubtedly why God repeated over and over the command, “Fear not”. As a matter of fact it is stated well over 300 times in the Scriptures. It is actually the most repeated command in the Bible, certainly worthy of our attention in relation to faith.

² *Deeper Christian Life*, 12 (in English pdf).



Question 9 Look up the following scriptures and write briefly what each have to say about fear:

Psalm 23:4 _____

Psalm 27:1 _____

Psalm 56:4 _____

Isaiah 41:10 _____

Romans 8:31 _____

You could make a long list of verses concerning fear and God's encouragement to those who are fearful. You might want to consider this as a personal project if you are plagued with fears.

However there is also a healthy, God-given aspect of fear. Not all fears are bad. Think about it for a moment.



Question 10 List some benefits fear can have in our lives.

Unfortunately, very often in our spiritual lives fear goes beyond any usefulness.



Question 11 In what ways is fear detrimental to us?

In the Gospels we see many times when the disciples were fearful. We could even say they were fearful in a healthy, normal way. The circumstances they were in would produce fear in all of us. But Christ was looking for something more from them and teaching them through these experiences.

Read Matthew 8:23-27.



Question 12 What were the circumstances in this story?



Question 13 What was Jesus' response to the disciples' fear?

A little later the disciples were in another storm with a slightly different situation. Read Matthew 14:22-33. Peter in this instance made a great step of faith.



You may find it helpful to read Chapter 6 "The Presence of Christ" in Appendix B.

Acting in faith is a cure for fear. As we stretch ourselves to believe God in new ways we see that He is faithful and worthy of our trust. With fear displaced we experience a feeling of security, knowing in Whom we have believed. We do not have to be ashamed that we feel fearful, but we need to let it turn us towards Christ. We need to depend on His presence with us.



Exercise 2

Take time to evaluate right now in what ways fear has limited your growth in your relationship to God. What other areas of your life does it affect? What would change in your life if you moved from fear to faith in these areas?

C. Doubt

The third challenge to faith is that of doubt. Doubt is more insidious than unbelief, but leads directly into that path. This is an area that many Christians flounder in and are afraid to admit. Satan loves to throw his darts of doubt against us. We will never be able to withstand them without our "shield of faith".

You are in good company when you struggle with doubts. One of the disciples, Thomas, is commonly referred to as "Doubting Thomas". John the Baptist who was to prepare the way for his Messiah languished in prison and was discouraged and began to doubt. He sent his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are you really the one?" In more recent times we have the example of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the great preachers of all time, who often was beset by great depression. Doubts would overwhelm him. He even wrote about this problem calling it "The Minister's Fainting Fits".

Any number of issues can cause doubt to rise. We will mention three of them.

1. Sin and Rebellion

This is an obvious area in which we can open ourselves to attack. When we have unconfessed sin or when we are rebelling against the voice of the Spirit doubt will creep in. The solution is to get back into a right relationship with our Savior and Lord.

2. Difficult Circumstances

There are many difficulties in life and we will cover the topic of suffering in Lesson 9, but these circumstances can and often do lead to doubt. Different situations can shake our faith and cause doubt: illness, financial struggles, persecution from those who mock our faith, betrayal by a friend, death of someone we love. All of these things can cause doubt about the goodness of God and His promises. Periods of darkness in this earthly life can be opportunities for Satan to drop doubts into our ears. In the darkness is where it is most important to hold onto the truth and wait for God's deliverance rather than doubting His love and care and plan for our lives.

3. Living by Feeling

There are many highs in the Christian life, but also many lows. It is easy to allow discouragement or other negative feelings to overwhelm us and to doubt what God has said. Emotions are

God-given but we must never let them rule our lives. We need to constantly realign our feelings with truth.

How do you feel when people doubt you, even when it is justly so? Now think of how our doubts grieve God--when we listen to Satan's thoughts. Don't cover up your doubts. God already knows. Instead bring them to Him, let them be examined under His light and increase your faith rather than continuing to waiver (James 1:6; Hebrews 10:23).



If you have problems in this area you may want to read Chapter 14 "Doubts" in Appendix A.

D. Worry

To some people worry is as normal as breathing, and often they do not even realize that worry and faith are not compatible. As a matter of fact worry is so ingrained for some people that they feel they are being irresponsible if they don't worry. But worry should signal an alarm to you that there is one or more areas in which you are not trusting God. Worry, unlike fear, has nothing to recommend it. It is simply trying to anticipate all the evil that might come and will rob us of joy and peace. Worry is actually the result of living in fear.



Read Chapter 3 "The Life Defined" in Appendix A. The author has used a couple of illustrations that are helpful in thinking through the issue of worry.



Question 14 Read Matthew 6:25-34. How many times in this passage does Jesus command us to stop worrying?



Question 15 What is Jesus' remedy for worry?

George Mueller from the 19th century is renowned the world over as a man of faith. He said, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety."³

E. Independence

Independence is an area which we seldom think of in relation to faith. The issue is control. If you trust someone else, you lose control in that area of your life. And we do like to control our own life. We want to have the final say-so. Often we act like we have more wisdom than God.



Read Appendix C "Kept by the Power of God" from *Absolute Surrender*. Focus on the section "Kept Through Faith".



Question 16 What does the author say that faith implies?

Faith in and of itself obligates us to reject pride and seek dependence on God. We have talked about this aspect of the Christian walk in Lesson 3. If we are going to be men and women of faith we will have to turn the decisions over to God, admit that we are helpless to move our lives in the right direction, and rest in His desires.



Exercise 3

Examine yourself now. What challenges to faith do you face? What are you going to do to deal with them?

³ http://www.famousquotesandauthors.com/authors/george_mueller_quotes.html, downloaded Nov. 11, 2008.

III. Increasing Your Faith

There are degrees of faith mentioned in Scripture. Jesus often addressed His disciples as “you of little faith.” They had some faith, but a lot of fears and doubts. They were just beginning to know Christ and who He really was. On the other end of the spectrum were some people whom Christ commended as having great faith. One of them was the Roman centurion whose slave was dying (Luke 7:2-10). Jesus said, “Not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” (vs. 9) Another person of great faith was the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus begging that He would heal her daughter who was demon-possessed (Matthew 15:21-28). She would not be turned aside in her request and Jesus’ response was, “O woman, your faith is great.” It was not one of Jesus’ disciples whom He commended for their faith, or one of the teachers of the law. As a matter of fact these two people were not even Jews, not even from God’s chosen people. We could easily add them to the list in Hebrews 11. They had great faith in God and saw great things happen.

So wherever we are on the faith spectrum, how can we have more faith? What can we do to increase our faith? Let us look now at four areas which impact the growth and development of faith.

A. Worship and Praise

We have already devoted a lesson to worship and we hope that you have been spending more time in worshiping God. As we focus on who He is and appreciate Him, our faith will increase. In contrast:

- *Without worship, we forget that we have a big God beside us and live in fear.*
- *Without worship, we forget God’s calling and begin to live in a spirit of self-reliance and stubborn independence.*
- *Without worship, we lose our sense of wonder and gratitude to God as we plod through life with blinders on, unaware of God’s work in our lives.*
- *Our understanding of God grows as we reflect on what God has done and respond in worship.⁴*

Worship increases our faith as we deepen our relationship with God and praise Him for His character. The same principle works in human relationships. When we meet a man of character and deepen our acquaintance with him so that we know him better, we then gain confidence in him.

We must let the knowledge of God—knowing of God—permeate every area of our lives (2 Peter 1:2-3). God’s truth and the knowledge of it can then be acted upon by faith, and when it is, faith increases. Our hope creates this action of faith. And in turn as we exercise faith we come to know God better. Faith will result in obedience. If God is good, what He wants is good; therefore we can come to understand that obedience will result in our benefiting from His goodness.

B. Knowing Scripture

We need to spend time with God deepening our relationship with Him and that includes spending time in His Word. This is His most direct communication with us. Throughout Scripture we see promises of God, examples of faith, and the history of what God has done in the past. We need to know it thoroughly so that we can grow in faith. We will not dwell on this now because we have already had a lesson on the Bible and its importance. We simply want to reiterate here that it is a critical factor to our growth in faith.



Question 17 What does Romans 10:17 say about faith?

⁴ John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat Leader’s Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 186.

C. Thankfulness

Yes, thankfulness is something that increases our faith. We can only approach God with a thankful heart if we remember what He has already done both in our lives and in the lives of others. This is not only pleasing to Him, it also encourages our faith as we take time to regularly remember and enjoy what He has already done. It is repeated over and over in Scripture that we are to remember what God has done, that we are to repeat to others what God has done. We could have titled this section “Remembering”, but God’s desire is that we would learn faith and thankfulness through our remembering. Human memory sometimes can be short when it is overcome by fear and anxiety. We only have to look back to the stories of the Israelites in the wilderness to see how short memory can be even in the face of totally miraculous events.

Make it a point to regularly list what God has done in your life. Listen to others and encourage them to tell you what God has done for them.



Exercise 4

Make a list of all of the things God has done in your life. How has He delivered? How has He guided? How has He provided? Take some time to think about it and list them in your notebook. Be prepared to share at least one of these blessings in your group.

D. Practicing Faith

There is risk to walking by faith because it moves beyond our human understanding, beyond what is “normal” in earthly life. We have already mentioned Peter’s experience of walking on the water. Peter is an example of a man who was willing to take a risk. But the risk he took was not based on foolishness. He knew Jesus and he asked Him if he should do it, then he obeyed when Jesus said yes. It is always hard initially to move out in faith, but once we take that step, our faith increases as we do things we could never have done in our own human strength and understanding. Yes, Peter’s faith started to fail, but he was quick to ask for help and Jesus was just as quick to answer. And these answers fuel our faith in God and in His faithfulness and love for us.

John Ortberg emphasizes our change in perspective as we practice faith: “When human beings get out of the boat, they are never quite the same... Every time you walk on the water, each time you trust God and seek to discern and obey his calling on your life, your God will get bigger, and your worship will grow deeper, richer, and stronger.”⁵



Exercise 5

Give an example from your own experience of a time when you exercised “great faith”.

In summary, we have mentioned four ways to strengthen and increase your faith. First, spend time praising and worshiping God and deepening your relationship with Him. As we come to know Him better faith **will** increase. Second, spend time in the Word of God learning more about Him, His “track record”, and His promises. Third, remember what God has done for you and others in the past and lift your heart up in thanks to Him. And last, take risks in faith. Step out in a new way that you have been resisting. Trust God in ways that you have not done so before.

Recommended reading: If you need extra encouragement in this area of faith, read Chapter 4 of *The Christian’s Secret*, “How to Enter In”. It is in Appendix A.

⁵ Ortberg, 174.



Exercise 6

Identify one or more areas in which you would like to step out in faith and trust God. What steps might you begin taking to accomplish this? You may first need to identify what is holding you back, and then list the steps you need to take.



Project 1 -- Faith

Read through verses 4-40 in Hebrews 11 again. List each of the examples of faith and at least one unique aspect of faith that is illustrated by their experience. Then select one of these examples, and study it in detail in its Old Testament context. Make as many applications to your own life as possible using the application guidelines from lesson *Alive and Powerful — the Word of God* (lesson 6).

IV. Guidance in the Life of a Believer

Walking by faith involves discerning what God's will is in all areas of our lives. How does God guide us? How do we discern the will of God in our day-to-day decisions of life? How do we know what calling He has laid upon our life?

There are people who do not believe God has a specific plan for each individual. They make a sharp distinction between God's sovereign will as referring to the whole cosmos and the whole of human history, and God's will for the individual. They believe in the first and deny the second. This, however, is an artificial distinction because man is part of the sovereign plan of God for the cosmos.

Read Luke 12:4-7, 22-34, a parallel passage to Matthew 6:25-34 which you have read already in this lesson. Note God's care for the smallest details of our lives. If God has an overall sovereign plan for each of us and if God's interest in us goes as far as having even the hairs of our head numbered, what conclusions can you draw regarding an individual will of God for your life? The key text for this question is Ephesians 2:10. Paul tells us that the purpose of our salvation ("created in Christ Jesus") is that we may do "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them".



Exercise 7

Read Ephesians 2:10 and the surrounding context. What do you think "good works" refers to: moral actions or specific works? Please state your reasons for the answer you choose.

Those who deny the existence of an individual will of God say that the "good works" in this passage refer to moral actions as defined in the Bible, not to specific works designated for a particular person. But they also agree that this text can be interpreted as indicating that specific works are designated by God for each individual. Those who object to the view that Ephesians 2:10 is referring to specific good works base their argument on the concept of free choice. How can a believer have a free choice of action if his works have already been designed by God? Yet the fact of the existence of a detailed plan of good works prepared by God for His child to follow does not cancel the free choice of that individual, nor does it preclude a walk of faith. God wants His children to **voluntarily** enter God's plan and to **voluntarily** choose to obey His commands and fulfill His plans for their individual lives.

God has a sovereign plan for the cosmos, for history, and for man--each man. But each person has the freedom as a child of God to obey or disobey his Creator and Savior. That is why we have so

many instructions in Scripture to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than the prompting of our sinful flesh. We are still free to choose and are therefore fully responsible for our acts.

So how does God reveal His will for us? Without guidance the Biblical experience of knowing God's presence in our daily lives is lost. From the pastoral point of view one of the greatest harms we can do to those under our care is to convince them that God is not going to meet them personally in their own experience. If the gospel does not free the individual for a unique life of spiritual adventure in living with God daily, we have not understood why Jesus came into this world and what God's purpose is with His children. Confidence in God's individual dealings with the believer on a one-to-one basis is critical to the practical life of the Christian. Christians need clear instruction on how to recognize the voice of the Shepherd and how to discern God's guidance.

A. Means of Receiving Guidance

God's methods of communication with us are determined by four factors: who God is, who we are, what God wants us to do, and what He has already said. In areas where He has already spoken, there is no need for Him to speak again. At such a point, God expects us to choose in accordance with His known will and to make mature, wise, and responsible decisions. We must keep in mind that God's guidance is intended to develop us into intelligent, freely cooperative persons. He wants us to be free agents but at the same time completely dedicated to obeying, serving, and glorifying Him. But because He wants us to be real human beings with free will, He will not force us into a conformity to His wishes that is mindless or purchased at the expense of freedom.

If this is true, there is one means of guidance that God will not use with us. He will not dictate to us what to do every single minute. Some people may believe that God tells them what to do at every turn of the road or that He is willing and available to do so if they would ask Him. But this kind of "guidance" would make us mere robots that automatically perform as they are programmed.

And there actually will be times when God is silent in our lives. In fact, the more mature we are, the easier it is to discern His will. By giving us chances to decide for ourselves, He develops our character and tests our faithfulness. Therefore, when God does not speak to us, it is not necessarily because of some shortcoming. It may well be the loving and wise Father saying, "At this point My will for you is that you decide on your own."



Read Chapter 11 "Difficulties Concerning Guidance" in Appendix A. Then answer the following questions:



Question 18 What are the four ways God speaks to us according to the author?



Question 19 What test is there for knowing that it is the voice of God speaking to us?



Question 20 What is the first pre-requisite before we may expect a separate direct personal revelation?



Question 21 What part should common sense have in our understanding God’s guidance?



Question 22 Do circumstances have a part in God’s guidance? If so, what is it?



Question 23 How does the author say the Holy Spirit usually makes us aware of His guidance, His desire for us?



Question 24 How does the Scripture, “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23) apply to guidance?



Question 25 What are the two roots of our difficulties concerning guidance?

With this background we will continue the discussion of the ways God uses to guide His children.

1. The Bible

The Bible is the inerrant Word of God. It is the written record of what God said to a certain number of people for the benefit of all mankind. Direct commands of what we should or should not do as well as principles for living are contained therein. Additionally, case histories illustrate the application of these principles. The Bible is so comprehensive in its coverage of how we are to live that it is to be our first and basic manual in matters of guidance. A good rule to keep in mind is this: If it contradicts the Word of God, then it obviously is not from God. Where many people struggle with God’s guidance in their lives, it is not because they do NOT know what He wants them to do, but rather they do know and are struggling with obedience.

Read Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 3:10, and 1 Peter 1:13, 4:1. The Scripture advises us to renew our mind, to acquire the mind of Christ, and to arm ourselves with that kind of thinking.



Question 26 So how can we actively renew and re-equip our mind?

We can conclude that the foremost key to guidance is to read the Bible, inform our mind by it, soak our mind in it, mold our thinking by it, and then apply it to different situations in our own life. All the while we rely on the promise that the Holy Spirit will bring to our attention exactly the Scripture that fits that situation (Colossians 3:16).

2. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is just as critical in the area of guidance as the Bible. We cannot even correctly understand the Bible without His help. The Bible is more tangible than the Spirit but without the enlightening of the Holy Spirit we can still go astray and try to force Scripture to say what we want it to rather than what He has written. We discussed the task of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in Lesson 2. You may want to go back and review that before continuing.

Romans 8:14 states: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” So, the Holy Spirit is leading us. The question is, are we following? Most of us wish that God would just write out His will for us on the wall. But it is a good caution for us to remember that when He actually did write on the wall, it was not direction or guidance, it was judgment (Daniel 5:5-30). It is important to remember that direct revelations are rare and are usually not associated with guidance as much as they are with rebuke.

However, at times God has used dreams, visions, angels, and other unusual phenomena to give guidance to people. God may speak through supernatural means and we should be open to that possibility. But the pattern of Scripture indicates that God does not normally use the miraculous to guide us. As we examine church history, we notice that the greater the maturity of God’s people, the better able they are to understand God’s **written** message to them. Therefore dreams, visions, and other such phenomena seem to play a lesser role with the availability of the Bible and the ability of so many to actually be able to read it. It is an unprecedented time in history both with the high literacy rate and the availability of the Bible in almost all languages of the world.

So how does the Holy Spirit guide us? Usually by impression in our spirit, by putting thoughts into our minds and then letting them gain strength as we think and pray about them. We have an example in Nehemiah 2:12 which says, “And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem.” Here God put it into the mind of Nehemiah to do something for Jerusalem. But we have to learn to distinguish what thoughts and impressions are from the Holy Spirit and what the other voices are. And we need to be aware that we get a lot of “static” from the spiritual world. There are battles and struggles going on around us in the spiritual world that would try to block out God’s communications with us. However, we can learn to know and recognize His voice, mostly by acting on the thoughts and impressions that are from Him. With obedience and willingness our sensitivity to His desires and directions grows.

3. Providential Circumstances

All of us have circumstances that come into our lives and influence our decisions and our directions. To us many of these things seem very random and can even look like interruptions to our own plans. Some of them come without choices on our part, as with Joseph when his brothers sold him into slavery. But much later he was able to say with full confidence, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Circumstances can be used by God to help direct us. But the greater problem is knowing whether an open door is God’s leading or not. (We will address this further in the next section.) This is a different issue than the things which are out of our control even though always within God’s sovereignty.

4. Sanctified Common Sense

God has gifted you with intelligence and natural abilities. And He wants you to put those to use for His glory. We are constantly told to seek wisdom, to pray for wisdom, to grow in wisdom. The beginning of wisdom we are told is the fear of God (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10). What do we mean by “sanctified” common sense? When a life is committed to God, God wants to use all the resources He has gifted that person with. He does not expect us to walk through life blindly or foolishly.

He expects us to balance our common sense and understanding with the direction that He is leading. We should be able to go ahead with the daily decisions we have to make using this resource.

However, sometimes He will lead us to do things that other people consider foolish, especially worldly people, because it does still involve stepping out in faith. Our faith must work together with our reason. We need to avoid foolishness as Proverbs points out so frequently. Let our prayer be that of the psalmist in Psalm 119:66: "Teach me good discernment and knowledge." And then use that knowledge and discernment under His direction. You will know when God wants you to move beyond what most would consider common sense because He will continue to speak to your heart about it until it becomes a conviction, regardless of all physical evidences or human reasoning. But sometimes we move quickly, and end up doing something foolish and presuming upon God rather than trusting Him. Our consistent walk of faith will mature us in these areas of judgment and discernment. This aspect of common sense should be underlying all of our decisions.

5. Wise counsel

Another instrument God uses to guide us is other people. The book of Proverbs teaches the importance of seeking wise counsel (11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6). Because it is possible to misunderstand what God is telling us and because we do not possess all wisdom, we definitely can and should benefit from the mature counsel of fellow members in the body of Christ. We should listen to what the church has to tell us as a body or through its ministers and other leaders because they can be used as God's instruments in giving us guidance. We also need to consider the voice of those in authority over us, even if they are not believers, as God often uses the line of authority to speak to us. They may have insights into our lives that are useful in seeing God's guidance. This is true of parents and spouses, but might include employers, teachers and others.

B. Conditions for Receiving Guidance

Knowing the different ways in which God guides us, we now turn to a related question. What are the qualities or attitudes that should be present in us to make us ready for guidance?

1. Obedience

The first condition for guidance is obedience to the guidance already received. Read 1 Samuel 13:1-14, 15:1-29, and 28:1-19 for background to the following discussion.

In 1 Samuel 13 and 15 Saul did not obey a specific command of God on two occasions. The consequence of disobedience can be clearly seen in 28:6. When Saul sought further guidance, it was denied to him because he did not obey the clear commands God had already given him.

The Bible contains many specific instructions from God. We know a lot about what we should and should not do. The question is: "Are we prepared to obey what we already know to be the will of God?" There are many places in the Bible where His will is stated explicitly.



Exercise 8

Read the following Scriptures, and observe what God's will is for you according to each verse. Write what you find in your notebook:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Romans 12:1-2 | f. Hebrews 13:20-21 |
| b. Ephesians 5:15-18 | g. 1 Peter 2:13-17 |
| c. Colossians 1:9-10 | h. 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19 |
| d. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 | i. 1 Peter 4:1-4 |
| e. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 | |

All of these verses refer directly to the will of God, but the Bible is full of God's commands and desires for us. Whenever you discover an area of disobedience to the revealed will of God in your life, confess your disobedience and renew your commitment to love Christ by obeying Him. You cannot legitimately ask for more guidance when you are unwilling to obey what has already been given to you.

2. Meekness and humility

A second prerequisite for guidance is meekness and humility. One aspect of the meaning of meekness is submission to someone else's control. When Jesus taught us to start our prayer by saying, "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done." He was teaching us to submit to God's authority and control. Only a person who is devoted to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom qualifies to receive God's guidance.

A. T. Pierson in his book *George Mueller of Bristol* explains the connection between meekness and guidance:

Here is a double emphasis upon meekness as a condition of such guidance and teaching. Meekness is a real preference for God's will. Where this holy habit of mind exists, the whole being becomes so open to impression that, without any outward sign or token, there is an inward recognition and choice of the will of God. God guides, not by a visible sign, but by swaying the judgment. To wait before Him, weighing candidly in the scales every consideration for or against a proposed course, and in readiness to see which way the preponderance lies, is a frame of mind and heart in which one is fitted to be guided, and God touches the scales and makes the balance to sway as He will. But our hands must be off the scales, otherwise we need expect no interposition of His in our favor.⁶

We need humility because we make mistakes. Taking pride in always being right is one of the worst expressions of pride. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6; cf. Prov. 3:34).

Since our minds are capable of self-inflated ideas and are susceptible to carnal influences (Jeremiah 14:14; Romans 8:4-7; Galatians 5:16-19), we should be cautious when we state that the Lord is leading us. God does not take lightly the false use of His name. To take God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7) means, among other things, to link His name to a lie. To say, "God led me to do something," when He did not, or to apply His name to something clearly contrary to His Word is to do evil in the name of the Lord.

C. Problem Areas in Guidance

Now we will address a few areas of guidance that can cause some problems if we do not understand and examine them properly.

1. Open doors

Current opportunities for service, or "open doors" as the Bible calls them, pose particular questions for the believer seeking God's will. How do I interpret open doors? Are they necessarily a sign that I have to enter them? What about closed doors? Are they not a sign that I should choose something else? To what extent am I supposed to force open these doors?

Anyone who seeks opportunities to minister for Christ is motivated to pray for such openings, and they are certainly Biblical (Colossians 4:3). But here the question is not whether they are Biblical, but how they are to be related to decision making and guidance.

⁶ A.T. Pierson, *George Mueller of Bristol* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1899), 185—186.

Gary Friesen in his book *Decision Making and the Will of God* has a helpful discussion of Paul's actions in relation to open doors (2 Cor. 2:12-13):

Why did Paul leave an "open door"? If an open door constitutes a "sign" written by God through providence which the believer is to read and obey, Paul's action is inexplicable. But if an open door is an opportunity to be considered and weighed by the decision maker, then the explanation is not difficult. Normally, Paul would take advantage of such an open door for ministry (1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:3). He would only pass up such potential if something more important demanded his attention. And that was precisely the case in this situation.⁷

Friesen's evaluation of the Biblical evidence concerning open doors provides the following guidelines for their interpretation:

(1) the term "door" refers to an opportunity, usually related to the effective ministry of the Word; (2) opportunities, like everything else, come through God's sovereignty; (3) the nature of such opportunities, as well as the common practice of Paul, indicate that most of the time "open doors" should be utilized as part of wise, resourceful living for the Lord (Ephesians 5:15-16); (4) if a greater opportunity or more pressing work is at hand, it is acceptable and proper to pass by the open door; and (5) an "open door" is not a direct providential sign from God telling the believer to go in a certain direction. A door is used, not because it is a sign, but because doors facilitate entrance. It is foolish to climb through a back window or tear down a wall when the front door is open.⁸

Friesen further notes that the Bible itself never speaks of closed doors. When Paul was hindered from doing something, he did not view this as an indication from God that He had misread God's guidance or even that God was now telling him not to pursue his desire. Paul "accepted the fact that he could not pursue that plan at that time. Yet he continued to desire, pray, and plan for the eventual accomplishment of the goal."⁹ See, for example, Paul's discussion of his attempts to visit Rome in Romans 1:10-13.

2. Laying out a fleece

Many individuals have pointed to the story of Gideon and the fleece as an example of a good approach to receiving guidance. But a proper understanding of Judges 6 will show that this type of fleece demands the accompaniment of divine power to validate previous revelation.

First, it is evident that Gideon's fleece was not a sign of circumstantial evidence but rather a display of miraculous divine power. It was a sign that altered the normal, physical process by which dew is made. Second, the fleece was not a way of obtaining guidance but of testing and confirming the special revelation that he had already received. Third, Gideon's demand for further confirmation could be taken as evidence of doubt and failure to believe the signs that had already been given (cf. Zacharias' response in Luke 1:8-20).

Yet at least two other Biblical examples seem to indicate that the laying out of some kind of a fleece or test situation is not something totally improper. It might be argued, however, that these were providential events rather than a fleece-type test of God's will. We will let you be the judge.

The first example is found in Genesis 24, where Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham told the servant that God would send His angel before him. When the servant arrived in the land to which he was sent, he needed guidance. He prayed:

⁷ Gary Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980) 220.

⁸ Friesen, 220-21.

⁹ Friesen, 221.

See, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming to draw water. And let it so be that the girl to whom I say, I pray you, let down your jar that I may drink, and she replies, Drink, and I will give your camels drink also--let her be the one whom You have selected and appointed and indicated for Your servant Isaac [to be a wife to him]; and by it I shall know that You have shown kindness and faithfulness to my master. (Genesis 24:13-14)

But notice that the servant did not accept the providence of the situation immediately. Verse 21 says that, after the girl had made the response that outwardly fit the conditions he had set down, he gazed in silence to know whether the Lord had made his journey successful or not. Then he did a second thing. When the girl finished watering the camels, he sought to know to whose family she belonged. When he found out that she was a relative of Abraham, he “bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord” (v. 26). Why? The answer is in verses 3-4. The servant had promised to take a wife for Isaac from his master’s (Abraham) relatives. It was only when he found out that Rebekah was a relative that he knew that he could trust the “fleece”. Thus, he conducted the test with known criteria.

A second example occurs in 1 Samuel 14:1-15. A garrison had been established in Michmash by the Philistines. Saul’s son Jonathan and his armor bearer decided to cross over to the garrison to see if the Lord would deliver them into their hands. To make a determination of whether the Lord was with them or not, they set up the conditions of a fleece. They would expose themselves to the garrison, and if the garrison said, “Wait until we come to you,” then they would wait. But if the garrison said, “Come up to us,” then they would go up, for this would be the sign that the Lord had delivered the Philistines into their hands (vv. 9-10). In what way is this a sign? The answer lies in the customs of war of that era. In a time of war, both warring parties came out to meet one another, unless it was a city that was being attacked. Therefore, Jonathan was looking for an unusual event to be a sign to him. But a further question must be asked. Why did Jonathan attack in the first place? The answer is that the attack was within the divine plan of God as previously revealed. God had established the principles of war under Moses. One of these principles was that all inhabitants in the land of Canaan were to be totally destroyed. Therefore, Jonathan’s laying out of a “fleece” was simply a matter of confirming whether the timing was within the desired will of God.

In conclusion, discerning a divine principle for the use of a fleece in decision making and guidance is extremely difficult. Since Gideon’s use of a fleece involved miraculous power and was used in accompaniment with a known principle or established directive from God’s Word this method should not be recommended as a general way of gaining guidance.

3. Forbidden means of guidance

Over the ages people have used many methods to find guidance, even seeking after knowledge of the future from sources other than God Himself. One such man was King Saul, whose story is recounted in 1 Samuel 28:1-25. Saul found himself in the midst of a national emergency, desperately needing guidance. Samuel the prophet was dead, and Saul himself had removed all spiritists and mediums from the land. Furthermore, God was not speaking with him (28:6). It seemed as if there was no one to whom Saul could turn. Consequently, he made contact with the witch of Endor . . . with terrifying results. The Bible indicates that such means are unacceptable for gaining guidance.

Divination is also forbidden (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). It refers to using random or chance happenings to determine the future. This could include reading patterns on the palm of one’s hand, using astrology (horoscopes) or Tarot cards for guidance, and so forth. The Bible strongly condemns such practices: “For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18:12).

We are also warned in the Scriptures not to listen to evil men or false prophets. The temptation comes when they are saying things that we want to hear. But Satan himself comes as an angel of light and we must be careful never to allow his deception to enter in as we look for guidance.

4. Wrong choices

Oftentimes, before you receive guidance or make a decision, there is a battle in you between conflicting tendencies or desires. When you receive genuine guidance and act upon it or when you make the right decision based on counsel or wisdom, the battle stops. By this we sense that we are on the right road, and the peace of God that passes all understanding is present in our minds and hearts.

But be aware that it is also possible to have inner peace when we make a **wrong** decision. How? By merely making a decision, **any** decision, the emotional battle stops, and we sense peace. But this emotional peace can lead you away from God's will, not into it. Thus, inner peace should be a confirmation of a right decision, i.e., God's will, **only** in conjunction with several other positive indicators.

But what happens when we make a wrong decision, when we miss God's will regarding a particular choice? Are we thereby consigned to living with second best? The answer to this depends partly upon the decision we have made and partly upon an understanding of forgiveness.

If the wrong decision we make is relatively small, the consequences will probably be insignificant, and we can expect that the effect on our spiritual walk will be insignificant. This process often helps us develop maturity when we are conscious of where we went wrong and what to do the next time.

On the other hand, if our wrong choice is a major decision, then the consequences could be significant. For example if a man chooses an unbelieving wife, there will be consequences to his own spiritual life and the lives of the children they will produce, as well as limitations on how he can serve the Lord.

But even when a wrong decision involves a serious sin, God in His love and grace offers us forgiveness, renewed fellowship, and usefulness through confession and submission. We are told to repent and confess directly to the Lord (1 John 1:9). Our loving heavenly Father, as illustrated in the touching parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24), has promised to always receive back with open arms any repentant child of God.

If we choose to accept this offer, we can in this sense still experience God's first best. If we fail to avail ourselves of it, then we will be left with second best or worse, especially if it involves sin. The final factor is not whether we have made a mistake but whether we repent and turn to the Lord for further leading. While God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, it may be that some decisions will only work together for good as we work through the consequences of bad decisions in a responsible, Biblical manner.

V. Steps to Knowing God's Will

Based on our study in this lesson, here are some practical suggestions on how to know God's will in varying situations:

1. ***Examine your heart. Be willing to do God's will.***

John 6:38 Jesus is your example. He came to do His Father's will.

John 7:17 If you are willing, God will show you.

2. ***Make it a matter of prayer asking for God to lead you.***

James 1:5-6; 5:16 He promises to help and lead us, but waits for us to ask.

1 John 5:14 You can have confidence that if you ask according to His will He will hear you.

3. ***Look into the Scriptures to see if there is something applicable to your decision.***

Psalms 119:105 The Bible is full of wisdom on every area of life.

4. ***Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Tune your spirit to hear what He is saying.***

Isaiah 30:21 God will show you when you have a decision to make, "This is the way."

Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Check to make sure you are neither grieving or quenching the Spirit.

5. ***Do what you know to do now. Often God leads us one step at a time and until we actually move in the direction we know is right He will not give us instructions for the rest of the way.***

Proverbs 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.

Luke 16:10 Prove yourself faithful in the small things.

6. ***Get good counsel, seeking men and women who are mature and have shown themselves to be godly, as well as taking heed to the advice of those in authority over you.***

Proverbs 11:14; 15:22 There is safety in having many counselors.

Proverbs 12:5,15; 19:20 God gives us wisdom through the counsel of others.

7. ***Consider whether God is moving in providential circumstances with open or closed doors.***

Isaiah 45:1-3 God has the power to open doors even by shattering them if it will accomplish His will.

8. ***Make a decision and move out in faith. Making the right decision does not mean there will not be obstacles. If that were true we would always be assured when we had made the right decision.***

Joshua 1:7 Move ahead with courage and faith.

Romans 14:23 If it is not of faith it is sin, so believe God and leave the results to Him.

One practical method to help you sort through all of the issues is to make a decision chart. This is simply a piece of paper that lists the different options possible when you are confronted with a decision. Under each option make two columns, one for the pros and one for the cons of that option. Now list the factors derived from common sense, providential circumstances, counsel, the Word, and so on. Include everything, no matter how trivial it seems. Keep adding points until one of the columns stands out as decisive. The following is an example of such a chart.

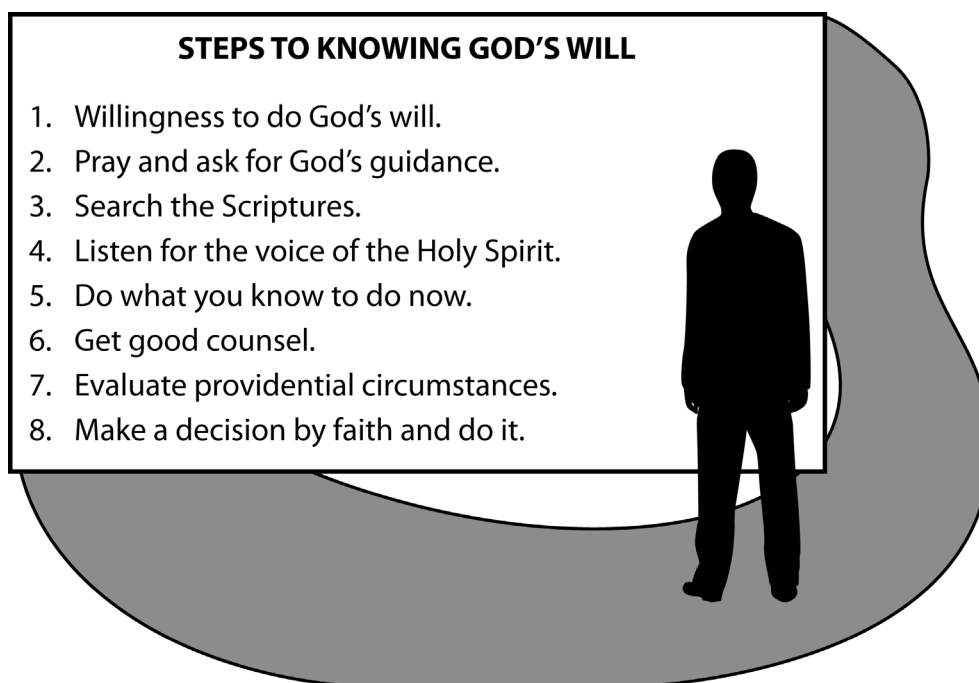


Diagram 7

Option 1		Option 2	
Pro	Con	Pro	Con

If guidance does not come at all, there may be a problem in your relationship with the Lord due to disobedience or lack of meekness and humility. See that you solve this problem first. On the other hand, absence of guidance may simply mean that the Lord wants you to wait upon Him or that you already have enough information to make a wise, mature, and sensible decision. Remember that waiting is probably the hardest lesson to learn because it involves trust rather than leaning on our own understanding.

Conclusion

We have examined a number of issues relating to our walk by faith. The value of faith is based on the object of that faith. If we are actively believing God as revealed in the Bible, then there is unlimited potential as to what can happen in our lives as we claim His promises for us. We will always experience challenges to our faith. It is easy to let unbelief, doubt, fear or worry creep into our lives and cripple our faith. And probably the area that is the biggest hindrance to faith is independence, seeking to control our own lives, rather than a willingness to depend on God. Ways to grow in faith include spending more time worshiping God, spending more time learning about Him and what He has done and what He promises in His Word, practicing thankfulness, and actually stepping out and walking in faith. As we live by faith we will seek guidance and the knowledge of God's specific will for us. When we receive guidance and understanding of His will for our lives, we come back again to the need to act upon that knowledge by faith.

As you move in faith and seek God's will for your life, make Hebrews 11 your inspiration and example of those who lived by faith and were therefore pleasing to God. Faith means pursuing God's will even when it involves hard work and sacrifices. Sometimes there will be disappointments and we may never see the physical results we hoped for, just as happened with many of the heroes in Hebrews 11. The challenge is to move ahead in our walk of faith, trusting God in everything.



PROJECT 2 -- Seeking God's Will

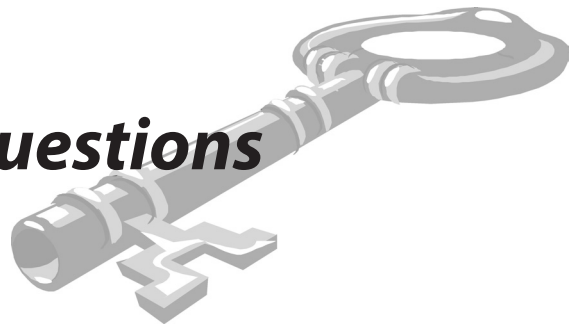
Apply now what you have learned about guidance. Choose one major decision you are currently facing, and work through the following steps based on the material in this lesson:

1. At your time of Bible study and prayer, bring the issue before the Lord and ask Him to reveal His will to you. Meditate upon the ways in which God might reveal His will to you.
2. Continue with your Bible study, meditation, and prayer, waiting upon the Lord to speak to you.
3. If guidance does not come during this time, continue to search for the will of God using the other ways suggested in this lesson. This may take several days.
4. Write down all of the steps you are taking in your decision-making process.
5. List the pros and cons of all the options.

6. Write down the indicators that helped you to identify God's will.
7. After you implement the decision, review and evaluate it. Are there things that you could or should have done differently? Are there other factors that you should have considered? Write them down.
8. Develop a list of key questions to use as a guide for the next time you make a major decision.

Be prepared to share your experience at your next group meeting, particularly the list of key questions that you have developed.

Answers to questions



Question 1

All of them state that the righteous person lives by faith.

Question 2

The two nouns used to describe faith are “assurance” and “conviction”.

Question 3

The parable of the lost son as told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32.

Question 4

- (1) We can have unbroken fellowship with God.
- (2) All that God can give us is ours.

Question 5

He did not believe he would get one so he never asked, never enjoyed it, and instead spent his time in complaining and dissatisfaction.

Question 6

Quite often God is blamed for cutting them short or not treating them like He does His other children.

Question 7

It is because of our unbelief in the love of God, the power of God and the reality of His promises.

Question 8

Despite all that God had done for them they did not believe in His ability to take them into this place.

Question 9

Your answer. We will give you an example for the first one:

Psalm 23:4—We don't have to fear evil because our Shepherd is with us through the darkest times, providing for us and guiding us.

Question 10

Your answer. Yes, there can be benefits to fear. It can help us avoid potential difficulties. It can provide us with adrenaline in an emergency so we can act more quickly and with greater strength.

Question 11

Your answer.

Here are a few suggestions: A constant attitude of fear makes us indecisive and can even lead to physical problems. It limits our potential because we will not take steps of faith that involve risk. It will make us less responsive to the Lord's leading.

Question 12

A furious storm had come up while Jesus and the disciples were in a boat on the lake. The boat was about to sink and Jesus was asleep.

Question 13

He said “You of little faith.” But they had cried out to Him and He calmed the storm.

Question 14

5 times.

Question 15

He tells us to seek His kingdom and righteousness first of all, and then He will provide everything we need.

Question 16

Faith implies helplessness.

QUESTION 17

It states that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ.

Question 18

God speaks to us:

- 1) by the voice of Scripture,
- 2) the voice of the inward impressions of the Holy Spirit,
- 3) the voice of our own higher judgment, and
- 4) the voice of providential circumstances.

Question 19

God’s voice will always be in harmony with itself. In other words all four of these areas should be in agreement.

Question 20

We must have found and obeyed God’s will as it is revealed in the Bible in reference to any subject before we can expect a separate direct personal revelation.

Question 21

We are to use our human judgment and common sense as enlightened by the Spirit of God. We could say using it through the filter of the Holy Spirit. God has given us minds and logic to use with His direction.

Question 22

If God is leading us, a way will open for us to do it without our “forcing” our way through.

Question 23

The Holy Spirit usually impresses it upon our minds to wish or desire to do or not to do something.

Question 24

We should never act in doubt. We must have a clear conviction that what we feel led to do is the right thing.

Question 25

The two mentioned by the author are: a lack of a surrendered will and a lack of faith in Divine guidance.

Question 26

Your answer. The primary means will be to saturate ourselves in the Word of God (see Colossians 3:16.)

Answers to exercises



Exercise 1

Your definition.

Exercise 2

Your answer.

Exercise 3

Your answer. You will receive more input in how to deal with these challenges as you study the next section “Increasing Your Faith”.

Exercise 4

Your answer. Are you guilty like the Israelites of forgetting His mercies to you?

Exercise 5

Your answer.

Exercise 6

Your answer.

Exercise 7

Your answer.

Exercise 8

God’s will is:

- a. To present your bodies as a living sacrifice and to be renewed in your minds
- b. To be filled with the Spirit and walk as wise men
- c. To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all things and bearing fruit in good works and increasing in the knowledge of God
- d. To be sanctified by abstaining from sexual immorality
- e. To give thanks in all things
- f. To do God’s will (that which is pleasing in His sight)
- g. To submit to every human authority
- h. To be willing to suffer
- i. To live the rest of our days for the will of God

Appendix A

APPENDIX



This appendix contains several chapters from the book *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life* by Hannah Whitall Smith. Her book, written in the late nineteenth century, has encouraged generations of Christians with sage advice such as, "When doubts come, meet them, not with arguments, but with assertions of faith. All doubts are an attack of the enemy; the Holy Spirit never suggests them--never. He is the Comforter, not the Accuser; and He never shows us our need without at the same time revealing the Divine supply."

This book is available in complete form. Please ask your leader about it.

Chapter 3, "**The Life Defined**"

Chapter 6, "**Difficulties Concerning Faith**"

Chapter 11, "**Difficulties Concerning Guidance**"

Chapter 14, "**Doubts**"

The Life Defined

In my last chapter I tried to settle the question as to the scripturalness of the experience sometimes called the Higher Christian Life, but which to my own mind is best described in the words, the “life hid with Christ in God.” I shall now, therefore, consider it as a settled point that the Scriptures do set before the believer in the Lord Jesus a life of abiding rest and of continual victory, which is very far beyond the ordinary line of Christian experience; and that in the Bible we have presented to us a Saviour able to save us from the power of our sins, as really as He saves us from their guilt.

The point to be next considered is, as to what this hidden life consists in, and how it differs from every other sort of Christian experience.

And as to this, it is simply letting the Lord carry our burdens and manage our affairs for us, instead of trying to do it ourselves.

Most Christians are like a man who was toiling along the road, bending under a heavy burden, when a wagon overtook him, and the driver kindly offered to help him on his journey. He joyfully accepted the offer, but when seated, continued to bend beneath his burden, which he still kept on his shoulders. “Why do you not lay down your burden?” asked the kind-hearted driver. “Oh!” replied the man, “I feel that it is almost too much to ask you to carry me, and I could not think of letting you carry my burden too.” And so Christians, who have given themselves into the care and keeping of the Lord Jesus, still continue to bend beneath the weight of their burden, and often go weary and heavy-laden throughout the whole length of their journey.

When I speak of burdens, I mean everything that troubles us, whether spiritual or temporal.

I mean, first of all, ourselves. The greatest burden we have to carry in life is self. The most difficult thing we have to manage is self. Our own daily living, our frames and feelings, our especial weaknesses and temptations, and our peculiar temperaments, our inward affairs of every kind, these are the things that perplex and worry us more than anything else, and that bring us oftenest into bondage and darkness. In laying off your burdens, therefore, the first one you must get rid of is yourself. You must hand yourself and all your inward experiences, your temptations, your temperament, your frames and feelings, all over into the care and keeping of your God, and leave them there. He made you, and therefore He understands you and knows how to manage you, and you must trust Him to do it. Say to Him, “Here, Lord, I abandon myself to thee. I have tried in every way I could think of to manage myself, and to make myself what I know I ought to be, but have always failed. Now I give it up to thee. Do thou take entire possession of me. Work in me all the good pleasure of thy will. Mould and fashion me into such a vessel as seemeth good to thee. I leave myself in thy hands, and I believe thou wilt, according to thy promise, make me into a vessel unto thine honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” And here you must rest, trusting yourself thus to Him continually and absolutely.

Next, you must lay off every other burden,—your health, your reputation, your Christian work, your houses, your children, your business, your servants; everything, in short, that concerns you, whether inward or outward.

Christians always commit the keeping of their souls for eternity to the Lord, because they know, without a shadow of a doubt, that they cannot keep these themselves. But the things of this present life they take into their own keeping, and try to carry on their own shoulders, with the perhaps unconfessed feeling that it is a great deal to ask of the Lord to carry them, and that they cannot think of asking Him to carry their burdens too.

I knew a Christian lady who had a very heavy temporal burden. It took away her sleep and her appetite, and there was danger of her health breaking down under it. One day, when it seemed especially heavy, she noticed lying on the table near her a little tract called “Hannah’s Faith.” Attracted

by the title, she picked it up and began to read it, little knowing, however, that it was to create a revolution in her whole experience. The story was of a poor woman who had been carried triumphantly through a life of unusual sorrow. She was giving the history of her life to a kind visitor on one occasion, and at the close the visitor said, feelingly, "O Hannah, I do not see how you could bear so much sorrow!" "I did not bear it," was the quick reply; "the Lord bore it for me." "Yes," said the visitor "that is the right way. You must take your troubles to the Lord." "Yes," replied Hannah, "but we must do more than that; we must leave them there. Most people," she continued, "take their burdens to Him, but they bring them away with them again, and are just as worried and unhappy as ever. But I take mine, and I leave them with Him, and come away and forget them. And if the worry comes back, I take it to Him again; I do this over and over, until at last I just forget that I have any worries, and am at perfect rest."

My friend was very much struck with this plan and resolved to try it. The circumstances of her life she could not alter, but she took them to the Lord, and handed them over into His management; and then she believed that He took it, and she left all the responsibility and the worry and anxiety with Him. As often as the anxieties returned she took them back; and the result was that, although the circumstances remained unchanged, her soul was kept in perfect peace in the midst of them. She felt that she had found out a blessed secret, and from that time she tried never again to carry her own burdens, nor to manage anything for herself.

And the secret she found so effectual in her outward affairs, she found to be still more effectual in her inward ones, which were in truth even more utterly unmanageable. She abandoned her whole self to the Lord, with all that she was and all that she had, and, believing that He took that which she had committed to Him, she ceased to fret and worry, and her life became all sunshine in the gladness of belonging to Him. And this was the Higher Christian Life! It was a very simple secret she found out. Only this, that it was possible to obey God's commandment contained in those words, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God"; and that, in obeying it, the result would inevitably be, according to the promise, that the "peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

There are many other things to be said about this life hid with Christ in God, many details as to what the Lord Jesus does for those who thus abandon themselves to Him. But the gist of the whole matter is here stated, and the soul that has got hold of this secret has found the key that will unlock the whole treasure-house of God.

And now I do trust that I have made you hunger for this blessed life. Would you not like to get rid of your burdens? Do you not long to hand over the management of your unmanageable self into the hands of One who is able to manage you? Are you not tired and weary, and does not the rest I speak of look sweet to you?

Do you recollect the delicious sense of rest with which you have sometimes gone to bed at night, after a day of great exertion and weariness? How delightful was the sensation of relaxing every muscle, and letting your body go in a perfect abandonment of ease and comfort. The strain of the day had ceased for a few hours at least, and the work of the day had been thrown off. You no longer had to hold up an aching head or a weary back. You trusted yourself to the bed in an absolute confidence, and it held you up, without effort, or strain, or even thought on your part. You rested.

But suppose you had doubted the strength or the stability of your bed, and had dreaded each moment to find it giving away beneath you and landing you on the floor; could you have rested then? Would not every muscle have been strained in a fruitless effort to hold yourself up, and would not the weariness have been greater than not to have gone to bed at all?

Let this analogy teach you what it means to rest in the Lord. Let your souls lie down upon His sweet will, as your bodies lie down in your beds at night. Relax every strain and lay off every bur-

den. Let yourselves go in perfect abandonment of ease and comfort, sure that when He holds you up you are perfectly safe.

Your part is simply to rest. His part is to sustain you, and He cannot fail.

Or take another analogy, which our Lord Himself has abundantly sanctioned, that of the child-life. For "Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven."

Now, what are the characteristics of a little child and how does he live? He lives by faith, and his chiefest characteristic is thoughtlessness. His life is one long trust from year's end to year's end. He trusts his parents, he trusts his caretakers, he trusts his teachers, he even trusts people often who are utterly unworthy of trust, because of the confidingness of his nature. And his trust is abundantly answered. He provides nothing for himself, and yet everything is provided. He takes no thought for the morrow, and forms no plans, and yet all his life is planned out for him, and he finds his paths made ready, opening out to him as he comes to them day by day, and hour by hour. He goes in and out of his father's house with an unspeakable ease and abandonment, enjoying all the good things it contains, without having spent a penny in procuring them. Pestilence may walk through the streets of his city, but he regards it not. Famine and fire and war may rage around him, but under his father's tender care he abides in utter unconcern and perfect rest. He lives in the present moment, and receives his life without question as it comes to him day by day from his father's hands.

I was visiting once in a wealthy house, where there was one only adopted child, upon whom was lavished all the love and tenderness and care that human hearts could bestow or human means procure. And as I watched that child running in and out day by day, free and light-hearted, with the happy carelessness of childhood, I thought what a picture it was of our wonderful position as children in the house of our Heavenly Father. And I said to myself, "If nothing could so grieve and wound the loving hearts around her, as to see this little child beginning to be worried or anxious about herself in any way, about whether her food and clothes would be provided for her, or how she was to get her education or her future support, how much more must the great, loving heart of our God and Father be grieved and wounded at seeing His children taking so much anxious care and thought!" And I understood why it was that our Lord had said to us so emphatically, "Take no thought for yourselves."

Who is the best cared for in every household? Is it not the little children? And does not the least of all, the helpless baby, receive the largest share? As a late writer has said, the baby "toils not, neither does he spin; and yet he is fed, and clothed, and loved, and rejoiced in," and none so much as he.

This life of faith, then, about which I am writing, consists in just this; being a child in the Father's house. And when this is said, enough is said to transform every weary, burdened life into one of blessedness and rest.

Let the ways of childish confidence and freedom from care, which so please you and win your hearts in your own little ones, teach you what should be your ways with God; and leaving yourselves in His hands, learn to be literally "careful for nothing"; and you shall find it to be a fact that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep (as in a garrison) your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Notice the word "nothing" in the above passage, as covering all possible grounds for anxiety, both inward and outward. We are continually tempted to think it is our duty to be anxious about some things. Perhaps our thought will be, "Oh, yes, it is quite right to give up all anxiety in a general way; and in spiritual matters of course anxiety is wrong; but there are things about which it would be a sin not to be anxious; about our children, for instance, or those we love, or about our church affairs and the cause of truth, or about our business matters. It would show a great want of right feeling not to be anxious about such things as these." Or else our thoughts take the other tack, and we say to ourselves, "Yes, it is quite right to commit our loved ones and all our outward affairs to the Lord, but when it comes to our inward lives, our religious

experiences, our temptations, our besetting sins, our growth in grace, and all such things, these we ought to be anxious about; for if we are not, they will be sure to be neglected.”

To such suggestions, and to all similar ones, the answer is found in our text,—

“In NOTHING be anxious.”

In Matt. 6:25-34, our Lord illustrates this being without anxiety, by telling us to behold the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, as examples of the sort of life He would have us live. As the birds rejoice in the care of their God and are fed, and as the lilies grow in His sunlight, so must we, without anxiety, and without fear. Let the sparrows speak to us:—

*I am only tiny sparrow,
A bird of low degree;*

*My life is of little value,
But the dear Lord cares for me.*

*I have no barn nor storehouse,
I neither sow nor reap;*

*God gives me a sparrow's portion,
But never a seed to keep.*

*I know there are many sparrows;
All over the world they are found;*

*But our heavenly Father knoweth
When one of us falls to the ground.*

*Though small, we are never forgotten;
Though weak, we are never afraid;*

*For we know the dear Lord keepeth
The life of the creatures he made.*

*I fly through the thickest forest,
I light on many a spray;*

*I have no chart nor compass,
But I never lose my way.*

*And I fold my wing at twilight
Wherever I happen to be;*

*For the Father is always watching,
And no harm will come to me.*

*I am only a little sparrow,
A bird of low degree,*

*But I know the Father loves me;
Have you less faith than we?*

Difficulties Concerning Faith

The next step after consecration, in the soul's progress out of the wilderness of Christian experience, into the land that floweth with milk and honey, is that of faith. And here, as in the first step, the enemy is very skilful in making difficulties and interposing obstacles.

The child of God, having had his eyes opened to see the fulness there is in Jesus for him, and having been made to long to appropriate that fulness to himself, is met with the assertion on the part of every teacher to whom he applies, that this fulness is only to be received by faith. But the subject of faith is involved in such a hopeless mystery in his mind, that this assertion, instead of throwing light upon the way of entrance, only seems to make it more difficult and involved than ever.

"Of course it is to be by faith," he says, "for I know that everything in the Christian life is by faith. But then, that is just what makes it so hard, for I have no faith, and I do not even know what it is, nor how to get it." And, baffled at the very outset by this insuperable difficulty, he is plunged into darkness, and almost despair.

This trouble all arises from the fact that the subject of faith is very generally misunderstood; for in reality faith is the plainest and most simple thing in the world, and the most easy of attainment.

Your idea of faith, I suppose, has been something like this. You have looked upon it as in some way a sort of thing, either a religious exercise of soul, or an inward gracious disposition of heart; something tangible, in fact, which, when you have got, you can look at and rejoice over, and use as a passport to God's favor, or a coin with which to purchase His gifts. And you have been praying for faith, expecting all the while to get something like this, and never having received any such thing, you are insisting upon it that you have no faith. Now faith, in fact, is not in the least this sort of thing. It is nothing at all tangible. It is simply believing God, and, like sight, it is nothing apart from its object. You might as well shut your eyes and look inside to see whether you have sight, as to look inside to discover whether you have faith. You see something, and thus know that you have sight; you believe something, and thus know that you have faith. For, as sight is only seeing, so faith is only believing. And as the only necessary thing about seeing is, that you see the thing as it is, so the only necessary thing about believing is, that you believe the thing as it is. The virtue does not lie in your believing, but in the thing you believe. If you believe the truth you are saved; if you believe a lie you are lost. The believing in both cases is the same; the things believed in are exactly opposite, and it is this which makes the mighty difference. Your salvation comes, not because your faith saves you, but because it links you on to the Saviour who saves; and your believing is really nothing but the link.

I do beg of you to recognize, then, the extreme simplicity of faith; that it is nothing more nor less than just believing God when He says He either has done something for us, or will do it; and then trusting Him to do it. It is so simple that it is hard to explain. If any one asks me what it means to trust another to do a piece of work for me, I can only answer that it means letting that other one do it, and feeling it perfectly unnecessary for me to do it myself. Every one of us has trusted very important pieces of work to others in this way, and has felt perfect rest in thus trusting, because of the confidence we have had in those who have undertaken to do it. How constantly do mothers trust their most precious infants to the care of nurses, and feel no shadow of anxiety? How continually we are all of us trusting our health and our lives, without a thought of fear, to cooks and coachmen, engine drivers, railway conductors, and all sorts of paid servants, who have us completely at their mercy, and could plunge us into misery or death in a moment, if they chose to do so, or even if they failed in the necessary carefulness? All this we do, and make no fuss about it. Upon the slightest acquaintance, often, we thus put our trust in people, requiring only the general knowledge of human nature, and the common rules of human intercourse; and we never feel as if we were doing anything in the least remarkable.

You have done all this yourself, dear reader, and are doing it continually. You would not be able to live in this world and go through the customary routine of life a single day, if you could not trust your fellow-men. And it never enters into your head to say you cannot.

But yet you do not hesitate to say, continually, that you cannot trust your God!

I wish you would just now try to imagine yourself acting in your human relations as you do in your spiritual relations. Suppose you should begin tomorrow with the notion in your head that you could not trust anybody, because you had no faith. When you sat down to breakfast you would say, "I cannot eat anything on this table, for I have no faith, and I cannot believe the cook has not put poison in the coffee, or that the butcher has not sent home diseased meat." So you would go starving away. Then when you went out to your daily avocations, you would say, "I cannot ride in the railway train, for I have no faith, and therefore I cannot trust the engineer, nor the conductor, nor the builders of the carriages, nor the managers of the road." So you would be compelled to walk everywhere, and grow unutterably weary in the effort, besides being actually unable to reach many of the places you could have reached in the train. Then, when your friends met you with any statements, or your business agent with any accounts, you would say, "I am very sorry that I cannot believe you, but I have no faith, and never can believe anybody." If you opened a newspaper you would be forced to lay it down again, saying, "I really cannot believe a word this paper says, for I have no faith; I do not believe there is any such person as the queen, for I never saw her; nor any such country as Ireland, for I was never there. And I have no faith, so of course I cannot believe anything that I have not actually felt and touched myself. It is a great trial, but I cannot help it, for I have no faith."

Just picture such a day as this, and see how disastrous it would be to yourself, and what utter folly it would appear to any one who should watch you through the whole of it. Realize how your friends would feel insulted, and how your servants would refuse to serve you another day. And then ask yourself the question, if this want of faith in your fellow-men would be so dreadful, and such utter folly, what must it be when you tell God that you have no power to trust Him nor to believe His word; that "it is a great trial, but you cannot help it, for you have no faith"?

Is it possible that you can trust your fellow-men and cannot trust your God? That you can receive the "witness of men," and cannot receive the "witness of God"? That you can believe man's records, and cannot believe God's record? That you can commit your dearest earthly interests to your weak, failing fellow-creatures without a fear, and are afraid to commit your spiritual interests to the blessed Saviour who shed His blood for the very purpose of saving you, and who is declared to be "able to save you to the uttermost"?

Surely, surely, dear believer, you, whose very name of believer implies that you can believe, will never again dare to excuse yourself on the plea of having no faith. For when you say this, you mean of course that you have no faith in God, since you are not asked to have faith in yourself, and you would be in a very wrong condition of soul if you had. Let me beg of you then, when you think or say these things, always to complete the sentence and say, "I have no faith in God, I cannot believe God"; and this I am sure will soon become so dreadful to you, that you will not dare to continue it.

But you say, I cannot believe without the Holy Spirit. Very well; will you conclude that your want of faith is because of the failure of the blessed Spirit to do His work? For if it is, then surely you are not to blame, and need feel no condemnation; and all exhortations to you to believe are useless.

But, no! Do you not see that, in taking up this position, that you have no faith and cannot believe, you are not only "making God a liar," but you are also manifesting an utter want of confidence in the Holy Spirit? For He is always ready to help our infirmities. We never have to wait for Him, He is always waiting for us. And I for my part have such absolute confidence in the blessed Holy Ghost, and in His being always ready to do his work, that I dare to say to every one of you, that you can believe now, at this very moment, and that if you do not, it is not the Spirit's fault, but your own.

Put your will then over on to the believing side. Say, "Lord I will believe, I do believe," and continue to say it. Insist upon believing, in the face of every suggestion of doubt with which you may be tempted. Out of your very unbelief, throw yourself headlong on to the word and promises of God, and dare to abandon yourself to the keeping and saving power of the Lord Jesus. If you have ever trusted a precious interest in the hands of any earthly friend, I beseech you, trust yourself now and all your spiritual interests in the hands of your Heavenly Friend, and never, never, NEVER allow yourself to doubt again.

And remember, there are two things which are more utterly incompatible than even oil and water, and these two are trust and worry. Would you call it trust, if you should give something into the hands of a friend to attend to for you, and then should spend your nights and days in anxious thought and worry as to whether it would be rightly and successfully done? And can you call it trust, when you have given the saving and keeping of your soul into the hands of the Lord, if day after day and night after night you are spending hours of anxious thought and questionings about the matter? When a believer really trusts anything, he ceases to worry about that thing which he has trusted. And when he worries, it is a plain proof that he does not trust. Tested by this rule how little real trust there is in the Church of Christ! No wonder our Lord asked the pathetic question, "When the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" He will find plenty of activity, a great deal of earnestness, and doubtless many consecrated hearts; but shall he find faith, the one thing He values more than all the rest? It is a solemn question, and I would that every Christian heart would ponder it well. But may the time past of our lives suffice us to have shared in the unbelief of the world; and let us every one, who know our blessed Lord and His unspeakable trustworthiness, set to our seal that He is true, by our generous abandonment of trust in Him.

I remember, very early in my Christian life, having every tender and loyal impulse within me stirred to its depths by an appeal I met with in a volume of old sermons to all who loved the Lord Jesus, that they should show to others how worthy He was of being trusted, by the steadfastness of their own faith in Him. And I remember my soul cried out with an eager longing that I might be called to walk in paths so dark, that an utter abandonment of trust might be my blessed and glorious privilege.

"Ye have not passed this way heretofore," it may be; but today it is your happy privilege to prove, as never before, your loyal confidence in the Lord by starting out with Him on a life and walk of faith, lived moment by moment in absolute and childlike trust in Him.

You have trusted Him in a few things, and He has not failed you. Trust Him now for everything, and see if He does not do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you could ever have asked or thought; not according to your power or capacity, but according to His own mighty power, that will work in you all the good pleasure of His most blessed will.

You find no difficulty in trusting the Lord with the management of the universe and all the outward creation, and can your case be any more complex or difficult than these, that you need to be anxious or troubled about his management of it. Away with such unworthy doubtings! Take your stand on the power and trustworthiness of your God, and see how quickly all difficulties will vanish before a steadfast determination to believe. Trust in the dark, trust in the light, trust at night, and trust in the morning, and you will find that the faith, which may begin by a mighty effort, will end sooner or later by becoming the easy and natural habit of the soul.

All things are possible to God, and "all things are possible to him that believeth." Faith has, in times past, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens"; and faith can do it again. For our Lord Himself says unto us, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

If you are a child of God at all, you must have at least as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, and therefore you dare not say again that you cannot trust because you have no faith. Say rather, "I can trust my Lord, and I will trust Him, and not all the powers of earth or hell shall be able to make me doubt my wonderful, glorious, faithful Redeemer!"

In that greatest event of this century, the emancipation of our slaves, there is a wonderful illustration of the way of faith. The slaves received their freedom by faith, just as we must receive ours. The good news was carried to them that the government had proclaimed their freedom. As a matter of fact they were free the moment the Proclamation was issued, but as a matter of experience they did not come into actual possession of their freedom until they had heard the good news and had believed it. The fact had to come first, but the believing was necessary before the fact became available, and the feeling would follow last of all. This is the divine order always, and the order of common-sense as well. I. The fact. II. The faith. III. The feeling. But man reverses this order and says, I. The feeling. II. The faith. III. The fact.

Had the slaves followed man's order in regard to their emancipation, and refused to believe in it until they had first felt it, they might have remained in slavery a long while. I have heard of one instance where this was the case. In a little out-of-the-way Southern town a Northern lady found, about two or three years after the war was over, some slaves who had not yet taken possession of their freedom. An assertion of hers, that the North had set them free, aroused the attention of an old colored auntie, who interrupted her with the eager question,—

"O missus, is we free?"

"Of course you are," replied the lady.

"O missus, is you sure?" urged the woman, with intensest eagerness.

"Certainly, I am sure," answered the lady. "Why, is it possible you did not know it?"

"Well," said the woman, "we heered tell as how we was free, and we asked master, and he `lowed we wasn't, and so we was afraid to go. And then we heered tell again, and we went to the cunnel, and he `lowed we'd better stay with ole massa. And so we's just been off and on. Sometimes we'd hope we was free, and then again we'd think we wasn't. But now, missus, if you is sure we is free, won't you tell me all about it?"

Seeing that this was a case of real need, the lady took the pains to explain the whole thing to the poor woman; all about the war, and the Northern army, and Abraham Lincoln, and his Proclamation of Emancipation, and the present freedom.

The poor slave listened with the most intense eagerness. She heard the good news. She believed it. And when the story was ended, she walked out of the room with an air of the utmost independence, saying as she went,—"I's free! I's ain't agoing to stay with ol massa any longer!"

She had at last received her freedom, and she had received it by faith. The government had declared her to be free long before, but this had not availed her, because she had never yet believed in this declaration. The good news had not profited her, not being "mixed with faith" in the one who heard it. But now she believed, and believing, she dared to reckon herself to be free. And this, not because of any change in herself or her surroundings, not because of any feelings of emotions of her own heart, but because she had confidence in the word of another, who had come to her proclaiming the good news of her freedom.

Need I make the application? In a hundred different messages God has declared to us our freedom, and over and over He urges us to reckon ourselves free. Let your faith then lay hold of His proclamation, and assert it to be true. Declare to yourself, to your friends, and in the secret of your soul to God, that you are free. Refuse to listen for a moment to the lying assertions of your old master, that you are still his slave. Let nothing discourage you, no inward feelings nor outward

signs. Hold on to your reckoning in the face of all opposition, and I can promise you, on the authority of our Lord, that according to your faith it shall be unto you.

Of all the worships we can bring our God, none is so sweet to Him as this utter self-abandoning trust, and none brings Him so much glory. Therefore in every dark hour remember that “though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” it is in order that “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Difficulties Concerning Guidance

You have now begun, dear reader, the life of faith. You have given yourself to the Lord to be His wholly and altogether, and He has taken you and has begun to mould and fashion you into a vessel unto His honor. Your one most earnest desire is to be very pliable in His hands, and to follow Him whithersoever He may lead you, and you are trusting Him to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. But you find a great difficulty here. You have not learned yet to know the voice of the Good Shepherd, and are therefore in great doubt and perplexity as to what really is His will concerning you.

Perhaps there are certain paths into which God seems to be calling you, of which your friends utterly disapprove. And these friends, it may be, are older than yourself in the Christian life, and seem to you also to be much further advanced. You can scarcely bear to differ from them or distress them; and you feel also very diffident of yielding to any seeming impressions of duty of which they do not approve. And yet you cannot get rid of these impressions, and you are plunged into great doubt and uneasiness.

There is a way out of all these difficulties, to the fully surrendered soul. I would repeat, fully surrendered, because if there is any reserve of will upon any point, it becomes almost impossible to find out the mind of God in reference to that point; and therefore the first thing is to be sure that you really do purpose to obey the Lord in every respect. If however this is the case, and your soul only needs to know the will of God in order to consent to it, then you surely cannot doubt His willingness to make His will known, and to guide you in the right paths. There are many very clear promises in reference to this. Take, for instance, John 10:3, 4: "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice." Or, John 14:26: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Or, James 1:5, 6: "If any of you lack wisdom, let Him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." With such passages as these, and many more like them, we must believe that Divine guidance is promised to us, and our faith must confidently look for and expect it. This is essential; for in James 1:6, 7, we are told, "Let him ask in faith nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not such a man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

Settle this point then first of all, that Divine guidance has been promised, and that you are sure to have it, if you ask for it; and let no suggestion of doubt turn you from this.

Next, you must remember that our God has all knowledge and all wisdom, and that therefore it is very possible He may guide you into paths wherein He knows great blessings are awaiting you, but which to the short-sighted human eyes around you seem sure to result in confusion and loss. You must recognize the fact that God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts, nor His ways as man's ways; and that He who knows the end of things from the beginning, alone can judge of what the results of any course of action may be. You must therefore realize that His very love for you may perhaps lead you to run counter to the loving wishes of even your dearest friends. You must learn from Luke 14:26-33, and similar passages, that in order, not to be saved only, but to be a disciple or follower of your Lord, you may perhaps be called upon to forsake all that you have, and to turn your backs on even father or mother, or brother or sister, or husband or wife, or it may be your own life also. Unless the possibility of this is clearly recognized, the soul would be very likely to get into difficulty, because it often happens that the child of God who enters upon this life of obedience is sooner or later led into paths which meet with the disapproval of those he best loves; and unless he is prepared for this, and can trust the Lord through it all, he will scarcely know what to do.

All this, it will of course be understood, is perfectly in harmony with those duties of honor and love which we owe to one another in the various relations of life. The nearer we are to Christ, the more shall we be enabled to exemplify the meekness and gentleness of our Lord, and the more tender will be our consideration for those who are our natural guardians and counsellors. The Master's guidance will always manifest itself by the Master's Spirit, and where, in obedience to Him, we are led to act contrary to the advice or wishes of our friends, we shall prove that this is our motive, by the love and patience which will mark our conduct.

But this point having been settled, we come now to the question as to how God's guidance is to come to us, and how we shall be able to know His voice.

There are four especial ways in which God speaks: by the voice of Scripture, the voice of the inward impressions of the Holy Spirit, the voice of our own higher judgment, and the voice of providential circumstances.

Where these four harmonize, it is safe to say that God speaks. For I lay it down as a foundation principle, which no one can gainsay, that of course His voice will always be in harmony with itself, no matter in how many different ways He may speak. The voices may be many, the message can be but one. If God tells me in one voice to do or to leave undone anything, He cannot possibly tell me the opposite in another voice. If there is a contradiction in the voices, the speaker cannot be the same. Therefore, my rule for distinguishing the voice of God would be to bring it to the test of this harmony.

If I have an impression, therefore, I must see if it is in accordance with Scripture, and whether it commends itself to my own higher judgment, and also whether, as we Quakers say, "way opens" for its carrying out. If either one of these tests fail, it is not safe to proceed; but I must wait in quiet trust until the Lord shows me the point of harmony, which He surely will, sooner or later, if it is His voice that has spoken.

For we must not overlook the fact that there are other voices that speak to the soul. There is the loud and clamoring voice of self, that is always seeking to be heard. And there are the voices, too, of evil and deceiving spirits, who lie in wait to entrap every traveller entering these higher regions of the spiritual life. In the same epistle which tells us that we are seated in "heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 2:6), we are also told that we shall have to fight there with spiritual enemies (Eph. 6:12). These spiritual enemies, whoever or whatever they may be, must necessarily communicate with us by means of our spiritual faculties, and their voices, therefore, will be, as the voice of God is, an inward impression made upon our spirits.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit may tell us, by impressions, what is the will of God concerning us, so also will these spiritual enemies tell us, by impressions, what is their will concerning us, though not of course giving it their name. It is very plain, therefore, that we must have some test or standard by which to try these inward impressions, in order that we may know whose voice it is that is speaking. And that test will always be the harmony to which I have referred. Sometimes, under a mistaken idea of exalting the Divine Spirit, earnest and honest Christians have ignored and even violated the teachings of Scripture, have disregarded the plain pointings of Providence, and have outraged their own higher judgment. God, who sees the sincerity of their hearts, can and does pity and forgive, but the consequences as to this life are often very sad.

Our first test, therefore, of the Divine authority of any voice which may seem to speak to us, must be its harmony in moral character with the mind and will of God, as revealed to us in the Gospel of Christ. Whatever is contrary to this, cannot be Divine, because God cannot contradict Himself.

Until we have found and obeyed God's will in reference to any subject, as it is revealed in the Bible, we cannot expect a separate direct personal revelation. A great many fatal mistakes are made in this matter of guidance, by the overlooking of this simple rule. Where our Father has written out for us plain directions about anything, He will not, of course, make an especial revelation to us

concerning it. No man, for instance, needs or could expect any direct revelation to tell him not to steal, because God has already in the Scriptures plainly declared His will about it. This seems such an obvious thing that I would not speak of it, but that I have frequently met with Christians who have altogether overlooked it, and have gone off into fanaticism as the result. For the Scriptures are far more explicit even about details than most people think. And there are not many important affairs in life for which a clear direction may not be found in God's book. Take the matter of dress, and we have 1 Pet. 3:3, 4, and 1 Tim. 2:9, 10. Take the matter of conversation, and we have Eph. 4:29, and 5:4. Take the matter of avenging injuries and standing up for your rights, and we have Rom. 12:19, 20, 21, and Matt. 5:38-48, and 1 Pet. 2:19-21. Take the matter of forgiving one another, and we have Eph. 4:32 and Mark 11:25, 26. Take the matter of conformity to the world, and we have Rom. 12:2, and 1 John 2:15-17, and James 4:4. Take the matter of anxieties of all kind, and we have Matt. 6:25-34, and Phil. 4:6, 7.

I only give these as examples to show how very full and practical the Bible guidance is. If, therefore, you find yourself in perplexity, first of all search and see whether the Bible speaks on the point in question, asking God to make plain to you by the power of His Spirit, through the Scripture, what is His mind. And whatever shall seem to you to be plainly taught there, that you must obey.

When we read and meditate upon this record of God's mind and will, with our understandings thus illuminated by the inspiring Spirit, our obedience will be as truly an obedience to a present, living word, as though it were afresh spoken to us today by our Lord from Heaven. The Bible is not only an ancient message from God sent to us many ages ago, but it is a present message sent to us now each time we read it. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," and obedience to these words now is a living obedience to a present and personal command.

But it is essential in this connection to remember that the Bible is a book of principles, and not a book of disjointed aphorisms. Isolated texts may often be made to sanction things, to which the principles of Scripture are totally opposed. I heard not long ago of a Christian woman in a Western meeting, who, having had the text, "For we walk by faith, and not by sight," brought very vividly before her mind, felt a strong impression that it was a command to be literally obeyed in the outward; and, blindfolding her eyes, insisted on walking up and down the aisle of the meeting-house, as an illustration of the walk of faith. She very soon stumbled and fell against the stove, burning herself seriously, and then wondered at the mysterious dispensation. The principles of Scripture, and her own sanctified common-sense, if applied to this case, would have saved her from the delusion.

The second test, therefore, to which our impressions must be brought, is that of our own higher judgment, or common-sense.

It is as true now as in the days when Solomon wrote, that a "man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels"; and his exhortation still continues binding upon us: "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding."

As far as I can see, the Scriptures everywhere make it an essential thing for the children of God to use all the faculties which have been given them, in their journey through this world. They are to use their outward faculties for their outward walk, and their inward faculties for their inward walk. And they might as well expect to be "kept" from dashing their feet against a stone in the outward, if they walk blindfold, as to be "kept" from spiritual stumbling, if they put aside their judgment and common-sense in their interior life.

I asked a Christian of "sound mind" lately how she distinguished between the voice of false spirits and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and she replied promptly, "I rap them over the head, and see if they have any common-sense."

Some, however, may say here, "But I thought we were not to depend on our human understanding in Divine things." I answer to this, that we are not to depend on our unenlightened human under-

standing, but upon our human judgment and common-sense, enlightened by the Spirit of God. That is, God will speak to us through the faculties He has Himself given us, and not independently of them. That is, just as we are to use our eyes when we walk, no matter how full of faith we may be, so also we are to use our mental faculties in our inward life.

The third and last test to which our impressions must be brought is that of providential circumstances. If a “leading” is of God, way will always open for it. Our Lord assures us of this when He says in John 10:4, “And when He putteth forth His own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know his voice.” Notice here the expression “goeth before,” and “follow.” He goes before to open a way, and we are to follow in the way thus opened. It is never a sign of a Divine leading when the Christian insists on opening his own way, and riding rough-shod over all opposing things. If the Lord “goes before” us, He will open all doors for us, and we shall not need ourselves to hammer them down.

The fourth point I would make is this: that, just as our impressions must be tested, as I have shown, by the other three voices, so must these other voices be tested by our inward impressions; and if we feel a “stop in our minds” about anything, we must wait until that is removed before acting. A Christian who had advanced with unusual rapidity in the Divine life, gave me as her secret this simple receipt: “I always mind the checks.” We must not ignore the voice of our inward impressions, nor ride rough-shod over them, any more than we must the other three voices of which I have spoken.

These four voices, then, will always be found to agree in any truly Divine leading, i.e., the voice of our impressions, the voice of Scripture, the voice of our own sanctified judgment, and the voice of providential circumstances; and where these four do not all agree at first, we must wait until they do.

A divine sense of “oughtness,” derived from the harmony of all God’s various voices, is the only safe foundation for any action.

And now I have guarded the points of danger, do permit me to let myself out for a little to the blessedness and joy of this direct communication of God’s will to us. It seems to me to be the grandest of privileges. In the first place, that God should love me enough to care about the details of my life is perfectly wonderful. And then that He should be willing to tell me all about it, and to let me know just now to live and walk so as to perfectly please Him, seems almost too good to be true. We never care about the little details of people’s lives unless we love them. It is a matter of indifference to us with the majority of people we meet, as to what they do or how they spend their time; but as soon as we begin to love any one, we begin at once to care. That God cares, therefore, is just a precious proof of His love; and it is most blessed to have Him speak to us about everything in our lives, about our duties, about our pleasures, about our friendships, about our occupations, about all that we do, or think, or say. You must know this in your own experience, dear reader, if you would come into the full joy and privilege of this life hid with Christ in God, for it is one of its most precious gifts!

God’s promise is, that He will work in us to will as well as to do of His good pleasure. This, of course, means that He will take possession of our will, and work it for us, and that His suggestions will come to us, not so much commands from the outside, as desires springing up within. They will originate in our will; we shall feel as though we wanted to do so and so, not as though we must. And this makes it a service of perfect liberty; for it is always easy to do what we desire to do, let the accompanying circumstances be as difficult as they may. Every mother knows that she could secure perfect and easy obedience in her child, if she could only get into that child’s will and work it for him, making him want himself to do the things she willed he should. And this is what our Father does for His children in the new dispensation; He writes His laws on our hearts and

on our minds, and we love them, and are drawn to our obedience by our affections and judgment, not driven by our fears.

The way in which the Holy Spirit, therefore, usually works in His direct guidance is to impress upon the mind a wish or desire to do or leave undone certain things.

The soul when engaged, perhaps, in prayer, feels a sudden suggestion made to its inmost consciousness in reference to a certain point of duty. "I would like to do this or the other," it thinks, "I wish I could." Or perhaps the suggestion may come as question, "I wonder whether I had not better do so and so?" Or it may be only at first in the way of a conviction that such is the right and best thing to be done.

At once the matter should be committed to the Lord, with an instant consent of the will to obey Him; and if the suggestion is in accordance with the Scriptures, and a sanctified judgment, and with Providential circumstances, an immediate obedience is the safest and easiest course. At the moment when the Spirit speaks, it is always easy to obey; if the soul hesitates and begins to reason, it becomes more and more difficult continually. As a general rule, the first convictions are the right ones in a fully surrendered heart; for God is faithful in His dealings with us, and will cause His voice to be heard before any other voices. Such convictions, therefore, should never be met by reasoning. Prayer and trust are the only safe attitudes of the soul; and even these should be but momentary, as it were, lest the time for action should pass and the blessing be missed.

If, however, the suggestion does not seem quite clear enough to act upon, and doubt and perplexity ensue, especially if it is something about which one's friends hold a different opinion, then we shall need to wait for further light. The Scripture rule is, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin"; which means plainly that we must never act in doubt. A clear conviction of right is the only safe guide. But we must wait in faith, and in an attitude of entire surrender, saying, "Yes," continually to the will of our Lord, whatever it may be. I believe the lack of a will thus surrendered lies at the root of many of our difficulties; and next to this lies the want of faith in any real Divine guidance. God's children are amazingly skeptical here. They read the promises and they feel the need, but somehow they cannot seem to believe the guidance will be given to them; as if God should want us to obey His voice, but did not know how to make us hear and understand Him. It is, therefore, very possible for God to speak, but for the soul not to hear, because it does not believe He is speaking. No earthly parent or master could possibly guide his children or servants, if they should refuse to believe he was speaking, and should not accept his voice as being really the expression of his will.

*God, who at sundry times and in manners many,
Spake to the fathers and is speaking still,
Eager to see if ever or if any
Souls will obey and hearken to His will.*

Every moment of our lives our Father is seeking to reveal Himself to us. "I that speak unto thee am He. I that speak in thy heart, I that speak in thy outward circumstances, I that speak in thy losses, I that speak in thy gains, I that speak in thy sorrows or in thy joys, I that speak everywhere and in everything, am He."

We must, therefore, have perfect confidence that the Lord's voice is speaking to us to teach and lead us, and that He will give us the wisdom needed for our right guidance; and when we have asked for light, we must accept our strongest conviction of "oughtness" as being the guidance we have sought.

A few rules will help us here.

- I. We must believe that God will guide us.
- II. We must surrender our own will to His guidance.
- III. We must hearken for the Divine voice.

- IV. We must wait for the divine harmony.
V. When we are sure of the guidance, we must obey without question.

*God only is the creature's home;
Though rough and strait the rod,
Yet nothing less can satisfy
The love that longs, for God.*

*How little of that road, my soul!
How little hast thou gone!
Take heart, and let the thought of God
Allure thee further on.*

*The perfect way is hard to flesh;
It is not hard to love;
If thou wert sick for want of God,
How swiftly wouldst thou move.*

*Dole not thy duties out to God,
But let thy hand be free;
Look long at Jesus, His sweet love,
How was it dealt to thee?*

*And only this perfection needs
A heart kept calm all day,
To catch the words the Spirit there,
From hour to hour may say.*

*Then keep thy conscience sensitive,
No inward token miss:
And go where grace entices thee—
Perfection lies in this.*

*Be docile to thine unseen Guide,
Love Him as He loves thee;
Time and obedience are enough,
And thou a saint shalt be.*

Doubts

A great many Christians are slaves to the habit of doubting. No drunkard was ever more utterly bound by the chains of his fatal habit than they are by theirs. Every step of their whole Christian life is taken against the fearful odds of an army of doubts, that are forever lying in wait to assail them at each favorable moment. Their lives are made wretched, their usefulness is effectually hindered, and their communion with God is continually broken by their doubts. And although the entrance of the soul upon the life of faith, of which this book treats, does in many cases take it altogether out of the region where these doubts live and flourish; yet even here it sometimes happens that the old tyrant will rise up and reassert his sway, and will cause the feet to stumble and the heart to fail, even when he cannot succeed in utterly turning the believer back into the dreary wilderness again.

We all of us remember, doubtless, the childish fascination, and yet horror, of that story of Christian's imprisonment in Doubting Castle by the wicked giant Despair, and our exultant sympathy in his escape through those massive gates and from that cruel tyrant. Little did we suspect then that we should ever find ourselves taken prisoner by the same giant, and imprisoned in the same castle. And yet I fear to every member of the Church of Christ there has been at least one such experience. Turn to the account again, if it is not fresh in your minds, and see if you do not see pictured there experiences of your own that have been very grievous to bear at the time, and very sorrowful to look back upon afterwards.

It seems strange that people, whose very name of Believers implies that their one chiefest characteristic is that they believe, should have to confess to such experiences. And yet it is such a universal habit that I feel if the majority of the Church were to be named over again, the only fitting and descriptive name that could be given them would be that of Doubters. In fact, most Christians have settled down under their doubts, as to a sort of inevitable malady, from which they suffer acutely, but to which they must try to be resigned as a part of the necessary discipline of this earthly life. And they lament over their doubts as a man might lament over his rheumatism, making themselves out as an "interesting case" of especial and peculiar trial, which requires the tenderest sympathy and the utmost consideration.

And this is too often true of believers, who are earnestly longing to enter upon the life and walk of faith, and who have made perhaps many steps towards it. They have got rid, it may be, of the old doubts that once tormented them, as to whether their sins are really forgiven, and whether they shall, after all, get safe to Heaven; but they have not got rid of doubting. They have simply shifted the habit to a higher platform. They are saying, perhaps, "Yes, I believe my sins are forgiven, and I am a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. I dare not doubt this any more. But then—" And this "but then" includes an interminable array of doubts concerning every declaration and every promise our Father has made to His children. One after another they fight with them and refuse to believe them, until they can have some more reliable proof of their being true, than the simple word of their God. And then they wonder why they are permitted to walk in such darkness, and look upon themselves almost in the light of martyrs, and groan under the peculiar spiritual conflicts they are compelled to endure.

Spiritual conflicts! Far better would they be named did we call them spiritual rebellions! Our fight is to be a fight of faith, and the moment we doubt, our fight ceases and our rebellion begins.

I desire to put forth, if possible, one vigorous protest against this whole thing. Just as well might I join in with the lament of a drunkard and unite with him in prayer for grace to endure the discipline of his fatal indulgence, as to give way for one instant to the weak complaints of these enslaved souls, and try to console them under their slavery. To one and to the other I would dare to do nothing else but proclaim the perfect deliverance the Lord Jesus Christ has in store for them, and beseech, entreat, command them, with all the force of my whole nature, to avail themselves

of it and be free. Not for one moment would I listen to their despairing excuses. You ought to be free, you can be free, you MUST be free!

Will you undertake to tell me that it is an inevitable necessity for God to be doubted by His children? Is it an inevitable necessity for your children to doubt you? Would you tolerate their doubts a single hour? Would you pity your son and condole with him, and feel that he was an interesting case, if he should come to you and say, "Father, I cannot believe your word, I cannot trust your love"?

I remember once seeing the indignation of a mother I knew, stirred to its very depths by a little doubting on the part of one of her children. She had brought two little girls to my house to leave them while she did some errands. One of them, with the happy confidence of childhood, abandoned herself to all the pleasures she could find in my nursery, and sang and played until her mother's return. The other one, with the wretched caution and mistrust of maturity, sat down alone in a corner to wonder whether her mother would remember to come back for her, and to fear she would be forgotten, and to imagine her mother would be glad of the chance to get rid of her anyhow, because she was such a naughty girl, and ended with working herself up into a perfect frenzy of despair. The look on that mother's face, when upon her return the weeping little girl told what was the matter with her, I shall not easily forget. Grief, wounded love, indignation, and pity, all strove together for mastery. But indignation gained the day, and I doubt if that little girl was ever so vigorously dealt with before. A hundred times in my life since has that scene come up before me with deepest teaching, and has compelled me, peremptorily, to refuse admittance to the doubts about my Heavenly Father's love, and care, and remembrance of me, that have clamored at the door of my heart for entrance.

I am convinced that to many people doubting is a real luxury, and to deny themselves from indulging in it would be to exercise the hardest piece of self-denial they have ever known. It is a luxury that, like the indulgence in all other luxuries, brings very sorrowful results; and, perhaps, looking at the sadness and misery it has brought into your own Christian experience, you may be tempted to say, "Alas! This is no luxury to me, but only a fearful trial." But pause for a moment. Try giving it up, and you will soon find out whether it is a luxury or not. Do not your doubts come trooping to your door as a company of sympathizing friends, who appreciate your hard case, and have come to condole with you? And is it no luxury to sit down with them and entertain them, and listen to their arguments, and join in with their condolences? Would it be no self-denial to turn resolutely from them, and refuse to hear a word they have to say? If you do not know, try it and see.

Have you never tasted the luxury of indulging in hard thoughts against those who have, as you think, injured you? Have you never known what a positive fascination it is to brood over their unkindnesses, and to pry into their malice, and to imagine all sorts of wrong and uncomfortable things about them? It has made you wretched, of course, but it has been a fascinating sort of wretchedness that you could not easily give up.

And just like this is the luxury of doubting. Things have gone wrong with you in your experience. Dispensations have been mysterious, temptations have been peculiar, your case has seemed different from that of any one's around you. What more natural than to conclude that for some reason God has forsaken you, and does not love you, and is indifferent to your welfare? And how irresistible is the conviction that you are too wicked for Him to care for, or too difficult for Him to manage.

You do not mean to blame Him, or accuse Him of injustice, for you feel that His indifference and rejection of you are fully deserved because of your unworthiness. And this very subterfuge leaves you at liberty to indulge in your doubts under the guise of a just and true appreciation of your own shortcomings. But all the while you are as really indulging in hard and wrong thoughts of your Lord as ever you did of a human enemy; for He says He came not to save the righteous, but sinners; and your very sinfulness and unworthiness is your chiefest claim upon His love and His care.

As well might the poor little lamb that has wandered from the flock and got lost in the wilderness say, "The shepherd does not love me, nor care for me, nor remember me, because I am lost. He on-

ly loves and cares for the lambs that never wander." As well might the ill man say, "The doctor will not come to see me, nor give me any medicines, because I am ill. He only cares for and visits well people." Jesus says, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." And again He says, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" Any thoughts of Him, therefore, which are different from what He says of Himself, are hard thoughts; and to indulge in them is far worse than to indulge in hard thoughts of any earthly friend or foe. From the beginning to the end of your Christian life it is always sinful to indulge in doubts. Doubts are all from the devil, and are always untrue. And the only way to meet them is by a direct and emphatic denial.

And this brings me to the practical part of the whole subject, as to how to get deliverance from this fatal habit. My answer would be that the deliverance from this can be by no other means than the deliverance from any other sin. It is to be found in the Lord and in Him only. You must hand your doubting over to Him, as you have learned to hand your other temptations. You must do just what you do with your temper, or your pride. You must give it up to the Lord. I believe myself the only effectual remedy is to take a pledge against it as you would urge a drunkard to do against drink, trusting in the Lord alone to keep you steadfast.

Like any other sin, the stronghold is in the will and the will to doubt must be surrendered exactly as you surrender the will to yield to any other temptation. God always takes possession of a surrendered will. And if we come to the point of saying that we will not doubt, and surrender this central fortress of our nature to Him, His blessed Spirit will begin at once to work in us all the good pleasure of His will, and we shall find ourselves kept from doubting by His mighty and overcoming power.

The trouble is that in this matter of doubting the soul does not always make a full surrender, but is apt to reserve to itself a little secret liberty to doubt, looking upon it as being sometimes a necessity. "I do not want to doubt any more," we will say, or, "I hope I shall not"; but it is hard to come to the point of saying, "I will not doubt again." But no surrender is effectual until it reaches the point of saying, "I will not". The liberty to doubt must be given up forever. And the soul must consent to a continuous life of inevitable trust. It is often necessary, I think, to make a definite transaction of this surrender of doubting, and to come to a point about it. I believe it is quite as necessary in the case of a doubter as in the case of a drunkard. It will not do to give it up by degrees. The total abstinence principle is the only effectual one here.

Then, the surrender once made, the soul must rest absolutely upon the Lord for deliverance in each time of temptation. It must lift up the shield of faith the moment the assault comes. It must hand the very first suggestion of doubt over to the Lord, and must tell the enemy to settle the matter with Him. It must refuse to listen to the doubt a single moment. Let it come ever so plausibly, or under whatever guise of humility, the soul must simply say, "I dare not doubt; I must trust. The Lord is good, and HE DOES love me. Jesus saves me; He saves me now." Those three little words, repeated over and over,— "Jesus saves me, Jesus saves me,"—will put to flight the greatest army of doubts that ever assaulted any soul. I have tried it times without number, and have never known it to fail. Do not stop to argue the matter out with your doubts, nor try to prove that they are wrong. Pay no attention to them whatever; treat them with the utmost contempt. Shut your door in their faces, and emphatically deny every word they say to you. Bring up some "It is written," and hurl it after them. Look right at Jesus, and tell Him you trust Him, and you mean to trust Him. Let the doubts clamor as they may, they cannot hurt you if you will not let them in.

I know it will look to you sometimes as though you were shutting the door against your best friends, and your heart will long after your doubts more than ever the Israelites longed after the flesh-pots of Egypt. But deny yourself; take up your cross in this matter, and unmercifully refuse ever to listen to a single word.

This very day a perfect army of doubts stood awaiting my awaking, and clamored at my door for admittance. Nothing seemed real, nothing seemed true; and least of all did it seem possible that I—miserable, wretched—could be the object of the Lord’s love, or care, or notice. If I only had been at liberty to let these doubts in, and invite them to take seats and make themselves at home, what a luxury I should have felt it to be! But years ago I made a pledge against doubting; and I would as soon think of violating my pledge against intoxicating liquor as to violate this one. I DARED not admit the first doubt. I therefore lifted up my shield of faith the moment I was conscious of these suggestions, and handing the whole army over to my Lord to conquer, I began to say, over and over, “The Lord does love me. He is my present and my perfect Saviour; Jesus saves me, Jesus saves me now!” The victory was complete. The enemy had come in like a flood, but the Lord lifted up a standard against him, and he was routed and put to flight; and my soul is singing the song of Moses and the children of Israel, saying, “I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name.”

It will help you to resist the assaults of this temptation to doubt, to see clearly that doubting is sin. It is certainly a direct disobedience to our Lord, who commands us, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And all through the Bible everywhere the commands to trust are imperative, and admit of no exceptions. Time and room would fail me to refer to one hundredth part of these, but no one can read the Psalms without being convinced that the man who trusts without a question, is the only man who pleases God and is accepted of Him. The “provocation” of Israel was that they did not trust; “anger also came up against Israel, because they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation.” (Psalms 78:17-22.) And in contrast, we read in Isaiah concerning those who trust, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.” Nothing grieves or wounds our hearts like doubting on the part of a friend, and nothing, I am convinced, grieves the heart of God more than doubting from us.

One of my children, who is now with the Lord, said to me one evening as I was tucking her up in bed, “Well, mother, I have had my first doubt.” “Oh, Ray,” I said, “what was it?” “Why,” she replied, “Satan came to me and told me not to believe the Bible, for it was not a word of it true.” “And what did thee say to him?” I asked. “Oh,” she replied, triumphantly, “I just said to him, Satan, I will believe it. So there!” I was delighted with the child’s spiritual intelligence in knowing so well how to meet doubts, and encouraged her with all my heart, explaining to her how all doubts and discouragements are from the enemy, and how he is always a liar and must not be listened to for a moment. The next night, I had forgotten all about it, however, and was surprised and startled when she said, as I was tucking her in bed, “Well, mother, Satan has been at it again.” “Oh, Ray darling!” I exclaimed in dismay, “what did he say this time?” “Well,” she replied, “he just told me that I was such a naughty little girl that Jesus could not love me, and I was foolish to think He did.” “And what did thee say this time?” I asked. “Oh!” she replied, “I just looked at him cross and said, Satan, shut thy mouth!” And then she added, with a smile, “He can’t make me unhappy one bit.” A grander battle no soul ever fought than this little child had done, and no greater victory was ever won!

Dear, doubting soul, go and do likewise; and a similar victory shall be thine. As you lay down this book take up your pen and write out your determination never to doubt again. Make it a real transaction between your soul and the Lord. Give up your liberty to doubt forever. Put your will in this matter over on the Lord’s side, and trust Him to keep you from falling. Tell him all about your utter weakness and your long-encouraged habits of doubt, and how helpless you are before your enemy, and commit the whole battle to Him. Tell Him you will not doubt again; and then henceforward keep your face steadfastly looking unto Jesus, away from yourself and away from your doubts, holding fast the profession of your faith without wavering, because He is faithful who has promised. And as surely as you do thus hold the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end, just so surely shall you find yourself in this matter made more than conqueror, through Him who loves you.

Appendix B

APPENDIX

B

This appendix has two chapters from the book *The Deeper Christian Life* by Andrew Murray. He wrote many books in his generation, most of which were about prayer. He was a great pastor, revival leader and deeply committed Christian who wanted to help people receive all that God desired for them. This book points out the way to a disciplined life that truly follows after God.

Chapter 2, “**Privilege And Experience**”

Chapter 6, “**The Presence Of Christ**”(An optional reading).

Privilege and Experience

“And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.” — Luke 15:31

The words of the text are familiar to us all. The elder son had complained and said, that though his father had made a feast, and had killed the fatted calf for the prodigal son, he had never given him even a kid that he might make merry with his friends. The answer of the father was: “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.” One cannot have a more wonderful revelation of the heart of our Father in heaven than this points out to us. We often speak of the wonderful revelation of the father’s heart in his welcome to the prodigal son, and in what he did for him. But here we have a revelation of the father’s love far more wonderful, in what he says to the elder son.

If we are to experience a deepening of spiritual life, we want to discover clearly what is the spiritual life that God would have us live, on the one hand; and, on the other, to ask whether we are living that life; or, if not, what hinders us living it out fully.

This subject naturally divides itself into these three heads: 1. The high privilege of every child of God. 2. The low experience of too many of us believers. 3. The cause of the discrepancy; and, lastly, 4. The way to the restoration of the privilege.

The High Privilege of the Children of God

We have here two things describing the privilege: — First, “Son, thou art ever with me”—unbroken fellowship with thy Father is thy portion; Second, “All that I have is thine”—all that God can bestow upon His children is theirs.

“Thou art ever with me;” I am always near thee; thou canst dwell every hour of thy life in My presence, and all I have is for thee. I am a father, with a loving father’s heart. I will withhold no good thing from thee. In these promises, we have the rich privilege of God’s heritage. We have, in the first place, unbroken fellowship with Him. A father never sends his child away with the thought that he does not care about his child knowing that he loves him. The father longs to have his child believe that he has the light of his father’s countenance upon him all the day—that, if he sends the child away to school, or anywhere that necessity compels, it is with a sense of sacrifice of parental feelings. If it be so with an earthly father, what think you of God? Does He not want every child of His to know that he is constantly living in the light of His countenance? This is the meaning of that word, “Son, thou art ever with me.”

That was the privilege of God’s people in Old Testament times. We are told that “Enoch walked with God.” God’s promise to Jacob was: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” And God’s promise to Israel through Moses, was: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” And in Moses’ response to the promise, he says, “For wherein shall it be known that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not that Thou goest with us; so shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.” The presence of God with Israel was the mark of their separation from other people. This is the truth taught in all the Old Testament; and if so, how much more may we look for it in the New Testament? Thus we find our Saviour promising to those who love Him and who keep His word, that the Father also will love them, and Father and Son will come and make Their abode with them.

Let that thought into your hearts—that the child of God is called to this blessed privilege, to live every moment of his life in fellowship with God. He is called to enjoy the full light of His countenance. There are many Christians—I suppose the majority of Christians—who seem to regard the whole of the Spirit’s work as confined to conviction and conversion: — not so much that He came to dwell in our hearts, and there reveal God to us. He came not to dwell near us, but in us, that we

might be filled with His indwelling. We are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit;” then the Holy Spirit would make God’s presence manifest to us. That is the whole teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews: — the veil is rent in twain; we have access into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus; we come into the very presence of God, so that we can live all the day with that presence resting upon us. That presence is with us wheresoever we go; and in all kinds of trouble, we have undisturbed repose and peace. “Son, thou art ever with me.”

There are some people who seem to think that God, by some unintelligible sovereignty, withdraws His face. But I know that God loves His people too much to withhold His fellowship from them for any such reason. The true reason of the absence of God from us is rather to be found in our sin and unbelief, than in any supposed sovereignty of His. If the child of God is walking in faith and obedience, the Divine presence will be enjoyed in unbroken continuity.

Then there is the next blessed privilege: “All that I have is thine.” Thank God, He has given us His own Son; and in giving Him, He has given us all things that are in Him, He has given us Christ’s life, His love, His Spirit, His glory. “All things are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” All the riches of His Son, the everlasting King, God bestows upon every one of His children. “Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine.” Is not that the meaning of all those wonderful promises given in connection with prayer: “Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, ye shall receive.”? Yes, there it is. That is the life of the children of God, as He Himself has pictured it to us.

In contrast with this high privilege of believers, look at

The Low Experience of too Many of Us

The elder son was living with his father and serving him “these many years,” and he complains that his father never gave him a kid, while he gave his prodigal brother the fatted calf. Why was this? Simply because he did not ask it. He did not believe that he would get it, and therefore never asked it, and never enjoyed it. He continued thus to live in constant murmuring and dissatisfaction; and the keynote of all this wretched life is furnished in what he said. His father gave him everything, yet he never enjoyed it; and he throws the whole blame on his loving and kind father. O beloved, is not that the life of many a believer? Do not many speak and act in this way? Every believer has the promise of unbroken fellowship with God, but he says, “I have not enjoyed it; I have tried hard and done my best, and I have prayed for the blessing, but I suppose God does not see fit to grant it.” But why not? One says, it is the sovereignty of God withholding the blessing. The father withheld not his gifts from the elder brother in sovereignty; neither does our Heavenly Father withhold any good thing from them that love Him. He does not make any such differences between His children. “He is able to make all grace abound towards you” was the promise equally made to all in the Corinthian church.

Some think these rich blessings are not for them, but for those who have more time to devote to religion and prayer; or their circumstances are so difficult, so peculiar, that we can have no conception of their various hindrances. But do not such think that God, if He places them in these circumstances, cannot make His grace abound accordingly? They admit He could if He would, work a miracle for them, which they can hardly expect. In some way, they, like the elder son, throw the blame on God. Thus many are saying, when asked if they are enjoying unbroken fellowship with God: — “Alas, no! I have not been able to attain to such a height; it is too high for me. I know of some who have it, and I read of it; but God has not given it to me, for some reason.” But why not? You think, perhaps, that you have not the same capacity for spiritual blessing that others have. The Bible speaks of a joy that is “unspeakable and full of glory” as the fruit of believing; of a “love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us.” Do we desire it, do we? Why not get it? Have we asked for it? We think we are not worthy of the blessing—we are not good enough; and therefore God has not given it. There are more among us than we know of, or are willing to admit, who throw the blame of our darkness, and of our wanderings on God! Take care! Take care! Take care!

And again, what about that other promise? The Father says, “All I have is thine.” Are you rejoicing in the treasures of Christ? Are you conscious of having an abundant supply for all your spiritual needs every day? God has all these for you in abundance. “Thou never gavest me a kid!” The answer is, “All that I have is thine. I gave it thee in Christ.”

Dear reader, we have such wrong thoughts of God. What is God like? I know no image more beautiful and instructive than that of the sun. The sun is never weary of shining; — of pouring out his beneficent rays upon both the good and the evil. You might close up the windows with blinds or bricks, the sun would shine upon them all the same; though we might sit in darkness, in utter darkness, the shining would be just the same. God’s sun shines on every leaf; on every flower; on every blade of grass; on everything that springs out of the ground. All receive this wealth of sunshine until they grow to perfection and bear fruit. Would He who made that sun be less willing to pour out His love and life into me? The sun—what beauty it creates! And my God, — would He not delight more in creating a beauty and a fruitfulness in me? — Such, too, as He has *promised* to give? And yet some say, when asked why they do not live in unbroken communion with God, “God does not give it to me, I do not know why; but that is the only reason I can give you—He has not given it to me.” You remember the parable of the one who said, “I know thou art an hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown and gathering where thou hast not strawed,” asking and demanding what thou hast not given. Oh! Let us come and ask why it is that the believer lives such a low experience.

The Cause of this Discrepancy between God’s Gifts, and Our Low Experience

The believer is complaining that God has never given him a kid. Or, God has given him some blessing, but has never given the full blessing. He has never filled him with His Spirit. “I never,” he says, “had my heart, as a fountain, giving forth the rivers of living water promised in John 7:38.” What is the cause? The elder son thought he was serving his father faithfully “these many years” in his father’s house, but it was in the spirit of bondage and not in the spirit of a child, so that his unbelief blinded him to the conception of a father’s love and kindness, and he was unable all the time to see that his father was ready, not only to give him a kid, but a hundred, or a thousand kids, if he would have them. He was simply living in unbelief, in ignorance, in blindness, robbing himself of the privileges that the father had for him. So, if there be a discrepancy between our life and the fulfilment and enjoyment of all God’s promises, the fault is ours. If our experience be not what God wants it to be, it is because of our unbelief in the love of God, in the power of God, and in the reality of God’s promises.

God’s word teaches us, in the story of the Israelites, that it was unbelief on their part that was the cause of their troubles, and not any limitation or restriction on God’s part. As Psalm 78th says: — “He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.” Yet they sinned by doubting His power to provide meat for them—“They spake against God; they said, can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (vs. 15–19). Later on, we read in v. 41, “They turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.” They kept distrusting Him from time to time. When they got to Kadesh-Barnea, and God told them to enter the land flowing with milk and honey where there would be rest, abundance, and victory, only two men said, “Yes;” we can take possession, for God can make us conquer.” But the ten spies, and the six hundred thousand men answered, “No; we can never take the land; the enemies are too strong for us.” It was simply unbelief that kept them out of the land of promise.

If there is to be any deepening of the spiritual life in us, we must come to the discovery, and the acknowledgment of the unbelief there is in our hearts. God grant that we may get this spiritual quickening, and that we may come to see that it is by our unbelief that we have prevented God from doing His work in us. Unbelief is the mother of disobedience, and of all my sins and short comings—my temper, my pride, my unlovingness, my worldliness, my sins of every kind. Though these differ in nature and form, yet they all come from the one root, viz, that we do not believe in the freedom and fullness of the Divine gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and strengthen us, and

fill us with the life and grace of God all the day long. Look, I pray you, at that elder son, and ask what was the cause of that terrible difference between the heart of the father and the experience of the son. There can be no answer but that it was this sinful unbelief that utterly blinded the son to a sense of his father's love.

Dear fellow believer, I want to say to you, that, if you are not living in the joy of God's salvation, the entire cause is your unbelief. You do not believe in the mighty power of God, and that He is willing by His Holy Spirit to work a thorough change in your life, and enable you to live in fullness of consecration to Him. God is willing that you should so live; but you do not believe it. If men really believed in the infinite love of God, what a change it would bring about! What is love? It is a desire to communicate oneself for the good of the object loved—the opposite to selfishness; as we read in 1 Corinthians 13. "Love seeketh not her own." Thus the mother is willing to sacrifice herself for the good of her child. So God in His love is ever willing to impart blessing; and He is omnipotent in His love. This is true, my friends; God is omnipotent in love, and He is doing His utmost to fill every heart in this house. "But if God is really anxious to do that, and if He is Almighty, why does He not do it now?" You must remember, that God has given you a will, and by the exercise of that will, you can hinder God, and remain content, like the elder son, with the low life of unbelief. Come, now, and let us see the cause of the difference between God's high, blessed provision for His children, and the low, sad experience of many of us in the unbelief that distrusts and grieves Him.

The Way of Restoration — How is that to be Brought About?

We all know the parable of the prodigal son and how many sermons have been preached about repentance, from that parable. We are told that "he came to himself and said, I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." In preaching, we speak of this as the first step in a changed life—as conversion, as repentance, confession, returning to God. But, as this is the first step for the prodigal, we must remember that this is also the step to be taken by His erring children—by all the ninety-nine "who need no repentance," or think they do not. Those Christians who do not understand how wrong their low religious life is must be taught that this is sin—unbelief; and that it is as necessary that they should be brought to repentance as the prodigal. You have heard a great deal of preaching repentance to the unconverted; but I want to try to preach it to God's children. We have a picture of so many of God's children in that elder brother. What the father told him, to bring about a consideration of the love that He bore him, just as he loved the prodigal brother, thus does God tell to us in our contentedness with such a low life: — "You must repent and believe that I love you, and all that I have is thine." He says, "By your unbelief, you have dishonoured me, living for ten, twenty, or thirty years, and never believing what it was to live in the blessedness of My love. You must confess the wrong you have done Me in this, and be broken down in contrition of heart just as truly as the prodigal."

There are many children of God who need to confess, that though they are His children, they have never believed that God's promises are true, that He is willing to fill their hearts all the day long with His blessed presence. Have you believed this? If you have not, all our teaching will be of no profit to you. Will you not say, "By the help of God, I will begin now a new life of faith, and will not rest until I know what such a life means. I will believe that I am every moment in the Father's presence, and all that He has is mine?"

May the Lord God work this conviction in the hearts of all cold believers. Have you ever heard the expression, "a conviction for sanctification?" You know, the unconverted man needs a conviction before conversion. So does the dark-minded Christian need conviction before, and in order for sanctification, before he comes to a real insight to spiritual blessedness. He must be convicted a second time because of his sinful life of doubt, and temper, and unlovingness. He must be broken down under that conviction; then there is hope for him. May the Father of mercy grant all such that deep contrition, so that they may be led into the blessedness of His presence, and enjoy the fullness of His power and love!

The Presence of Christ

*“But straightway Jesus spake unto them saying,
Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid.”— Matthew 14:27*

All we have had about the work of the blessed Spirit is dependent upon what we think of Jesus, for it is *from* Christ Jesus that the Spirit comes to us; it is to Christ Jesus that the Spirit ever brings us; and the one need of the Christian life day by day and hour by hour is this, — the presence of the Son of God. God is our salvation. If I have Christ with me and Christ in me, I have full salvation. We have spoken about the life of failure and of the flesh, about the life of unbelief and disobedience, about the life of ups and downs, the wilderness life of sadness and of sorrow; but we have heard, and we have believed, there is deliverance. Bless God, He brought us out of Egypt, that He might bring us into Canaan, into the very rest of God and Jesus Christ. He is our peace, He is our rest. Oh, if I may only have the presence of Jesus as the victory over every sin: the presence of Jesus as the strength for every duty, then my life shall be in the full sunshine of God’s unbroken fellowship, and the word will be fulfilled to me in most blessed experience, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all I have is thine,” and my heart shall answer, “Father, I never knew it, but it is true, — I am ever with thee and all Thou hast is mine.” God has given all He has to Christ, and God longs that Christ should have you and me entirely. I come to every hungry heart and say, “If you want to live to the glory of God, seek one thing, to claim, to believe that the presence of Jesus can be with you every moment of your life.

I want to speak about the presence of Jesus, as it is set before us in that blessed story of Christ’s walking on the sea. Come and look with me at some points that are suggested to us.

1. Think, first, of the presence of Christ *lost*. You know the disciples loved Christ, clung to Him, and with all their failings, they delighted in Him. But what happened? The Master went up into the mountain to pray, and sent them across the sea all alone without Him; there came a storm, and they toiled, rowed, and laboured, but the wind was against them, they made no progress, they were in danger of perishing, and how their hearts said, “Oh, if the Master only were here!” But His presence was gone. They missed Him. Once before, they had been in a storm, and Christ had said, “Peace, be still,” and all was well; but here they are in darkness, danger, and terrible trouble, and no Christ to help them. Ah, isn’t that the life of many a believer at times? I get into darkness, I have committed sin, the cloud is on me, I miss the face of Jesus; and for days and days I work, worry, and labour; but it is all in vain, for I miss the presence of Christ. Oh, beloved, let us write that down, — the presence of Jesus lost is the cause of all our wretchedness and failure.
2. Look at the second step, — the presence of Jesus *dreaded*. They were longing for the presence of Christ, and Christ came after midnight: He came walking on the water amid the waves; but they didn’t recognize Him, and they cried out, for fear, “It is a spirit!” Their beloved Lord was coming nigh, and they knew Him not. They dreaded His approach. And, ah, how often have I seen a believer dreading the approach of Christ, — crying out for Him, longing for Him, and yet dreading His coming. And why? Because Christ came in a fashion that they expected not.

Perhaps some have been saying, “Alas, alas! I fear I never can have the abiding presence of Christ.” You have heard what we have said about a life in the Spirit: you have heard what we have said about abiding ever in the presence of God and in His fellowship, and you have been afraid of it, afraid of it; and you have said, “It is too high and too difficult.” You have dreaded the very teaching that was going to help you. Jesus came to you in the teaching, and you didn’t recognize His love.

Or, perhaps, He came in a way that you dreaded His presence. Perhaps God has been speaking to you about some sin. There is that sin of temper, or that sin of unlovingness, or that sin of unforgiveness, or that sin of worldliness, compromise, and fellowship with the world, that love of man and man's honour, that fear of man and man's opinion, or that pride and self confidence. God has been speaking to you about it, and yet you have been frightened. That was Jesus wanting to draw you nigh, but you were afraid. You don't see how you can give up all that, you are not ready to say, "At any sacrifice I am going to have that taken out of me, and I will give it up," and while God and Christ were coming nigh to bless you, you were afraid of Him.

Oh, believers, at other times Christ has come to you with affliction, and perhaps you have said, "If I want to be entirely holy, I know I shall have to be afflicted, and I am afraid of affliction," and you have dreaded the thought, "Christ may come to me in affliction." The presence of Christ dreaded! — Oh, beloved, I want to tell you it is all misconception. The disciples had no reason to dread that "spirit" coming there, for it was Christ Himself; and, when God's word comes close to you and touches your heart, remember that is Christ out of Whose mouth goes the two-edged sword. It is Christ in His love coming to cut away the sin, that He may fill your heart with the blessing of God's love. Beware of dreading the presence of Christ.

3. Then comes the third thought, — the presence of Christ *revealed*. Bless God! When Christ heard how they cried, he spoke the words of the text, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Ah, what gladness those words brought to those hearts! There is Jesus, that dark object appears, that dreaded form. It is our blessed Lord Himself. And, dear friends, the Master's object, whether it be by affliction or otherwise, is to prepare for receiving the presence of Christ, and through it all Jesus speaks, "It is I; be not afraid." The presence of Christ revealed! I want to tell you that the Son of God, oh believer, is longing to reveal Himself to you. Listen! *Listen!* LISTEN! Is there any longing heart? Jesus says, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

Oh, beloved; God has given us Christ. And does God want me to have Christ every moment? Without doubt, God wants the presence of Christ to be the joy of every hour of my life, and, if there is one thing sure, Christ can reveal Himself to me every moment. Are you willing to come and claim this privilege? He can reveal Himself. I cannot reveal Him to you; you cannot grasp Him; but He can shine into your heart. How can I see the sunlight tomorrow morning, if I am spared? The sunlight will reveal itself. How can I know Christ? Christ can reveal Himself. And, ere I go further, I pray you to set your heart upon this, and to offer the humble prayer, "Lord, now reveal Thyself to me, so, that I may never lose the sight of Thee. Give me to understand that through the thick darkness Thou comest to make Thyself known." Let not one heart doubt, however dark it may be, — at midnight, — whatever midnight there be in the soul, — at midnight, in the dark, Christ can reveal Himself. Ah, thank God, often after a life of ten and twenty years of dawn, after a life of ten and twenty years of struggling, now in the light, and now in the dark, there comes a time when Jesus is willing just to give Himself to us, nevermore to part. God grant us that presence of Jesus!

4. And now comes the fourth thought, — The presence of Jesus *lost*, was the first; the presence of Jesus *dreaded*, was the second; the presence of Jesus *revealed*, was the third; the presence of Jesus *desired*, is the fourth. What happened? Peter heard the Lord, and yonder was Jesus, some 30, 40, 50 yards distant, and He made as though He would have passed them; and Peter, — in a preceding chapter I spoke about Peter, shewing what terrible failure and carnality there was in him, — but, bless the Lord, Peter's heart was right with Christ, and he wanted to claim His presence, and he said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come upon the water to Thee." Yes, Peter could not rest; he wanted to be as near to Christ as possible. He saw Christ walking on the water; he remembered Christ had said, "Follow Me;" he remembered how Christ, with the miraculous draught of fishes, had proved that He was Master of the sea, and of the waters,

and he remembered how Christ had stilled the storm; and, without argument or reflection, all at once he said, "There is my Lord manifesting Himself in a new way; there is my Lord exercising a new and supernatural power, and I can go to my Lord, He is able to make me walk where He walks." He wanted to walk like Christ; he wanted to walk near Christ. He didn't say, "Lord, let me walk around the sea here," but he said, "Lord, let me come to Thee."

Friends, would you not like to have the presence of Christ in this way? Not that Christ should come down, — that is what many Christians want; they want to continue in their sinful walk, they want to continue in their worldly walk, they want to continue in their old life, and they want Christ to come down to them with His comfort, His presence, and His love; but that cannot be. If I am to have the presence of Christ, I must walk as He walked. His walk was a supernatural one. He walked in the love and in the power of God. Most people walk according to the circumstances in which they are, and most people say, "I am depending upon circumstances for my religion. A hundred times over you hear people say, "My circumstances prevent my enjoying unbroken fellowship with Jesus." What were the circumstances that were found about Christ? The wind and the waves, — and Christ walked triumphant over circumstances; and Peter said, "Like my Lord I can triumph over all circumstances: anything around me is nothing, if I have Jesus." He longed for the presence of Christ. Would God that, as we look at the life of Christ upon earth, as we look how Christ walked and conquered the waves, every one of us could say, "I want to walk like Jesus." If that is your heart's desire, you can expect the presence of Jesus; but as long as you want to walk on a lower level than Christ, as long as you want to have a little of the world, and a little of self-will, do not expect to have the presence of Christ. Near Christ, and like Christ, — the two things go together. Have you taken that in? Peter wanted to walk like Christ that he might get near Christ; and it is this I want to offer every one of you. I want to say to the weakest believer, "With God's presence you can have the presence and fellowship of Christ all the day long, your whole life through." I want to bring you that promise, but I must give God's condition, — walk like Christ, and you shall always abide near Christ. The presence of Christ invites you to come and have unbroken fellowship with Him.

5. Then comes the next thought. We have just had the presence of Christ desired, and my next thought is, — the presence of Christ *trusted*. The Lord Jesus said, "Come," and what did Peter do? He stepped out of the boat. How did he dare to do it against all the laws of nature? — How did he dare to do it? He sought Christ, he heard Christ's voice, he trusted Christ's presence and power, and in the faith of Christ he said, "I can walk on the water;" and he stepped out of the boat. Here is the turning point; here is the crisis. Peter saw Christ in the manifestation of a supernatural power, and Peter believed that supernatural power could work in him, and he could live a supernatural life. He believed this applied to walking on the sea; and herein lies the whole secret of the life of faith. Christ had supernatural power, — the power of heaven, the power of holiness, the power of fellowship with God, and Christ can give me grace to live as He lived. If I will but, like Peter, look at Christ and say to Christ, "Lord, speak the word, and I will come," and if I will listen to Christ saying, "Come," I, too, shall have power to walk upon the waves.

Have you ever seen a more beautiful and more instructive symbol of the Christian life? I once preached on it many years ago, and the thought that filled my heart then was this, — the Christian life compared to Peter walking on the waves, nothing so difficult and impossible without Christ, nothing so blessed and safe with Christ. That is the Christian life, — impossible without Christ's nearness, — most safe and blessed, however difficult, if I only have the presence of Christ. Believers, we have tried in these pages to call you to a better life in the Spirit, to a life in the fellowship with God. There is only one thing can enable you to live it, — you must have the Lord Jesus hold your hand every minute of the day. "But can that be?" you ask. Yes, it can. "I have so much to think of. Sometimes for four or five hours of the day I have to go into the very thick of business and have some ten men standing around me, each claim-

ing my attention. How can I, how can I always have the presence of Jesus?" Beloved, because Jesus is your God and loves you wonderfully, and is able to make His presence more clear to you than that of ten men who are standing around you. If you will in the morning take time and enter into your covenant every morning with Him, "My Lord Jesus, nothing can satisfy me but Thine abiding presence," He will give it to you, He will surely give it to you. Oh, Peter trusted the presence of Christ, and He said, "If Christ calls me I can walk on the waves to Him." Shall we trust the presence of Christ? To walk through all the circumstances and temptations of life is exactly like walking on the water, — you have no solid ground under your feet, you do not know how strong the temptations of Satan may come; but do believe God wants you to walk in a supernatural life above human power. God wants you to live a life in Christ Jesus. Are you wanting to live that life? Come then, and say, "Jesus, I have heard Thy promise that Thy presence will go with me. Thou hast said, "My presence shall go with thee,"—and, Lord, I claim it; I trust Thee."

6. Now, the sixth step in this wonderful history, the presence of Christ *forgotten*. Peter got out of the boat and began to walk toward the Lord Jesus with his eyes fixed upon Him. The presence of Christ was trusted by him, and he walked boldly over the waves; but all at once he took his eyes off Jesus, and he began at once to sink, and there was Peter, his walk of faith at an end; all drenched and drowning and crying, "Lord, help me!" There are some of you saying in your hearts, I know, "Ah, that's what will come of your higher-life Christians." There are people who say, "You never can live that life; do not talk of it; you must always be failing." Peter always failed before Pentecost. It was because the Holy Spirit had not yet come, and therefore his experience goes to teach us, that while Peter was still in the life of the flesh he must fail somehow or other. But, thank God, there was One to lift him out of the failure; and our last point will be to prove that out of that failure he came into closer union with Jesus than ever before, and deeper dependence. But listen, first, while I speak to you about this failure.

Someone may say, "I have been trying, to say, 'Lord, I will live it;' but, tell me, suppose failure come, what then?" Learn from Peter what you ought to do. What did Peter do? The very opposite of what most do. What did he do when he began to sink? That very moment, without one word of self-reproach or self-condemnation, he cried, "Lord, help me!" I wish I could teach every Christian that. I remember the time in my spiritual life when that became clear to me; for up to that time, when I failed, my only thought was to reproach and condemn myself, and I thought that would do me good. I found it didn't do me good; and I learn from Peter that my work is, the very moment I fail, to say, "Jesus, Master, help me!" and the very moment I say that, Jesus does help me. Remember, failure is not an impossibility. I can conceive more than one Christian who said, "Lord, I claim the fullness of the Holy Ghost. I want to live every hour of every day filled with the Holy Spirit;" and I can conceive that an honest soul who said that with a trembling faith, yet may have fallen; I want to say to that soul, -Don't be discouraged. If failure comes, at once, without any waiting, appeal to Jesus. He is always ready to hear, and the very moment you find there is the temper, the hasty word, or some other wrong, at once the living Jesus is near, so gracious, and so mighty. Appeal to Him and there will be help at once. If you learn to do this, Jesus will lift you up and lead you on to a walk where His strength shall secure you from failure.

7. And then comes my last thought. The presence of Jesus was forgotten while Peter looked at the waves; but now, lastly, we have the presence of Jesus *restored*. Yes, Christ stretched out His hand to save him. Possibly—for Peter was a very proud, self-confident man—possibly he had to sink there to teach him that his faith could not save him, but it was the power of Christ. God wants us to learn the lesson that when we fall then we can cry out to Jesus, and at once He reaches out His hand. Remember, Peter walked back to the boat without sinking again. Why? Because Christ was very near him. Remember it is quite possible, if you use your failure rightly, to be far nearer Christ after it than before. Use it rightly, I say. That is, come and ac-

knowledge, “In me there is nothing, but I am going to trust my Lord unboundedly.” Let every failure teach you to cling afresh to Christ, and He will prove Himself a mighty and a loving Helper. The presence of Jesus restored! Yes, Christ took him by the hand and helped him, and I don’t know whether they walked hand in hand those forty or fifty yards back to the boat, or whether Christ allowed Peter to walk beside Him; but this I know, they were very near to each other, and it was the nearness of his Lord that strengthened him.

Remember what has taken place since that happened with Peter. The cross has been erected, the blood has been shed, the grave has been opened, the resurrection has been accomplished, heaven has been opened, and the Spirit of the Exalted One has come down. Do believe that it is possible for the presence of Jesus to be with us every day and all the way. Your God has given you Christ, and He wants to give you Christ into your heart in such a way that His presence shall be with you every moment of your life.

Who is willing to lift up his eyes and his heart and to exclaim, “I want to live according to God’s standard?” Who is willing? Who is willing to cast himself into the arms of Jesus and to live a life of faith victorious over the winds and the waves, over the circumstances and difficulties? Who is willing to say this, — “Lord, bid me come to Thee upon the water?” Are you willing? Listen! Jesus says, “Come.” Will you step out at this moment? Yonder is the boat, the old life that Peter had been leading; he had been familiar with the sea from his boyhood, and that boat was a very sacred place; Christ had sat beside him there; Christ had preached from that boat, from that boat of Peter’s, Christ had given the wonderful draught of fishes; it was a very sacred boat; but Peter left it to come to a place more sacred still, — walking with Jesus on the water, — a new and a Divine experience. Your Christian life may be a very sacred thing; you may say, “Christ saved me by His blood, He has given me many an experience of grace; God has proved His grace in my heart,” but you confess “I haven’t got the real life of abiding fellowship; the winds and the waves often terrify me, and I sink.” Oh, come out of the boat of past experiences at once; come out of the boat of external circumstances; come out of the boat, and step out on the word of Christ, and believe, “With Jesus I can walk upon the water.” When Peter was in the boat, what had he between him and the bottom of the sea? A couple of planks; but when he stepped out upon the water what had he between him and the sea? Not a plank, but the word of the Almighty Jesus. Will you come, and without any experience, will you rest upon the word of Jesus, “Lo I am with you alway”? Will you rest upon His word, “Be of good cheer; fear not; it is I”? Every moment Jesus lives in heaven; every moment by His Spirit Jesus whispers that word; and every moment He lives to make it true. Accept it now, accept it now! My Lord Jesus is equal to every emergency. My Lord Jesus can meet the wants of every soul. My whole heart says, “He *can*, He *can* do it; He *will*, He *will* do it!” Oh come, believers, and let us claim most deliberately, most quietly, most restfully, — let us claim, claim it, *claim it*, CLAIM it.

Kept by the Power of God

APPENDIX

Excerpt from the book *Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray, Chapter 8.

The words from which I speak, you will find in 1 Peter 1:5. The third, fourth and fifth verses are: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which... hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible ... reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” The words of my text are: “Kept by the power of God through faith.”

There we have two wonderful, blessed truths about the keeping by which a believer is kept unto salvation. One truth is, *Kept by the power of God*; and the other truth is, *Kept through faith*. We should look at the two sides—at God’s side and His almighty power, offered to us to be our Keeper every moment of the day; and at the human side, we having nothing to do but in faith to let God do His keeping work. We are begotten again to an inheritance kept in Heaven for us; and we are kept here on earth by the power of God. We see there is a double keeping—*the inheritance kept for me in Heaven*, and *I on earth kept for the inheritance* there.

Now, as to the first part of this keeping, there is no doubt and no question. God keeps the inheritance in Heaven very wonderfully and perfectly, and it is waiting there safely. And the same God keeps me for the inheritance. That is what I want to understand.

You know it is very foolish of a father to take great trouble to have an inheritance for his children, and to keep it for them, if he does not keep them for it. What would you think of a man spending his whole time and making every sacrifice to amass money, and as he gets his tens of thousands, you ask him why it is that he sacrifices himself so, and his answer is: “I want to leave my children a large inheritance, and I am keeping it for them”—if you were then to hear that that man takes no trouble to educate his children, that he allows them to run upon the street wild, and to go on in paths of sin and ignorance and folly, what would you think of him? Would not you say: “Poor man! he is keeping an inheritance for his children, but he is not keeping or preparing his children for the inheritance”! And there are so many Christians who think: “My God is keeping the inheritance for me”; but they cannot believe: “My God is keeping me for that inheritance.” The same power, the same love, the same God doing the double work.

Now, I want to speak about a work God does upon us—keeping us for the inheritance. I have already said that we have two very simple truths: the one the divine side—*we are kept by the power of God*; the other, the human side—*we are kept through faith*.

Kept by the Power of God

Look at the divine side: Christians are kept by the power of God.

Keeping Includes All

Think, first of all, that *this keeping is all-inclusive*.

What is kept? *You* are kept. How much of you? The whole being. Does God keep one part of you and not another? No. Some people have an idea that this is a sort of vague, general keeping, and that God will keep them in such a way that when they die they will get to Heaven. But they do not apply that word kept to everything in their being and nature. And yet that is what God wants.

Here I have a watch. Suppose that this watch had been borrowed from a friend, and he said to me: "When you go to Europe, I will let you take it with you, but mind you keep it safely and bring it back."

And suppose I damaged the watch, and had the hands broken, and the face defaced, and some of the wheels and springs spoiled, and took it back in that condition, and handed it to my friend; he would say:

"Ah, but I gave you that watch on condition that you would keep it."

"Have I not kept it? There is the watch."

"But I did not want you to keep it in that general way, so that you should bring me back only the shell of the watch, or the remains. I expected you to keep every part of it."

And so God does not want to keep us in this general way, so that at the last, somehow or other, we shall be saved as by fire, and just get into Heaven. But the keeping power and the love of God applies to every particular of our being.

There are some people who think God will keep them in spiritual things, but not in temporal things. This latter, they say, lies outside of His line. Now, God sends you to work in the world, but He did not say: "I must now leave you to go and earn your own money, and to get your livelihood for yourself." He knows you are not able to keep yourself. But God says: "My child, there is no work you are to do, and no business in which you are engaged, and not a cent which you are to spend, but I, your Father, will take that up into my keeping." God not only cares for the spiritual, but for the temporal also. The greater part of the life of many people must be spent, sometimes eight or nine or ten hours a day, amid the temptations and distractions of business; but God will care for you there. The keeping of God includes all.

There are other people who think: "Ah! in time of trial God keeps me, but in times of prosperity I do not need His keeping; then I forget Him and let Him go." Others, again, think the very opposite. They think: "In time of prosperity, when things are smooth and quiet, I am able to cling to God, but when heavy trials come, somehow or other my will rebels, and God does not keep me then."

Now, I bring you the message that in prosperity as in adversity, in the sunshine as in the dark, your God is ready to keep you all the time.

Then again, there are others who think of this keeping thus: "God will keep me from doing very great wickedness, but there are small sins I cannot expect God to keep me from. There is the sin of temper. I cannot expect God to conquer that."

When you hear of some man who has been tempted and gone astray or fallen into drunkenness or murder, you thank God for His keeping power.

"I might have done the same as that man," you say, "if God had not kept me." And you believe He kept you from drunkenness and murder.

And why do you not need believe that God can keep you from outbreaks of temper? You thought that this was of less importance; you did not remember that the great commandment of the New

Testament is—“Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). And when your temper and hasty judgment and sharp words came out, you sinned against the highest law—the law of God’s love. And yet you say: “God will not, God cannot”—no, you will not say, God cannot; but you say, “God does not keep me from that.” You perhaps say: “He can; but there is something in me that cannot attain to it, and which God does not take away.”

I want to ask you, Can believers live a holier life than is generally lived? Can believers experience the keeping power of God all the day, to keep them from sin? Can believers be kept in fellowship with God? And I bring you a message from the Word of God, in these words: *Kept by the power of God*. There is no qualifying clause to them. The meaning is, that if you will entrust yourself entirely and absolutely to the omnipotence of God, He will delight to keep you.

Some people think that they never can get so far as that every word of their mouth should be to the glory of God. But it is what God wants of them, it is what God expects of them. God is willing to set a watch at the door of their mouth, and if God will do that, cannot He keep their tongue and their lips? He can; and that is what God is going to do for them that trust Him. God’s keeping is all-inclusive, and let everyone who longs to live a holy life think out all their needs, and all their weaknesses, and all their shortcomings, and all their sins, and say deliberately: “Is there any sin that my God cannot keep me from?” And the heart will have to answer: “No; God can keep me from every sin.”

Keeping Requires Power

Second, if you want to understand this keeping, remember that it is not only an all-inclusive keeping, but it is an almighty keeping.

I want to get that truth burned into my soul; I want to worship God until my whole heart is filled with the thought of His omnipotence. God is almighty, and the Almighty God offers Himself to work in my heart, to do the work of keeping me; and I want to get linked with Omnipotence, or rather, linked to the Omnipotent One, to the living God, and to have my place in the hollow of His hand. You read the Psalms, and you think of the wonderful thoughts in many of the expressions that David uses; as, for instance, when he speaks about God being *our God, our Fortress, our Refuge, our strong Tower, our Strength and our Salvation*. David had very wonderful views of how the everlasting God is Himself the hiding place of the believing soul, and of how He takes the believer and keeps him in the very hollow of His hand, in the secret of His pavilion, under the shadow of His wings, under His very feathers. And there David lived. And oh, we who are the children of Pentecost, we who have known Christ and His blood and the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven, why is it we know so little of what it is to walk tremblingly step by step with the Almighty God as our Keeper?

Have you ever thought that in every action of grace in your heart you have the whole omnipotence of God engaged to bless you? When I come to a man and he bestows upon me a gift of money, I get it and go away with it. He has given me something of his; the rest he keeps for himself. But that is not the way with the power of God. God can part with nothing of His own power, and therefore I can experience the power and goodness of God only so far as I am in contact and fellowship with Himself; and when I come into contact and fellowship with Himself, I come into contact and fellowship with the whole omnipotence of God, and have the omnipotence of God to help me every day.

A son has, perhaps, a very rich father, and as the former is about to commence business the father says: “You can have as much money as you want for your undertaking.” All the father has is at the disposal of the son. And that is the way with God, your Almighty God. You can hardly take it in; you feel yourself such a little worm. His omnipotence needed to keep a little worm! Yes, His omnipotence is needed to keep every little worm that lives in the dust, and also to keep the universe, and therefore His omnipotence is much more needed in keeping your soul and mine from the power of sin.

Oh, if you want to grow in grace, do learn to begin here. In all your judgments and meditations and thoughts and deeds and questionings and studies and prayers, learn to be kept by your Almighty

God. What is Almighty God not going to do for the child that trusts Him? The Bible says: "Above all that we can ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). It is Omnipotence you must learn to know and trust, and then you will live as a Christian ought to live. How little we have learned to study God, and to understand that a godly life is a life full of God, a life that loves God and waits on Him, and trusts Him, and allows Him to bless it! We cannot do the will of God except by the power of God. God gives us the first experience of His power to prepare us to long for more, and to come and claim all that He can do. God help us to trust Him every day.

Keeping Is Continuous

Another thought. This keeping is not only all-inclusive and omnipotent, but also continuous and unbroken.

People sometimes say: "For a week or a month God has kept me very wonderfully: I have lived in the light of His countenance, and I cannot say what joy I have not had in fellowship with Him. He has blessed me in my work for others. He has given me souls, and at times I felt as if I were carried heavenward eagle wings. But it did not continue. It was too good; it could not last." And some say: "It was necessary that I should fall to keep me humble." And others say: "I know it was my own fault; but somehow you cannot always live up in the heights."

Oh, beloved, why is it? Can there be any reason why the keeping of God should not be continuous and unbroken? Just think. All life is in unbroken continuity. If my life were stopped for half an hour I would be dead, and my life gone. Life is a continuous thing, and the life of God is the life of His Church, and the life of God is His almighty power working in us. And God comes to us as the Almighty One, and without any condition He offers to be my Keeper, and His keeping means that day by day, moment by moment, God is going to keep us.

If I were to ask you the question: "Do you think God is able to keep you one day from actual transgression?" you would answer: "I not only know He is able to do it, but I think He has done it. There have been days in which He has kept my heart in His holy presence, when, though I have always had a sinful nature within me, He has kept me from conscious, actual transgression."

Now, if He can do that for an hour or a day, why not for two days? Oh! let us make God's omnipotence as revealed in His Word the measure of our expectations. Has God not said in His Word: "I, the Lord, do keep it, and will water it every moment" (Isaiah 27:3)? What can that mean? Does "every moment" *mean* every moment? Did God promise of that vineyard or red wine that *every moment* He would water it so that the heat of the sun and the scorching wind might never dry it up? Yes. In South Africa they sometimes make a graft, and above it they tie a bottle of water, so that now and then there shall be a drop to saturate what they have put about it. And so the moisture is kept there unceasingly until the graft has had time to stroke, and resist the heat of the sun.

Will our God, in His tenderhearted love toward us, not keep us every moment when He has promised to do so? Oh! if we once got hold of the thought: Our whole spiritual life is to be God's doing—"It is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13) — when once we get faith to expect that from God, God will do all for us.

The keeping is to be continuous. Every morning God will meet you as you wake. It is not a question: If I forgot to wake in the morning with the thought of Him, what will come of it? If you trust your waking to God, God will meet you in the morning as you wake with His divine sunshine and love, and He will give you the consciousness that through the day you have got God to take charge of you continuously with His almighty power. And God will meet you the next day and every day; and never mind if in the practice of fellowship there comes failure sometimes. If you maintain your position and say: "Lord, I am going to expect Thee to do Thy utmost, and I am going to trust Thee day by day to keep me absolutely," your faith will grow stronger and stronger, and you will know the keeping power of God in unbrokenness.

Kept Through Faith

And now the other side—*Believing*. “Kept by the power of God *through faith*.” How must we look at this faith?

Faith Implies Helplessness

Let me say, first of all, that this faith means utter impotence and helplessness before God.

At the bottom of all faith there is a feeling of helplessness. If I have a bit of business to transact, perhaps to buy a house, the lawyer must do the work of getting the transfer of the property in my name and making all the arrangements. I cannot do that work, and in trusting that agent I confess I cannot do it. And so faith always means helplessness. In many cases it means: I can do it with a great deal of trouble, but another can do it better. But in most cases it is utter helplessness; another must do it for me. And that is the secret of the spiritual life. A man must learn to say: “I give up everything; I have tried and longed and thought and prayed, but failure has come. God has blessed me and helped me, but still, in the long run, there has been so much of sin and sadness.” What a change comes when a man is thus broken down into utter helplessness and self-despair, and says: “I can do nothing!”

Remember Paul. He was living a blessed life, and he had been taken up into the third Heaven, and then the thorn in the flesh came, “a messenger of Satan to buffet me.” And what happened? Paul could not understand it, and he prayed the Lord three times to take it away; but the Lord said, in effect: “No; it is possible that you might exalt yourself, and therefore I have sent you this trial to keep you weak and humble.”

And Paul then learned a lesson that he never forgot, and that was—to rejoice in his infirmities. He said that the weaker he was the better it was for him, for when he was weak, he was strong in his Lord Christ.

Do you want to enter what people call “the higher life”? Then go a step lower down. I remember Dr. Boardman telling how that once he was invited by a gentleman to go to see a factory where they made fine shot, and I believe the workmen did so by pouring down molten lead from a great height. This gentleman wanted to take Dr. Boardman up to the top of the tower to see how the work was done. The doctor came to the tower, he entered by the door, and began going upstairs; but when he had gone a few steps the gentleman called out: “That is the wrong way. You must come down this way; that stair is locked up.”

The gentleman took him downstairs a good many steps, and there an elevator was ready to take him to the top; and he said: “I have learned a lesson that going down is often the best way to get up.”

Ah, yes, God will have to bring us very low down; there will have to come upon us a sense of emptiness and despair and nothingness. It is when we sink down in utter helplessness that the everlasting God will reveal Himself in His power, and that our hearts will learn to trust God alone.

What is it that keeps us from trusting Him perfectly?

Many a one says: “I believe what you say, but there is one difficulty. If my trust were perfect and always abiding, all would come right, for I know God will honor trust. But how am I to get that trust?”

My answer is: “By the death of self. The great hindrance to trust is self-effort. So long as you have got your own wisdom and thoughts and strength, you cannot fully trust God. But when God breaks you down, when everything begins to grow dim before your eyes, and you see that you understand nothing, then God is coming near, and if you will bow down in nothingness and wait upon God, He will become all.”

As long as we are something, God cannot be all, and His omnipotence cannot do its full work. That is the beginning of faith—utter despair of self, a ceasing from man and everything on earth, and finding our hope in God alone.

Faith Is Rest

And then, next, we must understand that faith is rest.

In the beginning of the faith-life, faith is struggling; but as long as faith is struggling, faith has not attained its strength. But when faith in its struggling gets to the end of itself, and just throws itself upon God and rests on Him, then comes joy and victory.

Perhaps I can make it plainer if I tell the story of how the Keswick Convention began. Canon Battersby was an evangelical clergyman of the Church of England for more than twenty years, a man of deep and tender godliness, but he had not the consciousness of rest and victory over sin, and often was deeply sad at the thought of stumbling and failure and sin. When he heard about the possibility of victory, he felt it was desirable, but it was as if he could not attain it. On one occasion, he heard an address on “Rest and Faith” from the story of the nobleman who came from Capernaum to Cana to ask Christ to heal his child. In the address it was shown that the nobleman believed that Christ could help him in a general way, but he came to Jesus a good deal by way of an experiment. He hoped Christ would help him, but he had not any assurance of that help. But what happened? When Christ said to him: “Go thy way, for thy child liveth,” that man believed the word that Jesus spoke; he rested in that word. He had no proof that his child was well again, and he had to walk back seven hours’ journey to Capernaum. He walked back, and on the way met his servant, and got the first news that the child was well, that at one o’clock on the afternoon of the previous day, at the very time that Jesus spoke to him, the fever left the child. That father rested upon the word of Jesus and His work, and he went down to Capernaum and found his child well; and he praised God, and became with his whole house a believer and disciple of Jesus.

Oh, friends, that is faith! When God comes to me with the promise of His keeping, and I have nothing on earth to trust in, I say to God: “Thy word is enough; kept by the power of God.” That is faith, that is rest.

When Canon Battersby heard that address, he went home that night, and in the darkness of the night found rest. He rested on the word of Jesus. And the next morning, in the streets of Oxford, he said to a friend: “I have found it!” Then he went and told others, and asked that the Keswick Convention might be begun, and those at the convention with himself should testify simply what God had done.

It is a great thing when a man comes to rest on God’s almighty power for every moment of his life, in prospect of temptations to temper and haste and anger and unlovingness and pride and sin. It is a great thing in prospect of these to enter into a covenant with the omnipotent Jehovah, not on account of anything that any man says, or of anything that my heart feels, but on the strength of the Word of God: “Kept by the power of God through faith.”

Oh, let us say to God that we are going to test Him to the very uttermost. Let us say: We ask Thee for nothing more than Thou canst give, but we want nothing less. Let us say: My God, let my life be a proof of what the omnipotent God can do. Let these be the two dispositions of our souls every day—deep helplessness, and simple, childlike rest.

Faith Needs Fellowship

That brings me to just one more thought in regard to faith—faith implies fellowship with God.

Many people want to take the Word and believe that, and they find they cannot believe it. Ah, no! you cannot separate God from His Word. No goodness or power can be received separate from God, and if you want to get into this life of godliness, you *must* take time for fellowship with God.

People sometimes tell me: “My life is one of such scurry and bustle that I have no time for fellowship with God.” A dear missionary said to me: “People do not know how we missionaries are tempted. I get up at five o’clock in the morning, and there are the natives waiting for their orders

for work. Then I have to go to the school and spend hours there; and then there is other work, and sixteen hours rush along, and I hardly get time to be alone with God.”

Ah! there is the lack. I pray you, remember two things. I have not told you to trust the omnipotence of God as a thing, and I have not told you to trust the Word of God as a written book, but I have told you to go to the God of omnipotence and the God of the Word. Deal with God as that nobleman dealt with the living Christ. Why was he able to believe the word that Christ spoke to him? Because in the very eyes and tones and voice of Jesus, the Son of God, he saw and heard something which made him feel that he could trust Him. And that is what Christ can do for you and me. Do not try to stir and arouse faith from within. How often I have tried to do that, and made a fool of myself! You cannot stir up faith from the depths of your heart. Leave your heart, and look into the face of Christ, and listen to what He tells you about how He will keep you. Look up into the face of your loving Father, and take time every day with Him, and begin a new life with the deep emptiness and poverty of a man who has got nothing, and who wants to get everything from Him—with the deep restfulness of a man who rests on the living God, the omnipotent Jehovah—and try God, and prove Him if He will not open the windows of Heaven and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room to receive it.

I close by asking if you are willing to experience to the very full the heavenly keeping for the heavenly inheritance? Robert Murray M’Cheyne says, somewhere: “Oh, God, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made.” And if that prayer is in your heart, come now, and let us enter into a covenant with the everlasting and omnipotent Jehovah afresh, and in great helplessness, but in great restfulness place ourselves in His hands. And then as we enter into our covenant, let us have the one prayer—that we may believe fully that the everlasting God is going to be our Companion, holding our hand every moment of the day; our Keeper, watching over us without a moment’s interval; our Father, delighting to reveal Himself in our souls always. He has the power to let the sunshine of His love be with us all the day. Do not be afraid because you have got your business that you cannot have God with you always. Learn the lesson that the natural sun shines upon you all the day, and you enjoy its light, and wherever you are you have got the sun; God takes care that it shines upon you. And God will take care that His own divine light shines upon you, and that you shall abide in that light, if you will only trust Him for it. Let us trust God to do that with a great and entire trust.

Here is the omnipotence of God, and here is faith reaching out to the measure of that omnipotence. Shall we not say: “All that that omnipotence can do, I am going to trust my God for”? Are not the two sides of this heavenly life wonderful? God’s omnipotence covers me, and my will in its littleness rests in that omnipotence, and rejoices in it!

Moment by moment, I’m kept in His love;
Moment by moment, I’ve life from above;
Looking to Jesus, the glory doth shine;
Moment by moment, Oh, Lord, I am Thine!

