

# God's Guidance and How to Get It

by R.A. Torrey

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*R.A. Torrey emphasizes the importance of seeking God's guidance through faith, prayer, and surrendering one's will to Him.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 32:8, James 1:5

**Topics:** "Divine Guidance", "Surrendering to God's Will"

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## Description

R.A. Torrey emphasizes the profound privilege of receiving God's guidance in life, asserting that true guidance is available only to believers who genuinely seek it. He outlines seven essential steps to obtain this guidance, starting with accepting Jesus Christ and recognizing our own limitations in wisdom. Torrey stresses the importance of sincere prayer, a willingness to follow God's will, and the necessity of expecting clear answers from God. He warns against the dangers of self-deception in seeking guidance and encourages believers to trust in God's clarity and timing. Ultimately, Torrey assures that God will guide those who fully surrender their will to Him.

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## Transcript

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." Ps. 32:8.

"But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Jas 1:5-8.

### I. THE POSSIBILITY AND BLESSEDNESS OF BEING GUIDED BY GOD.

ONE of the greatest and most precious privileges of the believer is to have the guidance of God at every turn of life. One of the most important of all practical questions is how to get this guidance. There are many who say very positively that they are guided of God who are not so guided. The event proves that they are not so guided. Some months ago a young woman informed me that she was guided of God to leave for Africa at a certain date and that God had given her positive assurance that the money would be provided for her to leave at that date. I was not at all sure that she was guided as she said that she was, and the event proved she was not; for the money was not furnished for her to leave at that date. As we see so many people apparently absolutely sure that God is guiding them when in the event it becomes clear that

He is not, does it not prove that the supposed guidance of God is a fancy and not a fact? It does not. The fact that some people are confident that they are guided when they are not is no more evidence that there is no such thing as guidance than the fact that some people are sure they are saved when they are not is an evidence that there is no such thing as salvation, or assurance of salvation. The fact that some people are misled in no way proves that all people are misled. There is such a thing as guidance, and there is a way to get guidance. There is a way to avoid the illusions regarding guidance into which many fall through ignorance of the Word of God.

## II. HOW TO GET GUIDANCE.

We come now face to face with the question of how to get God's guidance. There are seven steps, clearly set forth in the Word of God, in the path that leads to God's guidance.

1. The first step toward obtaining God's guidance is that we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour, and surrender to Him as our Lord and Master. This comes out very plainly in Jas. 1 : 5, "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God." It is clear that the promise is only made to believers. James does not say, "If any man lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, but, If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God. There is no promise in the Word of God that God will guide anyone but the believer in Jesus Christ. Indeed there is no promise in the Word of God that He will answer the prayers of unbelievers about anything. God's guidance is the privilege of the believer in Jesus Christ and of him alone. By believer I do not mean the one who merely has an orthodox faith about Jesus Christ, but the one who is a believer in the Bible sense, that is, the one who has that living faith in Jesus Christ that leads him to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, and to surrender his life to His service and control. If then, we would have God's sure guidance, the first thing to make sure of is that we really are believers, that we really are children of God, that we really have accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and really have surrendered our lives to His Lordship.

2. The second step toward obtaining God's guidance is that we clearly realize our own utter inability to decide for ourselves the way in which we should go. The promise, as we find it in the Word of God, makes this very plain. James says, "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, etc." The promise is made to the one who lacks wisdom, not the one who has it. It is made to the one who realizes the limitations of his own wisdom and realizes his dependence upon God for His wisdom. It is at this point that many, very many, fail of guidance. They have such confidence in their own opinions, in their own judgment, in their own ability to decide the course that they should pursue, that though they may as a formality ask God for His guidance, they do not really have any deep sense of their need of His guidance, and they have such confidence in their own wisdom that they mistake their own judgment for the guidance of God. Having prayed for Wisdom, but still being confident in their own judgment, they become all the more sure that their opinion is right and they attribute their own opinion to God. If we are to have God's guidance we must be utterly emptied of all confidence in our own judgment; and, in a sense of our own inability to decide for ourselves, we should come to God, putting our own notions utterly aside, for Him to tell us what He would have us to do, and we should wait silently before Him to make known His will.

3. The third step toward obtaining Divine guidance is that we really desire to know God's will, and are thoroughly willing to do it whatever it may be. This also comes out in the promise. It reads, "If any of you lacketh wisdom let him ask of God." Of course, the asking must be genuine, and there is no genuine asking wisdom of God unless we are eagerly desirous of knowing God's will and heartily willing to do it when that will is made known. The genuine and absolute surrender of the will to God is the great secret of

guidance. The promise, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee, " as is evident from the context, is made to the one whose will is surrendered to God, for the next verse reads, "Be ye not as the horse, or as a mule, which have no understanding: whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, else they will not come unto thee." If we are mulish, that is if we are bent on doing our own will, then God must guide us with "bit and bridle," and oftentimes must break our jaw before we submit to Him. His instruction, teaching and guidance, His gentle guidance "with His eye upon us," is for the one whose will is entirely surrendered to Him. The surrender must be real surrender. There are many who think they wish to know and are willing to do God's will, and that it is God's will that they are waiting to know, but, what they are really seeking, is to get God to say yes to their own plans, and get God to endorse the plan they themselves have already subconsciously formed, and they are not waiting, as they suppose they are, until God tells them what His will really is, they are waiting until God tells them to do the thing that they want to do and, in their subconscious self, have made up their mind to do, so they think and think and think, and pray and pray and pray, until they think themselves into thinking that God tells them to do the thing that they themselves wished to do from the outset, and this thing that they wanted to do from the outset may not be God's plan at all. This is one of the most frequent causes of thinking we have the mind of God when we are only doing the thing that we want to do. Men and women who go to God for guidance in this way, i. e., without having absolutely put aside their own will and their own opinion, when they do think themselves into the place where they fancy that God has endorsed their plan, are the most positive in saying that "God tells me to do thus and so." So then, we must, if we would be guided of God, make absolutely sure that we have put away our own will entirely and are utterly willing to and desirous of doing God's will, whatever it may be.

We must be sure that we are silent before God and truly listening to His voice, and not still listening to this desire that we have in the depths of our heart that God shall tell us to do the thing that we want to do. When Mr. Moody invited me to take up the work in Chicago in 1889, I went to God to show me what might be His will. There was a great conflict in my heart. There were reasons why I wished to go to Chicago; there are reasons why I wished to stay in Minneapolis, or why I thought I must stay in Minneapolis. It took me three days to get absolutely silent before God, and to put away my own conflicting ideas on both sides. When I did come to the place where I had no will whatever in the matter, but simply wished to know what God's will was, whichever way it might be, when I became absolutely silent before God, God soon made the path in which He would have me go as plain as day.

The fact that the thing that we are contemplating doing is a hard thing, that it requires great sacrifice, does not by any means make it sure that it is God's will and not ours. Our hearts naturally are deceitful above all things, and oftentimes wilful persons will set their heart on doing a very hard thing. They may set their heart upon doing it out of spiritual pride, or for many other reasons than because of surrender to the will of God. They want to do this hard thing, and they pray and pray and pray, and brood and brood and brood until they make themselves think that this hard thing is the will of God, when very likely the thing that God would have them do is some very humdrum, everyday sort of a thing. There is many a man and many a woman determined to be a foreign missionary, and a foreign missionary under the most difficult circumstances, whom God has called to a very quiet life at home, and while they are willing to endure the severest hardships in the foreign field, they are not willing to plod on quietly and unseen and unnoticed at home. But the best thing is God's will, whether that will be in a quiet humdrum life at home, or whether it be a notable life of courage and self-sacrifice in the foreign field; and, if we are to have God's guidance we must, as already said, become absolutely silent before God, and be willing and glad to serve Him in the most ordinary sort of life, a life that seems far beneath our talents and our training, if that be His will, just

as ready to do that as to serve Him in a field that demands large abilities and great sacrifice. Satan cheats many of God's children out of accomplishing the things that God would have them do by making them restless in the homely paths that God opens up to them of doing things that they can do, and sets their heart upon doing things that they cannot do; and thus they leave the path of actual achievement to brood over things they would like to do, but which it is not God's will for them to do, and which they never will do. Oftentimes a whole life is spoiled in this way.

4. The fourth step toward obtaining God's guidance is definite prayer for that guidance. "If any of you lacketh wisdom," says God, "let him ask of God." There should be definite prayer for definite guidance. We should ask God's guidance at every turn of life; we should ask His guidance not merely in the great crises of life, but in the ordinary matters of everyday life, in our business, in our domestic work, in the most simple things. None of us knows enough to direct our own steps in the simplest matters of every day life. We need God's guidance at every turn of life, and we can have it, and the way to get it is to ask for it. But the asking will do no good unless we have already taken the other steps that have been mentioned. The definite prayer is the fourth step and not the first, and we should be sure we have taken the first three steps before we take the fourth.

5. The fifth step toward obtaining God's guidance is positive expectation that God will grant our prayer and give us the guidance that we ask. This also comes out in the exact wording of the promise. It reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man (i.e., the man that doubts, the man who does not confidently expect) think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Here is where many miss God's guidance. Their wills are surrendered, they really desire to know and do God's will, and they ask God for His guidance, but they do not confidently expect that God will give the guidance they ask. They hope He will, but they are not at all sure that He will. If we have taken the other steps, when we ask God for His guidance we may be absolutely sure that God will give it. Some one may say, "But others have asked God's guidance and thought they had it, when the event showed they did not. May not I also be mistaken?" No, not if you have taken the other steps already mentioned and will take the steps that we are still to mention. We have God's absolute promise of guidance made to those who meet the conditions which we have described, and therefore we may ask guidance with the absolute certainty that we are going to receive it. When we ask for God's wisdom, if we are of those to whom the promise is made, we know that we have asked something according to God's will, for He has definitely promised it in His Word, and, therefore, we have a right to know that our prayer is heard and the thing we have asked is granted (1 John 5:14, 15).

Some years ago I was speaking at a Bible Conference of the Y. M. C. A. at White Bear Lake, Minn. I was speaking on the subject of prayer. As I left the platform to hurry to a train I found the next speaker waiting for me on the outside of the audience. He was greatly excited. He was a gifted teacher of the Word of God and had been much used of God. He stopped me as I passed by hurrying to the train and said, "I am going to tear to pieces everything you have said to these young men." I replied, "If I have not spoken according to the Book I hope you will tear it to pieces, but what did I say that was not according to the Bible?" He answered, "You have produced upon these young men the impression that we can ask things of God and get the very thing we ask." I replied, "I do not know whether that is the impression I produced or not, but that is certainly the impression that I meant to produce." "But," he said, "that is not right. We should pray, if it be Thy will." "Yes," I replied, "if we do not know what the will of God is in the case we should say if it be Thy will, but if God has revealed His will in any specific instance why should we put in any if?" "But," he

said, "we cannot know the will of God." "What is the Word of God given to us for," I asked, "if it is not to show us what the will of God is? For example, we are told in Jas. 1 : 5-7, if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. Now," I said, "when you ask for wisdom do you not know by this specific promise that you have asked something according to the will of God, and that you are going to get it?" "But," he replied, "I do not know what wisdom is." I said, "If you knew what wisdom was you would not need to ask for it, but whatever wisdom may be, do you not know that when you ask for wisdom God is going to give it?" He made no reply. What reply was there to make? Here we have a definite promise of God; and, if we meet the conditions of that promise, we may be, and ought to be, absolutely sure, that God will do as He says, absolutely sure that God will give us wisdom in this specific case in which we ask it. If we have any uncertainty at this point God will not give us the wisdom we ask. We should rest absolutely on God's plain promise, and when we ask for wisdom be absolutely sure that that wisdom is coming. How God gives wisdom we will consider later.

6. The sixth step toward obtaining God's guidance is to follow God's guidance a step at a time as He gives it. Here again is where many miss their way. Many seek to know the whole way before they take a single step, but God's method is to show us a step at a time. Look at Peter in Acts 12. God led him a step at a time: first the angel smote Peter on the side and awoke him, and told him to arise up quickly. This Peter did, and his chains fell from his hands. Then the angel said unto him, "Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals," and he did so.

Then the angel said, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me," and Peter did exactly as he was told. He was not even sure that he was awake, but he followed step by step, even when he thought he might be asleep. They passed the first and second guard and came to the iron gate that led into the city. Peter did not stop and argue as to whether the gate would be opened or not, but just followed up to the gate, and when he got to the gate the gate opened of its own accord. Thus God led him step by step, and thus God leads us.

The Word of God tells us that "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord" (Ps. 37 : 23). The trouble with many of us is we wish God to show us the whole path, and are not willing to go a step at a time. Look at Paul in the 16th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the 6th to 8th verses. Paul and his companions went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia and would have passed into the province of Asia to preach the Word there, but the Holy Ghost said, "No." So Paul passed over against Mysia and was about to go into Bithynia, the next province.

At that point "the Spirit of Jesus" again said, "No"; so passing by Mysia he came down to Troas, and there a vision appeared to Paul in the night, leading him to go over into Macedonia. Step by step the Spirit led, and step by step Paul followed on. The thing for us to do is to take the next step that God shows us in answer to our prayer and not wait until God shows us the whole way. A college student once came to me at the Northfield Students Convention, telling me that he was greatly perplexed as to his future life, that he had been asking God's guidance and could not get it.

I asked Him what he was asking God's guidance about and he said, about what he should do when he got out of college. I said, "How far are you along in college?" and he said that the following fall he would begin his junior year. I said, "Then you have two years left in college." "Yes." "Are you sure you ought to take those two years in college?" "Yes." "Then what you are perplexed about is because you cannot get guidance for two years from now." "Yes." "Well, just go on as God leads you, and in the two years if not before God will show you what to do next."

A very large share of our perplexity about the will of God is of this kind. We are troubled because God has not shown us what He wants us to do next year, or it may be next month. All we need is God's guidance for to-day. Follow on step by step as He leads you and the way will open as you go.

7. There remains just one more step in the path that leads to God's sure guidance, and that is that we always bear in mind that God's guidance is clear guidance. Here is where many go astray. They have impulses, they know not from what source; they have what appear like leadings, for example, to go to the foreign field, or do some other thing, but they are not at all sure it is God's leading. Very likely it is not God's leading; and yet they follow it for fear they may be disobeying God, or, perhaps they do not follow it and then get into condemnation lest they have disobeyed God.

I have met many in the deepest gloom from this cause. They had an impression they ought to do a certain thing, they were not at all clear the impression was from God, they did not do the thing, and then the devil has made them think that they have disobeyed God, and some even think they have committed the unpardonable sin because they did not obey this prompting (of the origin of which they were not at all sure). If we will only bear in mind that God's guidance is clear guidance we will be delivered from this snare of Satan.

We are told in 1 John 1:5 that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Any leadings that are not absolutely clear, provided our wills are surrendered to God, are not from Him as yet. We have a right in every case where we have any impression that we ought to do a certain thing, but where we are not absolutely sure it is the will of God, to go to God and say to Him, "Heavenly Father, I desire to do Thy will; my will is absolutely surrendered to Thine, now if this is of Thee, make it clear as day and I will do it, and if our wills are absolutely surrendered to God and we fully realize our own inability to decide and are ready to be led by Him, God will make as clear as day if it is His will, and we have a right not to do it until He does make it clear, and we have a right to have an absolutely clear conscience in not doing it until He does make it clear.

God is a Father and is more willing to make His will known to us than we are to make our will known to our children, provided we really wish to know and wish to do His will. We have no right to be in mortal dread before God and to be in constant apprehension that we have not done His will. When we accepted Christ and surrendered our wills to God we did not receive the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but the Spirit that gives us the place as sons where we cry, "Abba, Father," in perfect childlike trust in Him (Rom. 8:15).

We would not mislead our children in such a case, we would not leave our children to any doubts or uncertainty, we would make our will as clear as day, and so will God make His. Satan will prevent a man or woman making a full surrender to God just as long as he can, but when a man does make a full surrender, then the devil will do everything in his power to torment him. He will suggest all kinds of ridiculous things for him to do, and then the man will not do them and Satan will torment him by making him think he has gone back on his surrender to God.

Let us never forget that not all spiritual impressions are from the Holy Spirit. There are other spirits beside the Holy Spirit and we need to try the spirits whether they be of God (1 John 4:1). Some people are so anxious to be led of the Holy Spirit that they are willing to be led by any spirit and thus plunge into the delusions of spiritualism or "the tongues" business or other forms of fanaticism. I repeat it again, God's guidance is clear guidance and we should not follow any impression until God makes it as clear as day that it is from Him.

The main point in the whole matter of guidance is the absolute surrender of the will to God, the delighting in His will and the being willing to do joyfully

the very things we would not like to do naturally, the very things in connexion with which there may be many disagreeable circumstances because of association with or even subordination to people that we do not altogether like, and difficulties of other kinds, doing them joyfully simply because it is the will of God, and the willingness to let God lead in any way He pleases, whether it may be by His Word or by His Spirit. If we will only completely distrust our own judgment and have absolute confidence in God's judgment, and God's willingness to guide us, and are absolutely surrendered to His will, whatever it may be, and are willing to let God choose His way of guidance, and will go on step by step as He does guide us, and are studying His word to know His will, and are listening for the still small voice of the Spirit, going step by step as He leads, He will guide us with His eye. He will guide us with His counsel to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, and afterwards receive us into glory (Ps.

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