

Guidance in the Christian Life

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[0 : 0 0] let's bow our heads in prayer once again let's pray our father in heaven dare we come to your word without reminding ourselves what we are doing when we open up the pages of scripture and reminding ourselves that this is the very word of god addressed to us we pray that when we make up our minds to go to church that we will always remember that we are coming together to worship to meet with you in a very special way not that you're not everywhere you are there is no place in the world where we are in the universe where the presence of god is not and yet in a very special concentrated way you are amongst your people receiving their worship and opening up their hearts and working using your word and taking your word and bringing it to them and that's what we pray for this evening we pray that your word will speak to us and that will have a profound effect upon us and that you will make us willing to obey your word we ask lord for any amongst us this evening who has not received the gospel by faith we pray that even this evening that you will give a new revelation to them and that you will show them afresh as never before that the bible is god's message to us and it points us to the lord jesus christ and what he has done for us and what he can do for us in the gospel we pray that you will work amongst all of us tonight we pray lord for anybody who is distracted and we ask that you will concentrate our minds on what we are thinking about in such a way that will that will give us a fresh determination to put your word into practice in all that we do forgive us for where we have failed forgive us for where we have drifted and forgive us for where we have backslidden we ask lord that that you if there's anyone this evening who is in a in a bad place in relation to you we pray that you will work in their hearts and that you will bring your word in a fresh way in a in a powerful way reminding them that you are a god who is able to restore our soul and to make us to walk in the paths of righteousness because of your your love for your people pray for anyone who's not here this evening we pray that you will be with them where they are we pray especially for those who are ill this evening and ask that you will that you will be very very close to them lord whether in hospital or in their homes we pray for them and ask that you will draw close to them and that they may know your presence at this time and your healing where that is your will we pray for the world in which we live we think of the masses of people that there are the billions of people in the world who need to hear the gospel we give thanks that that is your plan that a day will come when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the lord we ask that that will day will come soon and we pray that that you will show us how to play our part in making that happen lord we look at ourselves and our own contribution it's so small and yet lord you're able to take these little stones and build your temple and we pray that you will do that so that your glory may be seen and in all the world and that that that the day will come when when people will say to one another come let us go to the house of the lord that he may teach us his ways our father give the we pray for our country oh lord we

ask that you will that you will place within the people around us a sense of of emptiness and a sense of longing and we pray that that will be satisfied only when they find the gospel and we ask that you will make us ready to be able to explain the reason for the hope that lies within us so lord empower us and fill us with your spirit for we ask in jesus name amen we're going to turn back to the book of psalms psalm 37 look with me at verse 23 and 24 the steps of a man are established by the lord when he delights in his way though he fall he shall not be cast headlong for the lord upholds his hand you'll understand that the subject of guidance has been very close to me in the last few weeks when you're having to make a decision if you're a christian not just a christian minister but if you're a christian you're a follower of jesus and you're having to make a decision you seek for and expect god to show you and lead you in the right direction the bible assures us as god's people that our lives are established by god they are marked out by god they are led and guided by god which means that god takes a particular interest in the actions and the thoughts and the behavior and the

decisions of his people god guides our steps life is not a series of random events or meaningless happenings god stands behind the events and decisions and make sense of them and they take place in the framework of his plan and his will and that is what it's got to be uppermost in our minds not just when we're having to make major decisions whether to go or whether to stay whether to choose this side or that side but in everyday life we're seeking god's guidance even in the smallest of choices and decisions that we make and in our behavior and in our conduct and in everything that we do we're seeking to be led by the holy spirit but for many christians this is a difficult area because the natural question that arises is how do you know god's will how can you determine the plan and the mind of god you pray for it you seek it but then what do you do do you look for some sign do you look for do you do a gideon and you say to the lord well if you do this i'll know that this is what you want me to do like you remember what gideon did he put the fleece out before the lord and he said to the lord well if you want me to do this if you want me to lead the army then please make sure that in the morning

when i get up the fleece that's been out all night will be dry and the dew will be all over the grass and of course you know the story it happened just as he prayed is that what we're to do is that how we are to determine the mind of the lord or like the old testament people used to do when with the urim and the thummim there was in the priest's clothing something called the urim and the thummim and whenever a person wanted to determine the mind of god whether it was david or mooses or or one of the people in the old testament they would go to the high priest and somehow he would be able to use the urim and the thummim to determine and to find out what god's mind was whether to go this way or that way or to or to do this or to do that for one thing we have absolutely no idea what the urim and the thummim was and secondly it's no longer with us there is no longer such a facility of being able to or to determine god's mind but what we do have is what's in front of every one of us the bible and the first thing that i would say to anyone who is concerned about knowing the mind of god is to make sure that you make the bible your everyday nourishment don't neglect the bible because if you do then you come into a time of crisis and you don't know where to turn you've ignored the very provision that god has made for you in order for you to know his will how do you how do you know the will of god well you can you cannot expect to discover that will if the bible isn't close to your heart and that's why i would say to you time and time again to make sure that you get to know the bible and to read it and to read through it not just read it at random but to read through it and you will discover as you live your christian life that god makes himself known to you in the bible well then how then do we answer this question as to how god makes his mind known to us several things i want us to think about this evening in relation to this verse verse 23 the steps of a man are ordered by the lord are established by the lord but it's not just the steps of any man it's the man who delights in his way now the question in verse 23 the interesting question here is who delights in whose way is it the man that delights in god's way or is it god that delights in the man's way not quite sure what the answer to that question is in a way it's got to be both isn't it the person in whom god delights is the person who delights in the lord that's why we read at the very beginning of the psalm in verse 4 where the where david says delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart do we make it our ambition this evening as god's people to delight ourselves in god we'll come back to that in a few moments time but i want to suggest to you that the man whose steps are established who's guided by the lord is the man in whom god delights think about that tonight if you belong to jesus it's not only that your sins are forgiven and that you're brought into his kingdom but that god when he thinks of you and looks at you tonight he is absolutely thrilled with you i find that hard to believe because i see all the flaws and the blemishes and the sinfulness and the corruption of my own heart i often ask myself how could god actually love me and delight in me

i don't know the answer to that question but i accept by faith what the bible tells me that god delights in me and he delights in you if you are in christ this evening what a thought what a thought actually that's all we need to think about isn't it you could go home on that you could just shut the bible and just go home because there's enough there in that very truth to keep us going for the rest of our lives isn't it just think about it i don't think we i don't think we live that truth as much as we should i don't think we're as aware of it as we should that tonight in christ and it's only in christ that we can say this god delights in us despite all the flaws and all the disobedience and all the backsliding and when we backslide god makes sure that he restores our soul and makes us to walk in the paths of righteousness that that means we don't give up on our brothers and sisters in the lord because god hasn't given up on them god delights in his people so that's what it says that's the

verse we're looking at the steps of a man are established by the lord and he delights in his way i'm going to ask you tonight once again do you delight in the lord there's only one way you can say yes and that is by trusting and believing in jesus christ you can have a relationship with god in which your life is transformed and in which the past is forgiven and in which you are born again and you have a new beginning to live for god at the very center and the very and the very goal and objective of your life i can't tell you tonight if you have never discovered that already i can't explain what it is to live for god you have to discover it yourself and how important how essential it is and i would invite you because jesus invites you to come to know himself in the gospel because he has died for us so that we can come to know him now here's how i know that we can be absolutely confident in this verse first thing is that the holy spirit guides god's people the holy spirit guides god's people that is a truth that we find in the new testament you'll find it in john 16 for example where jesus promised his disciples that after he left them after he would depart from them the holy spirit would be the other comforter and he would come to be with them but he would dwell within them and then the apostle paul tells us in romans 8 that we've just read for all who are led by the spirit of god listen to this all who are led by the spirit of god are sons of god so to be a son or a daughter of god is to be led by the spirit of god jesus told his disciples that the holy spirit would lead them into all truth that's the promise that jesus left his disciples that god's people can expect this wonderful truth on a day-by-day level that we are led by and guided by the holy spirit of god so the basis of our confidence and what we're reading tonight is the indwelling of the holy spirit of god in every believer and again let's stop there's enough there for us to shut the bible and go home i am indwelt by the holy spirit think about that for a moment that means that doesn't mean just mean when you walk in the door or when we start singing or when we're in it's it's it's a day-to-day 24-7 reality that every christian is indwelt by god who's remember that the holy spirit is not some kind of lesser deity it's not just some kind of force or power the holy spirit is god there is god the father god the son and god the holy spirit and we believe tonight and are assured that we are indwelt and he's there for a purpose he's there in order to shape us and fashion us and change us so that we become conformed to the image of jesus christ that's his ultimate purpose but in order to do that there is the life of decision making and the life of living and experiencing and tasting and doing and working and sleeping and eating and all of the things that make up our human experiences god is in all of these things the holy spirit guides us that's what he's there for second thing i want to say is this when we think about how do you find out what god's plan is and i'm i'm speaking to all of us but i remember when i was a young christian that this was a a very very common topic of discussion amongst young christians some of you can remember when the older ones can remember when you were young christians as well if you were a young christian and you can remember maybe in student days or in days of when you used to have bible studies and i used to this was all always a question how do you find out god's will how do i know who the right person will be to marry how do i know which the what the right job is to accept how do i know where where god wants me to live and so on and so forth and these are real questions and the fact that we're asking these questions i hope you are if you're a young christian and an older christian because who knows what god is in store for us it is good to ask these questions because it means that we are conscious that the right decision that we take is dependent on what god wants us to do not our own selfish pleasure because when a person follows jesus jesus is at the center jesus is on the throne jesus is the lord he is the one who determines our course of action however it's not about me very often people talk about what god's plan for me is very often you'll have you'll find people saying well do you know that god has a plan for you well that's maybe true but it can give the impression that somehow everything revolves around you or everything revolves on it doesn't my life doesn't revolve around me and in a world where selfishness is so prevalent in our world and where it seems that life and it's not surprising because if you forget god if you abandon god if you abandon the bible then life becomes all about me doesn't it and my pleasure and my goals and my ambitions and my life but for the christian life is not about me it's about how i can glorify god and how god can be glorified in me and sometimes that might involve my suffering as opposed to my happiness that's the second thing first thing i wanted to say was that god's will is is determined by the holy spirit who dwells within me secondly it's not about me it's about god and his [20:16] glory in us the third thing is i kind of mentioned that a minute ago is this that god's plan will involve not just the exciting but the painful there's a verse in the bible that says in the day of prosperity rejoice but in the day of adversity consider and what that means is that life for the most part is a mixture of both there are times of rejoicing and times of tears the times of tears are just as

important in the plan and in the mind and in the will of god as the times of rejoicing sometimes we can anticipate doing god's will or finding out god's will and it's kind of like it's exciting but it's not just the excitement of living god's way it's the pain that very often makes up much of the christian life you remember how at gethsemane when jesus anticipated the cross and when unlike us he knew what god's will was going to be the cross you remember how he submitted to that will even though he knew it would involve the agony of the crucifixion which one of us would ask for a cross but you know what that is exactly what jesus demands of us this evening anyone who does not carry his cross said jesus and follow me cannot be my disciple think about that fourthly it's a mistake to think that god's guidance only applies to the major decisions of our lives the major decisions are the major decisions when we come up to our crossroads and we have a choice to make as to perhaps a change of of of of location or a change of job or or a change of life in some way particularly a young person who's contemplating the the options that i've just mentioned which career will i follow who will i marry and that kind of thing if anyone and these are the milestones which most people face and of course we need to ask god to lead us in the right direction in these ways but at the same time there's also the mundane in life the little decisions we very seldom think of god leading us and guiding us in these and whilst there are the few major decisions that we have to take every day is filled with the choices that we make which are not so glamorous are they and yet god is in them god is involved in our everyday life whether it's washing the dishes or whether it's changing nappies or hoovering the floor or cleaning the bedroom or whatever it is or going out to work in the morning and having to go through the same routine day by day by day that's when it's hard and god god is in your life and his plan is for you to continue to do the things that you have been doing on a day by day basis just as much as to won't change it's hard for us to face the mundane but very often he shows us what he can do through everyday faithfulness and witness and letting our light so shine

number five some christians believe that they can fall outside of god's plan and god's will and because they have god has given up on them i heard somebody once saying i think i've told you this before i heard somebody saying this once and i remember i was quite surprised because this was an experienced christian he actually said it from a pulpit and he said i remember so many years ago i think maybe 20 30 years ago i made a decision that wasn't the right one he said and he said from that moment onwards i've had to live outside of god's plan for me that's what he said i've had to live outside of god's plan for me and i remember thinking at the time i have to work that one out i can't figure that one out at all i think i know what he means that 20 years ago he made a wrong decision and since that time it's kind of like he's living a second class existence he's been forgiven but yet he's had to live a kind of second class existence where he's not quite been in the way that god originally had for him i don't know if there's anyone here this evening who's like that and who's who believes that that because we have made mistakes in the past that somehow god has kind of shunted us to the sidelines and we're not quite where god wants us to be and we never will be and we kind of give up on ourselves because we think that god has given up on us well the god of the bible is far greater than that there are plenty of examples in the bible where god's people went wrong think for example of moses in in in exodus remember when moses grew up and when he killed the egyptian that was wrong that was something he took upon himself it was a wrong choice it was an arbitrary thing to do he thought the bible tells us that he did it from wrong motives and he had to flee he could easily have concluded maybe he did for a while that god had given up on him he had to go to midian and there of course he married zipporah and he began to work for his father-in-law and that was him cut off from israel he could easily have concluded that god had nothing more to do with him or nothing more for him to do but he was wrong god had a plan for him god was going to bring him all the way back difficult though that was and he was going to renew him and he was going to he was going to commission him to be the leader of god's people out of egypt and into the promised land think of david when he catastrophically we've been thinking about david and by the way we will finish david very shortly there's only a couple two or three more chapters to go through um think of david and when he committed adultery with bathsheba and all the consequences the awful consequences with absalom and how david was evicted from his palace by absalom and how as a consequence of david's sinfulness he he had to flee and and all the rest was god finished with him no he wasn't god restored him as david repented god restored him not only back into forgiveness but back into fellowship with himself and it would be

utterly wrong for us to say oh well david became a second class citizen a second class christian from that moment onwards by no means psalm 23 he restores my soul and makes me to walk in the paths of righteousness two things he not only restores our soul but he makes us to walk in the paths of righteousness so don't ever say that because you go wrong that god will write you off none of god's people are written off god is the god of restoration number six guidance also comes through keeping a close walk with god how can you expect god to lead you and to guide you in the everyday and the major decisions and choices that you have to make unless you keep a close walk from god and i know that we all fall short in this respect we all drift we become distracted we become lazy in prayer we forget to read our bible we a day goes to two days goes to three days since we've prayed and we have to come back to the lord and we have to discipline ourselves to maintain that close walk with the lord what is a close walk with the lord mean well here we have the verse in verse in verse verse four delight yourself in god and he will give you the desires of your heart i would like you to pray with me tonight that you will that you will that you will say to the lord show me what it means to delight myself in god will you pray that prayer show me what it means to delight myself in god and you know this is the pivot this is one of the most pivotal verses in the bible it's one of those verses that is quite extraordinary because look at what it says afterwards it says delight yourself in god and he will give you the desires of your heart you notice that that's a promise that's a promise which means that god will not force you to do something that you don't want to do what god does is as we go through the christian life he changes our desires so what i desired and longed for 20 years ago is not what i desired this evening he changes us to be to be shaped and fashioned into his mind and into his will will you pray that prayer this evening show me how to delight myself in god so that i too will know what this promise is that you will give me the desires of my heart as long as they're your desires that's what god does he shapes our desires into his room number seven are we willing to be guided in just as much into not doing something as doing something not doing something the example i'm thinking of is david again you remember how david wanted so much to build a temple for the lord that was a good thing he wanted a place where the ark of the covenant would be taken and where it would be housed and located he wanted to honor god in that way but when he brought it to god god said no you're not the one that's going to do this and i can't help feeling the disappointment in second samuel chapter 7 where david had to accept that he was not the man that god had chosen to do this task he wanted so much to do it and yet he was not the person we have to be

just as much willing just as willing to accept god's no as god's yes are you willing to do what god is asking you to do and not to do what god is refusing for you lastly wherever we're guided to and whatever god reveals to us in his will it always means that if we're following the lord that we are shaped and fashioned into the image of the lord jesus christ and that our motivation must always be for the glory of god and for the extension of his kingdom because after all that's what we live for that is why our lives have been changed and that is what we pray for that your will will be done your kingdom will come and your will will be done on earth as it is in heaven so tonight as god's people as we seek for and as we look for and as we ask for god to guide us let us remember that that includes everything our behavior our talk our conduct our attitudes at home our our the the little decisions as well as the great decisions but remember that our motivation has to be god first the glory of god in my life in our church in our kingdom because that is what god has changed us to become and is continuing to change us to become like the lord jesus christ let's pray our father in heaven we thank you for for the change that you have brought about in the gospel and we give thanks that that there is a for the reality that the steps of a man or a woman who loves the lord are established by the lord and we give thanks for this great truth that you delight in our way that the holy spirit has come to dwell amongst us and to dwell within us to lead us into all truth and to take of the things of jesus and to make them known to us so lord we pray that you will do that keep us from being stubborn keep us from being obstinate and from refusing to do your will lord may your word be our guiding light in everything that we do and forgive our sin for we ask in jesus name amen we're going to sing together in psalm 37 it's on it's the sing the traditional version of the psalms and we're singing psalms 37 and we're going to sing from verse 3 to verse 7 so on page 252 of sing psalms page 252 and it's verse 3 to verse 7 set thou thy trust upon the lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food psalm 37 verse 3 to verse 7 and the tune is sing columba and we're going to stand to sing set thou thy trust upon the lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell

and merrily have food delight thyself in god he'll give thine heart's desire to thee thy way to god
commit him trust it bring to pass shall he and like unto the light he shall thy righteousness thy
righteousness thy righteousness is clear and here thy thy judgment shall be poured like noontide of
the air rest in the the the

[37 : 53] Lord and patiently wait for him do not pray for heaven prospering in its way success that
now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the
commune and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with each one of us both now and
always amen you to