



HOW DO YOU MAKE UP YOUR MIND?

**BY
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FOURPENCE



HOW do you make up your mind?

I have tried all the wrong ways. I have flipped a coin and hoped that there was some supernatural destiny in whether King George or Britannia faced the sky.

I have tried the way of the politician who "sat on the fence with one ear to the ground," and lived by an imaginary Gallup poll of my friends' opinions. Inverting

the words of St. Paul, I have done those things which are done and left undone those things which are not done.

I have taken the advice of the last man with whom I have talked. Then, if things went wrong, someone else could be blamed. I might remain silent and graciously refrain from that unhappiest comment of all, "Well, that was your idea." But a nose-in-the-air silence says the same thing at times like those.

Worst of all, I have taken on the perilous mood of Scarlett O'Hara, "I won't decide that to-day; I'll decide it to-morrow," and let events decide me.

Having taken a decision, by whatever means, I can find myself defending it like the Bill of Rights. It is now my decision. Right may it always be, but right or wrong, my decision. And in the unhappy laws of self-will the more suspicion I have that I may be wrong, the more I stoutly maintain that I am right. Ever do it yourself?

When I first heard the phrase "listen to God," I looked around to see who of my friends were present. People who listened to voices were, I supposed, kept in some place at the expense of the State.

Of course I had heard of Joan of Arc, and had a slight

recollection that people claimed to be guided by God in the Bible. But it was not the field of those of us who were raised in the "great scientific tradition" of universities in the wood alcohol age of the early 'twenties.

I prayed to God at night in bed where no one could see. It seemed like a cheap insurance policy with nothing to lose by it. I prayed for protection, for victory in the immediate project on my heart, usually a girl or an examination. Most fervently of all I prayed when I found myself in a tough spot. But all prayer was undertaken in the spirit of the Southern darkie who came to New York for the first time and decided to see the lower harbour by moonlight in his own rowboat. As the tide proved stronger than his oars, he knelt in the boat and prayed, "Dear Lawd, carry me back to New York City. 'Cause if you get me back to New York City, then I'll get back to Alabama by myself."

Then one day I tried to listen to God. To be honest, I had to admit that God had been talking to me for some time. About that money I had no right to. About that lie I had told. About some relationships I would not have wanted made into a movie. About the selfishness of my plans for the future.

God had talked to me through conscience. I had not wanted to listen, partly because I was afraid of being found out, partly because I had seen no hope that these whimsies of my nature could ever be different in the future, even if I owned up to them in the past.

Then one night, May 27th, 1924, I decided to open my ears and take out the cottonwool of resistance. The adventure of what might happen seemed to me intriguing. The results I had seen in the lives of a few men who had tried the experiment were also intriguing.

They looked like very sane people with an unusual zest for living. Business men, workers, doctors, professors, young and old, they seemed to be getting results I saw nowhere else.

Human wisdom had brought me many things that people prize. Tapping a wisdom greater than your own, said the men who lived according to this pattern, could bring results that left human wisdom standing at the post. It was the biggest gamble I ever took, and it worked. It paid 100 to 1, just as it was promised in that story of the sower in the New Testament.

By a deliberate act of the will I made an experiment in the field of human experience. I stopped fighting against the power—call it truth, call it God—that was pressing in upon me. I surrendered my will, my future, my life to the power I dimly felt at work in the universe and at work in me.

That decision was the door to a new echelon of living. That act of the will has to be taken again and again. But the road to that door is now plain. I have no one else to blame but myself if I stay outside.

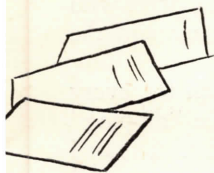
Conscience was and is a forceful channel of the guidance of God. It was soon shown that my receiving set needed cleaning and adjustment. Four standards were suggested to me: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Love, Absolute Unselfishness.

I took four pieces of paper and tried to write down where I needed to change. Fortunately there was no paper shortage in those days.

Guidance still comes daily through conscience. But conscience is only a part of the guidance of God. In fact, conscience directed by the human mind alone, without the clear, clean seeking of the will of God, can land you in confusion and futility.



Conscience itself must be guided by God. Ignorance of this point has tragically obscured the practicality of Christianity. It has left millions thinking, for example, that to do the will of God means that you are to be a doormat for others to walk on. Is that not the meaning of love? Certainly not. It is not good for the mat or the man who walks on it.



*"I took four pieces of
of paper ..."*

Christ told us to love our enemies. He also scourged the enemies of God with his tongue in a way that scarcely fits the ordinary man's idea of love. "Vipers," "hypocrites," "whited sepulchres," he told them. Strong words.

Many men likewise are pursued by the bogey that to do God's will means you have to give away all your possessions. With a wife and children and an income tax collector, it looks impossible. To give away your money to all and sundry may be the worst thing for everyone concerned. Clearly, you must be willing to. You need to make a constant and consistent transfer of ownership of all you have to God, and take back only what God directs and when. But you are likely to be the best trustee of your possessions.

Ethics without guidance from God is like using the curves of the road to direct your car instead of the steering-wheel.

How am I to be honest? What should I do with my money? How should I fight against evil? When is force justified? In countless ways conscience needs the guidance of God.

There is another difference, too, between conscience and guidance. It is illustrated in the story of a nine-year-old girl's conversation with her mother. Her mother stated that conscience and guidance were one and the same thing. The child replied, "No, conscience tells you the difference between right and wrong. But God's guidance can tell you which of six right things is the one to do."

There are other ways that God speaks to us besides conscience. There is the Bible. Amazing perennial best-seller of the world, the Bible is man's experience of God written down. It is so contemporary that it never ceases to amaze me. Reading it is an exciting adventure, when its experiences start to happen in your own life, too.

The Bible gives us the route of the good road. It moves majestically to its eternal climax in the figure of Christ, who is both the end and the beginning, "the pioneer and the perfection of life."

God uses the Bible also as an arsenal of truth for every man's pattern of action. I am not strong on the "dipping" process to find the answer to a specific problem. A man I know once tried it and landed on, "So out they came and went to the swine, and the entire drove rushed down the steep slope into the sea and perished in the water." He tried again and got, "Go and do thou likewise."

Yet time and again a particular verse has come to my eyes or my memory that gave the answer to a particular question and the perspective in which it should be decided.

Reason also is an instrument for finding out the will of God. All that common sense can give us is there to use. I do not have to be directly guided to brush my teeth every morning. I have been shown the rightness of that refreshing action before. Nor can I rely on supernatural intervention to pass examinations or to remind me that my wife has asked me to buy a chop on the way home. All the training the mind can receive is grist for the mill of guidance.

Some solicitous person, however, anxious for your welfare, will exclaim, "Why not use your reason? Why rely on listening to God? What is your reason for?"

Exactly, what is it for? And what does it produce if left to itself? Fewer and fewer grow the proud voices that stride

the air with claims of the invincibility of the human mind. Intellect without God has brought civilization to a black chasm of danger. Human wisdom has failed, and failed humanity. We need a greater wisdom than our own.

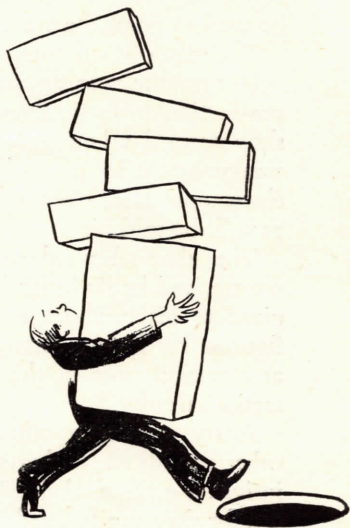
If you want to know the plan of God for your life, get all the facts that reason can give. Do all the thinking that moulds these facts into a conclusion, but then wait on God.

There are facts known to God that are not known to you. Your knowledge of the situation is fractional; His is complete. He may not be able to let you in on all the evidence. But "the 'foolishness' of God is wiser than men."

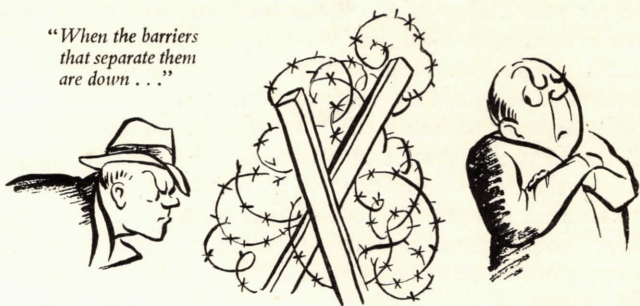
God speaks through circumstances.

Perhaps only 10 per cent. of God's guidance in your life will come through your conscious mind. We have been told that "all things work together for good to them that love God." That is a conviction that brings tears to your eyes and a jump to your blood in gratitude. Millions of times I have taken a course of action on faith, and then, as I walked ahead, circumstances verified the rightness of the steps. God works at both ends of the line and everywhere in between. The basis of a God-guided life is faith, not sight. I am perfectly convinced that if I keep my will under God's control and honestly seek to do what He wants, then I am in His hands and all is well. I will

"... Your knowledge of the situation is fractional ..."



*"When the barriers
that separate them
are down . . ."*



make mistakes, and do. My reception may be faulty. But He will not let me down or let me go. You cannot always see the how or why of every action. Yet you can often see results. From the stern of the ship you can see how the pilot missed the rocks. And even in the midst of decision, circumstances will be used to point the way.

The plan of God comes through people.

During the war an aircraft factory shop steward found production dropping throughout his section. He and the other shop steward did not get along together. He related this man's weaknesses at length to his family at home. His sister, aged eleven, put her finger on the secret. "You're jealous of that man," she told him.

The shop steward argued vehemently that she was wrong, and knew in his heart that she was right. He apologized to his opposite number. A new spirit changed the figures. Production increased 100 per cent. in that section at a critical time in the war. And the spirit spread to the sections nearby.

A true word from others is a tonic. When people trust each other and lift each other in prayer before God, then a unique insight is given to them. It comes not only in correction, as it did for the shop steward. It comes in vision into what people

*"When they plan
together . . ."*



can become. It reveals a pattern of growth that helps other people to realize their destiny in the plan of God.

Guidance also comes through other people in teamwork. When the barriers that separate them are down, when they seek God's plan together, then each may be given a segment of the plan to follow. The whole pattern for their project builds up to something far richer than they could ever have achieved as individuals working alone.

"When two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When that is true, a plan of action can emerge in which each has been given a creative part.

If I think a course of action is right to take, I talk it over with others concerned. I start with my family who, thank God, have also captured this secret of the art of living. As I do so, the weaknesses of my own thinking begin to clarify. A "community of mind" begins to emerge. This is of course a natural process of consultation, but it is immensely heightened when the individuals in a group have achieved a real unity with each other and fight for God's maximum plan.

Finally, God makes his pattern known to us in the direct thought that comes to mind as we are quiet. Silence was once described by a child as "what you don't hear when you listen."

But silence can be living and moving in its power when you take time to realize the Presence of God.

A time of silence has become for me and my family, and for countless others in this generation, the key to the action of every day. We start early, before breakfast, before the telephone, before conversation, to find out God's specific plan for ourselves and for our world, using all the ways mentioned above. We look over the day to see what decisions need to be taken. We open our minds and hearts to each other.

"You were dictatorial with the children yesterday." "Apologize for that thoughtless word." "Stop trying to wangle your own way." "Start helping others to grow instead of grabbing the limelight yourself," are some of the first thoughts that come, often against the grain, to clear up the day before. The truth is painfully clear at times like this.

Then thoughts come of specific action to be taken. Prayer is not woolly, idealistic aspiration. "Definite, accurate, adequate information can come from the mind of God to the mind of man" is a favourite phrase of Frank Buchman, who more than any man of this age has taught people to listen to God.

Insight into a business operation, people to write to, what to say, thoughts about the country, an assurance of God's love and power, perspective for the problems I have to face, vision for the day's opportunities, come tumbling along in those early morning quiet times.

I write down these thoughts as they come. As the Chinese say, "The strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink."

In a letter to Peter the Barber, Martin Luther once wrote, "And when the Holy spirit speaks, stop all that you are doing and write it down. For what the Holy Spirit says is more important than a thousand sermons."



But how, you may ask, does one know how to sort out the true from the false? These thoughts may be the promptings of my own mind. They may come from the unconscious. How can I know?

Certainly these thoughts need to be checked. I sometimes have a foolish thought because I sometimes have a foolish mind.

There are two ways to know. One, make the moral test. Does it conform to the character of Christ? Is it according to the four Absolute Standards mentioned above? Two, check your thoughts with others who are trying to be guided by God.

Mistakes you will certainly make. We do. But the greatest mistake is to move ahead on human wisdom alone without a fight to find God's wisdom at every point. The mistakes of those who seek to find the guidance of God are almost irrelevant as against the mistakes of those whose pride pushes them to be "masters of their fate," whose heads "bloody but unbowed" might be less bloody if they were bowed.

Those who are concerned over mistakes in trying to find the will of God usually have not made the experiment themselves. If they had, they would have been amazed at the providence of God's spirit at work in, through and around them. "If you keep my commands, you will remain within my love," said

Jesus Christ to His followers.

Or you may say, "Why should God be concerned with little decisions? I can imagine Him intervening in the great crises of life; why should I bother Him over the details?" Well, some details you already know the answer to. But who knows where details stop and crises begin? How

*"Start early, before breakfast,
before the telephone . . ."*



many serious events in your life turned on a seemingly trivial incident, being at a certain place at a certain time, turning to the right instead of the left, the single word, the yes or no? These are the warp and woof of the pattern of life, the pennies out of which the fortunes of life are made.

The price of guidance is obedience. Years ago a great Christian statesman, Bishop Logan Roots, was asked by Madame Chiang Kai-shek, "How do I find the guidance of God?" He replied, "I take it you do not want merely to find God's approval of your own plans?" "No," she replied. "Then," said the man who gave his life to lift the Chinese people, "you must do two things. You must take time every day to find out what God's guidance is; and second, when you find it, you must obey it without reservation."

The answers you look for in guidance may come like a flash of lightning etched across a black night sky. They may come slowly like the dawn, but they come.

Such guidance is the good road of history, a key to its meaning. It is also a signpost to the future. The Psalmist "waiting on God"; the national statesman Isaiah at a time of national crisis saying, "Though scant and scarce may be your bread and water from the Lord, yet He your teacher never leaves you now . . . and when you swerve to right or left you hear a voice behind you whispering, 'This is the way, walk here.'"

Christ Himself, listening at every step, and at the supreme crisis of His life deciding in the simple words, "Nevertheless not My will but Yours be done." Ananias, sent by the Holy Spirit to a specific house in the Street-called-Straight, in Damascus. The amazing adventures recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, as these early revolutionaries fixed their itinerary by the specific leading of the guidance of God.

Joan of Arc told her inquisitors: "There is nothing impossible to the power of God. Have complete faith that the King of

Heaven will give more strength to Joan than her enemies will know how to oppose with all their assaults. . . . I am no scholar. I know neither A nor B. But I was commanded by the Voice that speaks the will of God to declare to my King that God would give him back his kingdom. And I did so. What God empowered me to do, I did, and henceforth whatever He commands me to do, I will not fail to do it."

Monseigneur Chevrot, well known for his Lenten sermons at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, spoke of this tradition last summer at the Moral Re-Armament World Assembly in Switzerland.

He recalled the words of Father Gratry, buried near Montreux, who over one hundred years ago said, "The world that you want to transform into a just one will not be transformed because you yourselves are not transformed; and so long as you refuse to change yourselves, the world will not change. The world can change if each of you changes.' How shall we change? and he replies: 'By listening to God, because God does not stop speaking to us any more than the sun stops shining.' When shall we listen to God? 'It is in the morning before the distractions and activity of a busy life that we must listen.' How shall we listen to God? Here is the reply, 'You write it down. Write it down so that you may preserve the spirit in you and so as to keep its words.'"

Abraham Lincoln said, "I have 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."

When congratulated by members of a Commission for whom he had written a plan, Lincoln said, "It was written down as if dictated to me. Hereafter thank your Heavenly Father for it, and not me."

Increasingly at the nerve centres of world affairs there are rising up men and women whose insight and strategic action

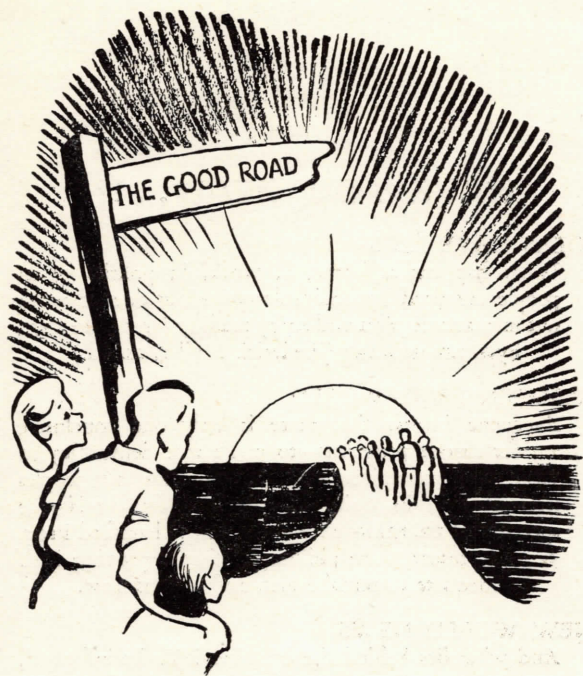
have been decisive in defeating the sabotage of destructive forces and winning the battle for peace.

A commentator in a national magazine reporting on the United Nations news said recently of a delegate to an important sub-committee, "M. is easily the ablest man on the sub-commission. . . . He has been responsible for more compromise solutions than any other man on the commission, and his quick perception has saved days of work." M. has practised for fifteen years the habit of listening to God.

What might happen if we as a people, starting with you who read these lines, should resolve at all cost to put absolutely first obedience to God's orders? What might it mean if we resolved to establish the government of God in every aspect of our lives?

Then Europe would live out an inspired democracy. Then peace and production and a truly Christian culture would make the atomic age the greatest renaissance of all times.

Try listening to God. Make the experiment. It is the answer to problems, the secret of effectiveness and the key to adventure.



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