

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD

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I ask no dream, no prophet-ecstasies,
No sudden rending of the veil of clay,
No angel-visitant, no opening skies;
But take the dimness of my soul away.

THE history of man's adventure into the supernatural begins with the race. He has always reached out to something beyond himself. He has felt compulsions, asked for signs, and according to his understanding has put them to the test. The range of experience has depended upon man's conception of God. The heathen runs the gamut of his idolatrous practices, while Socrates draws attention in his trial to that superhuman influence in his experience which he calls sometimes by the name of a 'divine somewhat' and which occasionally has the shorter name of 'the sign'. He tells his judges in his defence that 'the sign' was one which he had experienced ever since he was a child.

Within the Bible, running through the dark perplexing panorama of time, is a crystal stream of communication with the unseen world of the Spirit. Men talked with God. More important, God talked with men. Conversations took place and were recorded because they knew God to be a personal Spirit, and not always because they were better men than some whose noble lives challenge us out of pagan history. These were the chosen who knew Him intimately. The mass of people lived by the progressive revelation given through these men.

The word 'guidance' left to itself, drifts. It has no anchor. Since the most important thing about guidance is the one from whom it comes, this paper will primarily be concerned with a personal relationship. As we reach out into realms of the spirit, feeling for the adventure with which it has always enticed man, we can hear the aged Apostle warning us: 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.'¹ Many modern 'fancy religions' open the door into the supernatural, but afford no guide to the ignorant and curious who look hungrily for something beyond themselves. Casuistry often masquerades in the guise of religion, so when we speak of guidance, let it be remembered that we speak of *that process of communication at whose other end is the Living God*. Nor is it a God who conforms to our prejudices and superstitions, but the Eternal Spirit as we begin to know Him through His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. He is a God Who makes trenchant moral demands on us; Who assures us there is no compromise; Who sounds the death-knell to sin and self; Whose only means of 'reconciling the world to Himself' is a Cross.

It was an old world whose pendulum swung between cruelty and ennui that stood by at Calvary. The Roman centurion who said, 'Truly this was the Son of God', must have been struck by some extraordinary quality of life—and death. But as certainly the servants in the palace of the High Priest must *not* have been impressed by the peasant who swore, 'I know not the Man'. Behold then, some two months

¹ 1 John 4. 1.

later, this same man and his friends unable to repress a message of such audacious character that all Jerusalem was thunderstruck. They said that this Galilean, whom with their own eyes they had seen crucified, was alive again. It seemed absurd. It still seems absurd to some people. They said He had done away with death, with sin, with the torturing evil domination of self. There blew in from another world through these men a fresh morning wind which cut like a knife through the stale atmosphere of the old world. The Spirit of God had come upon their little group as they prayed in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Through them it was to be made known that this same Spirit was available for all time to any one who would come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

To the people who said, 'These men are full of new wine', the happenings of these days must have seemed unreasonable. But for men to whom the 'miraculous' had become natural, and who saw life transformed in the power of an accomplished redemption, nothing could have been more rational. These were not *reformed* men. They were *new* men, creating new life in a jaded world. It was not audacity that caused St. Paul to write in his letter to the Philippians, 'We are a colony of heaven'.¹ God's thoughts had become the normal thinking of its citizens. An astonishing fellowship was born. Their Master had thrown aside His human incognito and resumed His sovereignty in the world from which He had come, and He now lived among them

¹ Phil. 3. 20 (Moffatt translation).

and in them without human limitations. His Spirit was the guarantee of His presence.

How unmistakably they hear the summons! Philip is told to 'Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza'.¹ An Ethiopian official, high in the counsels of his Queen, stops his chariot to hear the Good News for which his soul is thirsting. . . . 'While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting. For I have sent them".'² A group gathered in the house of a Roman soldier pledges allegiance to the Risen Christ. . . . Ananias is told to 'Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus',³ and the most bitter persecutor of the Early Church becomes its most aggressive partisan, establishing under the same divine guidance the foundations of Christendom.

There is a legend that some one, looking at the twelve disciples, asked Jesus Christ incredulously whether He intended to entrust the success of His Gospel to such as these. He replied that He did. 'But if they fail, what other plan have you?' He answered, 'I have no other plan.' In each generation He takes this seemingly incredible risk and entrusts to ordinary people the task of making Him real to a soul-weary world. If you fail—if I fail—there is no other plan.

It is faith in the power and presence of the Living Christ to which the world has been—and is still—

¹ Acts 8. 26.

² Acts 10. 19-20.

³ Acts 9. 11.

bearing witness. He spoke to the cavalier, Francis Bernadone, and through him the creative winsomeness of the new life again flowed from the other world, when this one was in a state of almost unimaginable chaos and hostility. The Friends of God in the fourteenth century steadied Europe in a whirlpool of political and religious unrest by the simple fact of their intercourse with the Living God. England might have slipped over the precipice of social and industrial revolution in the eighteenth century but for the breaking in of the Kingdom of Heaven in another little 'colony' under John Wesley.

In our own twentieth century one nation builds her towers of materialism on the tottering foundations of a poverty-stricken world; another repudiates God with violence; the disruptive forces of anarchy threaten a world-wide empire; there is an oncoming tide of Communism; race hatred tears at the vitals of more than one continent.

Man-made remedies are as numerous as they are inadequate. There is a 'sentimental humanitarianism' which so often spoils the object of its charity, and provides no real answer to the deep and fundamental problems of personal sin. Socially it is like putting a bread and milk poultice on a cancer.

Another attempt at human salvation seeks to superimpose a point of view rather than share a life vibrant with the Supernatural. Whether inside or outside the Church, beliefs without power are merely ideals, and an honest facing of this fact may lead to the vitalizing of much that is anaemic in the Christian Church to-day.

Some look to psychology, saying, 'Perhaps here is the answer'. One is grateful for the resources and technique of a science which throws such light on the mechanism of the human mind and does so much to heal mental disease. But to be sure it is the whole answer one must sound the experience of those who have sought the solution both here and in a releasing experience of the Living Christ. A short time ago some one said, 'Psychology helped me enormously. It emptied me, but it didn't fill me with anything new. It took Jesus Christ to do that.' A noted psychologist recently gave several hours of sound psychological schooling as it bore on the great mission of winning people to Christ. Closing, he said, 'The person with an experience of God and a poor technique will make fewer mistakes in the end than the person with a high technique and no God.' One sees in this statement of a trained psychologist whose power is avowedly of God, the experiential knowledge that the Holy Spirit is the great Teacher and Christ the Cure. As this Cure transforms individual lives, God works through the personal to social, national, and racial redemption. No programme is too big, no vision too high, if built up through His guidance on this plan.

These past years have witnessed the 'catching' of God's Spirit from one life to another, running through communities like fires across a dry field wherever the wind blows.

Seven years ago a parcel was given to some one to take to a family in Holland. The visitor being guided

through this casual meeting, the flame leaped from life to life in an ever-broadening circle, including many types of people, as they witnessed with spontaneous warmth to the reality of Christ in their lives.

Some Rhodes scholars in Oxford had the vision three years ago of carrying the message of a new-found Christ back to their families and universities in South Africa. The torch was passed adventurously from hand to hand, and now a movement is abroad which, while renewing individual lives, is slowly getting at the roots of social and racial problems.

Hear one of the leading authorities on the relationship between black and white in South Africa, after the wind of the Spirit had blown through his life:

‘There is no question on which I have spoken more than on the Native question. I have offered detailed plans, advice, even in the days of my callow youth “solutions” of the Native problem. I do not do this to-day. That is a wonderful thing about this movement; we have not to tell people what to do, but to ask them to let Christ tell them what to do. The Native question is one in which the surrender operates. It is going to be a hard tussle for many of us. Do not think that I say this having at the back of my mind a particular programme as to how to handle the Native question. I know no longer. But I do know that we must handle the Native question as Christ would do it if He were here, and that we dare not do anything less than that.’¹

Little groups who are living this ‘romance’ gather everywhere. Nurses in hospitals have vision for people’s souls as well as their bodies. I remember see-

¹ Address by Dr. Edgar Brooks, Professor of Political Science, Transvaal University College, Pretoria, ‘The Letter 7—The South African Adventure.’

ing one lose the new light from her face for a few days. It returned with higher radiance when she said, 'I knew I could never have Christ released in my life again, unless I took Him to my patients in the native ward.'

An engineer returned to his mine in the Transvaal to tell his companions that he had 'found something'. One thinks of Philip hurrying to Nathanael: 'We have found Him of Whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' The answer to sceptics for all time was supplied in Philip's reply to the sceptical Nathanael, 'Come and see.'¹ If we have not this answer, with all the thrill and expectancy of its promise, we need not hope to capture for Christ the honourable pagan or the sinner who is 'enjoying life as it is'.

Members of families gather for 'quiet times' with a sense of newness and adventure in each other's company, and as naturally as though they were sitting down to a consultation business men meet to wait on God. In schools and colleges, under Northern Star and Southern Cross, lives and relationships are changed that have their sequel as often in the home as in the classroom or on the athletic field.

Do not be surprised if criticism and malicious gossip often rage about these groups. Nineteen hundred years ago, it raged about a little group with increasing intensity until at last intrigue gave birth to violence and violence ended in death. But He Who died that day between two thieves left a warning. 'A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.'²

¹ John 1. 45, 46.

² John 15-20.

The history of those early days is, however, repeated among us in still another way, for not infrequently the criticism of a modern Saul is turned into witness for the living Christ. Ten years ago at Oxford, a soldier returned from the war was finding vent to his great restlessness and discontent in the only way he knew—a cynical self-indulgence. He found himself one evening in a small group of men who talked with such naturalness about God's immediate presence and the sin that had barred Him out, that he saw the answer to his own needs, and soon unconditionally gave his life to Christ. The discipline of a guided life was not easy; there were painful misunderstandings, often ridicule; but the power of Christ propagating in his life is seen to-day in the recapturing on his own Scottish soil of the early apostolic fellowship and gladness.

How unconventionally God's Spirit works could be seen last March near Edinburgh when a privileged son of Wales was the deciding factor in bringing a young Scotch communist to the feet of Christ. This man had been under the influence of an old anarchist for six of the most formative years of his life. He had tried to make Christianity a justification for his communism. He says that at the time of greatest defeat in his own life, whenever he spoke in the streets, there was always trouble the next day between the people and the police. 'This was not any triumph of principle,' he said, 'it was just the projection of my own defeat and bitterness into the minds of the people.' It was the challenge of surrender to a personal Christ, with all the facing of, and restoration

for, personal sin that has made him a vital force for Christ in Scotland to-day, not least among those whom he once regarded as his class enemies.

In America some years ago the challenging leader of a Christian society in a large university was tempted not to speak to one of the most attractive men in the college 'because he seemed to have everything'. But during one brief interview in which he obeyed his guidance, the issues were settled which led that young man into the ministry. At least fourteen members in the family connexion are now radiating the same quality of life, while he and his wife have been 'envoys for Christ' on three continents.

We see in such vivid stories picked at random from an ever-increasing witness in many lands, that there is some victorious power at work beyond man's frail effort. Hugh Redwood, speaking of the work of the Salvation Army in his book, *God in the Slums*, summarizes this for us in the words: 'Religion must throw off its defeatism. Christ is not struggling for victory; the victory was won nineteen hundred years ago. That is what the ordinary man needs to be assured of: the daily victories of a living God over the desolation of the slums should give him the assurance.'

There are other slums than those which sprawl in our modern cities. There are slums in the human soul, and it is because these flourish in every rank of society and type of person that miracles must happen everywhere and all the time. I met a missionary on board ship returning from her post in the Far East. She said she was afraid she couldn't go back, 'for', she confessed, 'a great many heathen I am

supposed to convert are better people than I am.' Her slum of bad temper and discouragement had beaten her. No power, no victory. The other day a woman known for her wide interest both in Christian work and the political life of her country, said that she was the victim of 'drunk and disorderly mental states', and turned to the cross of Christ for release from her lifelong indiscipline. Gross dishonesty, lust, violence, and hatred are open menaces, but these cellars of the soul, often lying concealed in the lives of good and religious people, are more difficult to recognize.

Do not let the allegorical flavour of this little story bemuse your minds, for it was grim reality. For a time in my life there was a beautiful façade with 'Humility' written on it. It had gargoyles and a charming bas-relief in which, funnily enough, I was the central figure. Finally I got suspicious and, taking courage by the forelock, explored. What did I find?—This delicate façade was built of granite quarried from the pits of pride. Behind it lay a notably uninviting slum plot. There was a heap of tarnished tinsel rags that looked suspiciously like conceit in one corner, and I found myself mud up to the knees in self-pity. Fancy the shock! But it was nothing to my surprise when I found the back fence broken down into the next lot, which was one great bog of boredom and ambition. This second slum led back to the main street of my life under another charming façade illuminated, 'Individuality'. This, as Shakespeare says, was 'the most unkindest cut of all'.

There are the notorious slums of those Christians

who lack power: Compromise and Inertia. And there are slums of Resentment, Self-Righteousness, and Criticism which are difficult to clean up because their tenants have such intense pride of ownership. Independence, Prejudice, and Pride of Reputation seem to be handsome blocks, but many families and friends are sacrificed to pay mortgage on them. Jealousy has a high picket fence where love and friendship are often impaled and die bleeding. The night cries of Fear disturb all the peace of these parts: fear of being found out, fear of people, fear of the future, of ill-health, of failure, of death. Selfishness hangs like a choking fog over everything, and a very foul drainage system called Gossip runs from tenement to tenement.

Recently some one said, 'So live and talk in your own house that you can sell your parrot to the town gossip with an easy mind!' Ask yourself the last time a bit of slander got into public circulation through you; or you showed an unholy curiosity in some book, play, or picture, a copy of which you would feel grossly ashamed to have found hidden on your person if you were hurt in an accident. An incorrigible sinner changed within the past year into a most hearty and humorous young saint, had this thought when he first began listening to God. 'Stop pretending you are in love with——'. If all Don Juans were to begin having such guidance, a mischievous species might soon happily become extinct.

You may be asking what all this has to do with guidance. Everything. For while it is true that God

often intervenes, putting a 'stop' or 'stir' in our minds, and recalling us when we are in the 'Far Country'; it is equally true that to be of the 'Colony of Heaven', to be athrill with the adventure of Eternal Life, it is necessary to die to the old self upon which such sin feeds. These sins are but symptoms of a deeply diseased nature which must perish before a new nature can be given. What was done for Peter and the other disciples can be done for us. The swelling tide of the world's need will not be turned except through such channels.

There is an unconscious guidance which has often weighted our decisions or laid a 'taboo' on some impulse or thought. The restraining conviction may have no foundation in reason, but that is not to say it is unreasonable. A young man of once bibulous habits and no little originality was recently telling how, after giving his life to Christ, he was twice 'caught out by his old pals' when trying to put away a quiet pint of beer. 'I could feel God breathing down the back of my neck,' he said. Irreverent? The Holy Spirit is not limited to conventional phraseology. He uses the language of the person to whom He speaks.

Count Zinzendorf standing, noble and complacent, before a picture of the Crucified Christ was arrested by the words written beneath,

This Thou hast done for me,
What have I done for Thee,
Thou Crucified?

From that moment he belonged to Christ, and became the founder of the great Moravian Mission.

St. Augustine, after years of struggle with himself, was sitting in a garden one day, when he heard the words, 'Take up and read.' He took up and read, 'Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' A saint was born. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' God speaks to us at the place where we are, in a way we can understand, if we have the willingness and the faith to hear.

What if, in the search-light of Christ's life and teaching, when we have opened ourselves to the convicting guidance of God, we find all these symptoms—or most of them? Suppose we are utterly tired of self, overpowered with a sense of purposelessness, misdirection, and failure? Where, practically, for us is that experience corresponding to the Pentecost experience of the disciples? Perhaps, blindly and ignorantly, we have been trying to follow such light as we had, the ideal of Christ faintly glimmering on our horizon.

We are recalled to the Cross. Sin is more than a personal inconvenience. It is an offence and insult to God. I must speak here from experience. In the death of Christ I saw how much God cared. Before such awful earnestness I began to care too; uneasily at first, looking for an escape. I saw in myself three great sins—pride, selfishness, wilful independence of God. I was restless; then unhappy, throwing myself with abandon into anything that chanced along in an effort to forget. But I grew to hate myself, and,

correspondingly, I began to love Jesus Christ. It was but a step from that to the realization of my own utter worthlessness, and the impossibility of ever getting rid of that old self through any effort of my own. The purpose of the Cross in His mind, as I saw it in relief against my sin and helplessness, was focussed in these words: 'I am the only One who can meet this evil in its full strength and conquer. I must do it for you.' And if you insist on asking *why* He had to do it, I ask you, 'Can you do it for yourself?' I could not.

If it were to be a battle to the death, then they must come to grips—Christ and sin. This happened at the Cross. It killed Him, but sin died with Him, and when He rose He left it behind for ever. And it remains dead for all who will meet Him on those terms and take His victory for their own.

The Spirit of God seeks to release one's whole personality and to co-ordinate all one's faculties at their highest, attuning them to the mind of God and training one's imagination and sympathies to carry out His redemptive Will for the individual and the world.

St. Paul refers to the body as the 'temple of the Holy Spirit'. I like to think of the mind as His laboratory. Thoughtlessly, people sometimes ask whether following one's guidance might not lead to the atrophy of the ordinary thinking processes given by God. God does not relieve us of the responsibility of knowing all the facts possible and thinking a thing through. But, at best, our knowledge of the facts in any given situation is limited. Even if we have all the facts

relating to past and present, which is not likely, we are still in the dark as regards facts relating to the future. Many people have by experience been shown that God gives the conviction which relates perfectly to the future in His plan. This may explain why a guided decision sometimes seems to be unreasonable. In God's mind it has its place either in future events or present facts unknown, and must be acted on in faith by the person receiving it.

The question arises: How are we to find the particular will of God? There must be absolute readiness to obey, coupled with a faith resolute enough to carry conviction into action. It is not an uncommon experience at the outset to find one's seemingly harmless habits brought into question. Socrates said: 'Hitherto the familiar oracle within me has been in the habit of opposing me about trifles.' Many an adventuring Christian might hear in that the echo of his own experience. But the time comes when the pressure of God's will may bend us, against our own inclinations and deepest desire, toward some sphere of sacrifice and service. A young man in Oxford, his mind running on such a possibility, said thoughtfully, 'No doubt I can when I am told to.' He had found the secret spring of God's will. Knowledge comes with willingness: power with obedience.

Those cautious people who speak of 'the danger of young people trying to be guided', need only be introduced to the problems one meets daily in the lives of all kinds of people, to know the terrible dangers of *not* being guided. The tragic problem of

the 'misfit' is one. There are no misfits in God's plan. The tragedy is when God's plan is missed. That He can provide a second—or third—plan does not lessen our responsibility to see that those with their lives before them do not miss the glory of fulfilling God's purpose. There are broken homes, or homes that hang together like a shattered window pane, ready to fall apart with the slightest stiffening of the breeze; growing estrangements and lifelong misunderstandings between people who should be united that could be cleared in an hour of honest, forgiving, guided 'sharing'; divorces; illegitimate children; nervous breakdowns; ideals scrapped and faith forsaken. This is only some of the wreckage in the lives of people who have not had God's chart and compass. The miracle is that He cares, and that even in the face of such ruin He can 'make all things new'.

The God-directed life has its signposts. The first is the Bible. It is steeped in the experience through centuries of men who have dared under divine revelation to live experimentally with God. There, culminating in the life of Jesus Christ, we find the highest moral and spiritual challenge—complete honesty, purity, selflessness, love, and sacrifice in identifying oneself with God's redemptive work. To test one's guidance by a haphazard glance in the Bible is as unsound as it is unscientific. The Bible is not a medley of disconnected historical facts and spiritual ideas. It is a magnificent and complete story of man's developing relationship to God, unfolding in time, but beginning and ending in eternity. It is not the

man idly casting a fishing line into some sheltered backwater, but the man commissioned to lay a cable across the ocean, who begins to plumb its depths, to know something of the power and tug of its undertow, and those depths beyond where there is infinite and eternal rest.

The second signpost is this: 'Look for the coincidences.' These are not to be consulted for their own sake, nor does one argue one's decision from them. It must be remembered that they are only signposts. But it is wise to look for circumstances and opportunities bearing on the divine conviction already received or for which one is seeking. The guided life calls for great human risks, much blazing of trails by faith, and it may be only inch by inch that the way opens. Life under God's hand often calls us to act upon probabilities rather than upon certainties.

The third signpost is a question: 'Where is the Cross?' The Cross first acts on our lives, whether we understand it or not, in what Christ did for us—His Cross. But we cannot go far before we hear His challenge, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'¹ In seeking God's will through daily life we are constantly confronted by the Cross in one aspect or the other. From His there pours a steady stream of forgiveness, cleansing, and power. On my side the Cross called for an open avowal of Christ to certain friends with whom at that time I should have preferred to remain on the old terms; it lay in the choice of life-work, the surrender of natural affinities in friendship

¹ Matt. 16. 24.

for those which were Christ-centred and redemptive. Later on it appeared with clear challenge in the way of discipline: getting up early on cold dark mornings for a long quiet time of communion with God; refusing to be drawn away from the moment-by-moment challenge of His Spirit by thoughts of natural but selfish inclination and desire; the discipline of the look, the thought, the tongue. The Cross may not always point in the direction which is humanly hardest, though we must be girded for that possibility. It means that in seeking His Will we are never deflected one hair's breadth by the fact that we may suddenly turn a corner and find the Cross. And it does mean that although God supplies us with boundless fun and camaraderie, it never degenerates into the 'fellowship of a tea-party', for it is essentially the fellowship of a crusade.

The fourth signpost is an intuitive conviction that a course of action is inherently right, the certainty that, hard as it may be, there can be no other way. There is a sense of freedom from strain and worry, hurry and apprehension, which characterizes a life so led by the Spirit and lavishly trusting God. An old coloured woman once said, 'Ah wears de world like a loose garment'. Some of us might learn from her in our spiritual lives. This release is based on faith; and faith is attention, elastic expectancy, a keeping step with God.

The fifth signpost, 'What say others to whom God speaks?' is the unwritten law of fellowship. It calls for the death of that subtle spiritual pride which 'takes conviction only from God'. It has no place for

the temperamental vagaries of the person who likes to play the rogue elephant, and resents the constraining discipline of the 'team'; whose loyalty has no wider scope than his vanity leaves room for. It ordains that one should be ready to let any plan of one's own, however good, be superseded if God reveals one better through other people. One is reminded of the 'Kerngemeinde' of which Luther speaks:

'The third way which ought to be the real evangelical order should not take place so publicly, but rather those who intend seriously to be Christians and confess the Gospel with hand and mouth ought to put their names down on a list and meet alone in a house with prayer and reading—and other Christian work. In this group those who don't live like Christians could be known and put under proper discipline, even excommunicated according to the rule of our Lord. . . . Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing; here a simple concentration on the Word, on prayer and love would be sufficient. . . . In short, if there were people enough who seriously intend to be Christians, the order would be quickly arranged. But I cannot and may not arrange such a group or meeting, for I have not the people for it, neither do I see many of them that push towards it. If, however, it so happens that I am pushed to it and cannot refrain from it with a good conscience, I will gladly do my best to help towards it.'

There are not many who 'push toward' such discipline. But it is for lack of this very discipline that God cannot undertake great works. It must be a 'team', able to go forward as one man to the Adventure.

With this background we turn to think of God's Presence in the quiet time. We take for granted the fact that He is always with us. One has but to read the inspiring memoirs of Brother Lawrence, 'Practising the Presence of God' over his pots and pans, or recall the *Jongleur de Dieu*, turning his somersaults to the glory of God, to realize this. That He can hearten us, walking along the street, or see that we are in a given place at the right moment goes without saying.

The reason why the quiet time is of supreme importance is that there we can shut out the world with its clamour of duty, its conflicting appeals, and our own tangled thoughts, and realize the presence of God—'the ineffable something that holds the mind.'¹

That other world is more nearly in touch with us than we dream. Waves from the everlasting shores roll in and break at the very threshold of our lives, but few take heed. The quiet time is not to bring that world into touch with us, but to carry us out of ourselves, beyond its frontier, where our spirits may be swept by the Spirit of worship and wonder, which is the very climate of the Unseen.

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.²

The purpose of the quiet time, then, is not primarily to obtain direction but to come into the stillness—'that greatest and most awful of all goods which we

¹ Rudolph Otto, 'The Idea of the Holy,' p. 18.

² Francis Thompson, 'The Kingdom of God.'

can fancy,'¹ where God can find and commune with us. We need time enough to forget time, and this often means the sacrifice of other interests and almost inevitably that last precious hour of morning sleep. It is not too much to say that for many people the power of the whole day completely depends on that first hour alone with God, and the man who would move mountains must have given God his ear before the rush of life is upon him. For many it may involve the discipline of getting earlier to bed. Remember that no real duties in life conflict, and you can let God so order your day that everything *in His will* for that day will be done.

A great realization came after a long period of inadequate quiet times with little of the Supernatural in them. It was this: that I had been trying to 'pilot' them myself. When and for what should I pray? How and when should I read the Bible? What guidance ought I to seek? Then it dawned on me that the folly of trying to penetrate God's Country without His Spirit leading step by step was as great as though I had attempted to climb the Alps without a guide. After that each quiet time became a spiritual adventure.

Prayer, instead of being a somewhat grim battle for concentration with a good deal of vain repetition, became a tapping of the power-house of God. Remember God's reproof to Job: 'Who darkens my design with a cloud of thoughtless words?'² Some-

¹ Henry Newman, Sermon xxix—'Warfare, the Condition of Victory.'

² Job 38. 1 (Moffatt translation).

times it takes a long time to learn that it is God's Spirit Who must pray through us, bringing to our minds the people and the needs for which to intercede.¹ Few of us pray prayers that deserve an answer, for we ask that God will do things our way instead of His.

I visited at a home where bedtime stories were in order. These tales ranged from stories of high adventure both in the Bible and out, to stories of miracles in the lives of modern people. One night I asked, 'What sort of a story to-night?' 'Tell us,' came the answer from the vortex of a flying somersault, occasioned by pure expectancy, 'Tell us one about where you pray and *something happens*. I love those.'

One is impressed by the naturalness of the supernatural in children, how instantly they respond to its romance. A small girl of six, whose mother's life had been changed, was told that God could talk to her. She was enchanted and put her head down on the table as she was brushing her hair. When she looked up, she said simply, 'He said, "You will be a messenger of Me, Faith"'. A tiny three-year-old said shyly, after listening to God, 'He said, "You must eat more porridge in the morning!"'

In the silence we are led into God's secret plans as far as He wishes us to know them at the time. We will be reminded of letters to write, people to see, and things to do. As with Philip, Peter, and Ananias, the summons comes with a stamp of divine urgency upon it when we are trying to win others to Christ. *Guidance comes in action*. If your life is caught up in

¹ See Romans 8. 26.

God's purpose to redeem the world, it may matter seriously what street you take, which train you go by, and what time you make an appointment. God's Will is a mosaic. The thought may come that there is some new line of personal discipline to be taken up, a relationship to be put right. Promises are given which later we have the joy of seeing come true. There will be, if one's ear is sensitive, warnings that temptation is about, and, like Noah, we may be 'warned of God of things not seen as yet'. Encouragement is constant.

It has been a habit with many people to keep a small notebook for recording these thoughts. There is, of course, no virtue in this *per se*, but hear Martin Luther on this point, in a letter to Master Peter the Barber in 1535:

'It so happens quite often that in contemplating on a part (of the Lord's Prayer) or one of the petitions, I come into such rich thoughts that I let all the other (petitions) alone. And when such rich and good thoughts come one ought to stop all other prayers and make room for such thoughts listening quietly and hindering them by no means. For then it is the Holy Ghost Himself who preaches. And one word of His is better than a thousand of our Prayers. And thus I have often learned more from one prayer than I might have learned by much reading and meditating . . .

'And as I have said before about the Lord's Prayer I say again: In case the Holy Spirit should come among such thoughts and should begin to preach into your heart with rich and illuminating thoughts, then do homage to Him and let your own thoughts behind. Be still and listen to Him who knows better than you. And keep in mind

what He preaches and write it down. Then you will experience miracles.'

I have spoken particularly about the more ordinary thoughts that may come because few people realize how minutely God's will is incarnated in human life. Stray and wandering thoughts may come, but with greater faith and discipline, and the ever-deepening sense of commitment to His plan as it works out in detail in your life, they will cease to be a trial. If you do not feel reasonably sure that a thought is from God, wait. See whether it conforms to Christ's rounded teaching and, if you can, use the test, 'What say others to whom God speaks?'

In closing, one practical word about faith. Faith, issuing in obedience, is the match which lights the fire God has laid for you in your quiet time. Suppose the conviction comes to say or do a very difficult thing. What is faith at this point? Out of the infinite measures of faith it is the one ounce of courage or grit or purpose or will, whatever you choose to call it, that brings you to the point of *seeing that it is done*. If the person you are to speak to is in the next room, the miracle-working forces of heaven must wait until you have made the first move.

There is the other side to this picture. Faith for some people involves the willingness to give up another that *he* may do God's will. One meets many people greatly concerned that a friend or member of the family should be changed—usually in order that an opprobrious habit may be overcome, or home be made a more comfortable place to live in. But there are few who at first want those they love to

do God's will, for discipline and sacrifice will follow. Yet it can never be love that will hold another back from the Divine Adventure. The issue often resolves itself into the simple but agonizing struggle: peace with man at any price, or obedience to God at all costs. Some time ago a mother whose daughter is called to far countries in God's service, said, 'When she was a child I asked God to use her in such a way that the world would be a better place. I am not going to begin now dictating how or where He will answer my prayer.'

Until those evils which took Jesus Christ to the Cross are at last utterly destroyed, a cross awaits each one who undertakes to carry His Lord's Victory into the enemy territory. Danger, separation, privations, misunderstandings, fatigue, loneliness await him. But so bracing is the atmosphere of the unseen world that those who walk in its light and breathe its air find nothing impossible, and carry its hilarity through the deepest glooms. These are the people who say with David Livingstone, 'I have never made a sacrifice', and who walk boldly into the thick of God's battle with sin, knowing that they are invulnerable in their immortality.

May a race of men and women arise in this generation of whom it can be said, that 'God spake to them face to face as a man speaketh with his friends', and that they honoured the intimacy to the laying down of their lives.

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