

Divine Guidance

by Loudon Hamilton

GUIDANCE is no new idea. We are all guided by something: by money and status; by what the neighbours think; by sex, success and security; by self-interest, self-importance and self-concern; wanting to have our own way and to control others, thinking we know best and can cope.

We can be guided by some pet ambition or private relationship; by our reactions and feelings, our likes and dislikes, our moods; by our attitudes and habits; by some bitterness, disappointment or hurt from the past; by fear of making a mistake, being criticised or laughed at.

Fear is the worst form of guidance. All these things, and many more, do in fact guide us in ordinary life, often unconsciously.

But they are not the kind of guidance we are thinking of now. Just the opposite.

Guidance is a triangle between you, God and the other person. Power flows round if there is no break. The only thing that can break that power is sin. Sin in us not the other person. **SIN** with the big capital 'I', the *ego* in the centre.

It may be some sin we won't let go. Something in our lives we will not call sin or be honest about. Some habit we will not let go, like impure thoughts or any such private indulgence.

Some person we won't forgive, some apology we won't make.

Some guidance we have already had but have not obeyed.

Something we won't seek God's guidance about because we know quite well what the answer would be if we did.

Some point at which we have stopped fighting and ceased to expect change.

So we accept the second best, calling it 'realistic'. It may be just atheistic.

What is the answer?

One of the first things I heard Dr Buchman say was that God can put a thought in a person's mind. 'So live that God can say "hullo" to you at any time of the day or night.'

Guidance requires two things—absolute honesty and a readiness to obey.

Guidance is for everything or it's nothing. Don't be like the young man who said he hurried through his guidance in the morning so he could have the rest of the day to himself.

If we hold back at one point, we are powerless at all points. If we compromise anywhere, we are compromised everywhere. Remember, it is always the last five per cent that counts.

Don't use God like the Fire Brigade: only call on Him in a crisis, and when that's over, carry on in the same old way. A young lady once said that whenever she saw her mother on her knees, she knew something awful had happened in the family.

Why not deal with the things that caused the crisis in the first place?

We humans often love to get along in our strength—only when we have reached our limit do we ask for help.

Reaching our limits

A Scottish farmhand in remote Glencoe who had never seen the sea decided to spend his holiday at the well-known seaport town of Oban. He even ventured out in a rowing boat, but soon found himself in very rough water. Thoroughly frightened he began to pray: 'Oh God, if only you will get me back to Oban, I will get back to Glencoe by myself.'

It is sometimes asked, is not guidance just your conscience? Of course it is conscience, but it is more than that.

An Indian boy once told Buchman: 'My conscience tells me the difference between right and wrong. My guidance tells me what is the right thing to do at the time.'

Conscience corrects. Guidance directs. Of course, consciences are sometimes flexible. A doctor introduced himself once at a meeting. 'My name is so-and-so, pulse 200. I have very little conscience left and what I have is guilty.'

A business man came to an MRA conference at Caux in Switzerland. He may have been a Scot. He heard a Swiss businessman say from the platform that he had returned a large sum of money to the Income Tax. The Scot was very upset. 'If I were to do that, it would not be absolute honesty, it

would be absolute bankruptcy.' He did not sleep much that night. Even when he got home he was still not at peace. So he wrote to his Tax Inspector, 'I have been to a place called Caux—my conscience is troubling me. Here is £500' and he signed his name. Then he added a postscript: 'If my conscience troubles me any more, I will send you the balance.'

Guidance is something to have daily, like breakfast, only have it before breakfast, first thing before the day starts. The violinist tunes his violin before the concert, not after. It sounds better that way.

Guidance begins the night before. Don't waste time getting to bed or talking late. You'll be fresher in the morning. Use an alarm clock if you have to, but agree with your room-mate about that. The day is won or lost in the first waking hour.

Take unhurried time to listen—enough time to forget time. Have a notebook and pencil handy and whatever book has for you divine authority. For the Christian that is the Bible.

Decide beforehand how long you are going to have for quiet and stick to it. Don't let anything or anyone interfere with that. Those with small children will understand what I mean.

It is natural to feel sleepy in the morning. A lady said to Dr Buchman: 'Oh Dr Buchman, I find it so hard to get up in the morning. How do you do it?' He replied: 'I just get up.'

Write down the thoughts you get, all of them. It makes them definite. Your mind is then free for the next thought.

You don't forget them. It is easy to forget. A man told his Doctor: 'My trouble is I cannot remember anything from one moment to the next.' Doctor: 'When did this trouble start?' Patient: 'What trouble?'

The length of time you need in the morning will grow as you do. St Francis de Sales (1567-1622 A.D.) said: 'The secret is to listen to the inner voice.' He taught that half an hour a day is the basic minimum, except when you are exceptionally busy. Then a full hour is necessary.

Continued overleaf

Dr Buchman wrote: 'In my quiet hour I give my mind to disciplined direction so that God's thoughts can become my thoughts. You can learn more and be more sure of it in one hour of listening than you can by reading a thousand books.'

Test the thoughts you get:

1. For the Christian, test by the Bible.
2. By absolute moral standards. If the thoughts you get don't match up to absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, they cannot be God's will.
3. Test by the highest truth we know. For many that will be the teaching of their Church.
4. Consult your friends who also live by guidance—this is an unwritten law of fellowship. It is an acid test of one's commitment to God's plan. No-one can be wholly God-controlled who works alone. Don't always check with those you think will agree with you.
5. Test the thoughts you get by circumstances—these may be over-riding considerations which point clearly to the right course of action.

Beware of reasons for putting off an uncomfortable decision.

If in doubt, take an honest look at the traffic lights—red, yellow or green. Stop, wait or go ahead. You will know, if you are not colour-blind.

Don't worry if at times you don't see the full answer right away. Enlightenment may come from unexpected sources. Some friend may have a further thought. You are not going to be infallible. The point may come when you have to act on faith—you may not know till long afterwards that you had been guided at all.

Test guidance, yes; but don't overtest. Have the spirit of expectancy and readiness to receive. It is all too easy to discuss till there is no inspiration left, nothing of the supernatural, the miraculous, the immediate—things which are normal whenever God's spirit is at work.

The steps in making guidance work are: you listen, you write down, you check, you act.

Guidance comes in activity, not in passivity. It is possible, but not advisable, to get too absorbed in taking your own spiritual temperature.

Guidance becomes most real when we are out in the lives of other people, fighting for them, with the help of friends.

A ship at anchor does not need a rudder, only at sea—we need to get out

of our depth. Otherwise what has God got to guide us about?

The story goes of the man who prayed 'O God help me!' But God said, 'How can I help you? You are not doing anything.'

So much depends on two things: your motive in life, what are you really living for? Secondly, have we taken on a big enough job?

If we are rowing a small boat on a lake on a calm summer's day, we do not need a very large compass. Sailing the Atlantic, we need a compass as a constant.

Guidance becomes a reality the minute it becomes a necessity.

The aim of listening is to find God's will. The greatest obstacle to that is our self-will. There is a price to be paid.

This principle of Divine Guidance has been practised over the centuries. St Augustine wrote, 'Eternal wisdom never stops talking to the reasonable creature.' He believed in writing his thoughts down.

Father Alphonse Gratry (1805-72) in his book 'Les Sources' writes: 'If you believe that you have within you a Master who wants to teach you eternal wisdom, say to this Master as to a man face to face, "Master speak. I am listening." But having said, "I am listening", you must listen. That is a simple thing but it is of supreme importance.'

'In order to listen, silence is essential . . . Who among you, let me ask, is ever really silent?'

'It is in fact in the morning, before the business and distractions of the day, that we must listen to God. What exactly is listening to God, you ask. Here is your answer. You will write. Do not trust your memory. Memory is in fact a faculty which forgets. So you must seize the occasion and write.'

Abraham Lincoln understood Divine Guidance: 'I have seen so many evidences of God's direction that I cannot doubt this power comes from above. I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do any particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know it.'

Sometimes simple thoughts have far-reaching consequences. One such thought came to Frank Buchman in Caux in 1955. This is how he describes it: 'It was in the night that I had the compelling thought "Africa will speak to the world through a play." I was at the World Assembly at Caux at the time and with me were Africans from all parts of the Continent. They wrote a play on the theme closest to their hearts—*Freedom*. That play went through the capitals of Europe. Now

it has been made into a film. Men of many nations gave money, time and skill. The film was made in Africa. It had its World Premiere in Hollywood in February 1957. Its Washington premiere was held at the National Theatre. Queues stood four deep for half a mile twice a day.' *Freedom* has been dubbed into nine languages thus far and has been presented in over fifty countries in all five continents.

Asked about Moral Re-Armament, Dr Buchman called it 'the triumph of a God-given thought.'

Some things guidance is not:

It is not a technique or a ritual. It is the fruit of a living relationship with God.

It is not just for saints or experts. It is for the ordinary person as well. The ordinary person, plus God, can do the extraordinary thing. Guidance can become the permanent daily possession of every man, woman and child who is willing to listen and obey.

Children understand this experience. Centuries ago, the child Samuel learnt the simple lesson 'Speak Lord. Your servant is listening.'

In 1918 Dr Buchman told the Chinese: 'Listening to God is not an experience of the few. It is the most sane, normal, healthful thing a person can do. I am absolutely convinced that it is possible for even the newest beginner to have this experience. It is not a question of temperament. It is a matter of simple faith, a willingness to become as little children. You begin to realise your own nothingness.'

Again, guidance is not a substitute for hard work. It is the secret of effective work. You do three hours' work in two. Many students have discovered this.

Guidance is not a means of asserting your authority or of getting children to behave. A British family were working with MRA in Paris. One day their small daughter was misbehaving. Mama called for a quiet time. 'Let us listen to Jesus.' Silence. 'Well, what did Jesus say to you?' 'Jesus did say something, but I did not quite understand. He was talking in French.'

Stressing the need for Divine Guidance in world affairs, Dr Buchman said in a broadcast in May 1955, 'The Electronics of the Spirit':

'Statesmen in every land are beginning to discover that the human mind, however able and sincere, cannot solve the problems created by the human passions of hate, greed and fear. It needs an electronic intervention, an experience of the Spirit, a new dimension that can usher in a new age. It is an answer that works.'