

The Thrill of Living Within God's Will



By CARL COFFMAN

“Not My Will, But Thine Be Done”

Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
Chapter 1: He Will Direct Our Paths-- If . . .	9
Chapter 2: Ten Revelings of God's Will	19
Chapter 3: The Printed Will of God	31
Chapter 4: When God Chooses the Miraculous	45
Chapter 5: When God Chooses to Whisper	57
Chapter 6: Seeking His Leadings Daily	71
Chapter 7: I Lay All My Plans at Thy Feet	87
Chapter 8: Doing God's Will--the Acid Test	101

Introduction

During the many years that I have pastored and taught college Bible, the one question, by far the most often asked me, has been, "How can I know for sure what God's will is?" Young and older ask it. Students and teachers ask it. Laypersons and preachers ask it. Anyone who is serious about living the Christ-life asks it. Sometimes I am asked this same question several times a week.

Thus, I have been driven to do some very serious study on the subject. And since I must seek God's will continually in my own life, the study has been tremendously rewarding--to me personally, and in my helping those who come to ask the question. There have opened many opportunities to test the validity and workableness of my findings--in weeks of prayer, in campmeetings, in one-to-one counseling, in individual crises, in frustrating moments, in situations that brought a sudden and severe testing of one's faith. I have witnessed God's marvelous revelation of His will in many ways,

to many people, including myself and my family. I am still studying to learn more about the subject that I may be more helpful to all who come and continue to ask this same, vital question.

It seems that the inspired counsel as to how God reveals Himself and His will to man is easier to discover than is the achieving of success in helping someone step out in faith to walk in harmony with that counsel. That might seem strange to you at first. When you think it through, we all know much of the revealed will of God; but we so often hesitate, even refuse at times, to be willing to step out and fully follow. Our humanity gets in the way, doesn't it? So often we want God to simply bless our way--put His "OK" stamp on it, when He truly has revealed His will to us so that we will be able to go His way.

Why do we do this when we have a whole Bible full of records telling us that it doesn't work? Humanness hasn't changed much, has it? The devil hasn't changed either. He still hates for us to yield to God's will for our lives. The almost overpowering tug to continue to "do our own thing" is ever-present with us all. In yielding to God's will, I must yield to His control fully. This undoubtedly is the major reason that we hesitate to follow God's will totally. We do not want Someone else to fully control. And partial acceptance and yielding actually leaves us outside the will of God and very vulnerable to Satan's gaining full

control over us.

Imagine drawing two circles on a piece of paper, one large and one small, one beside the other. Let the larger circle represent God and the smaller circle represent you. By nature we live outside the will of God. Then draw an arrow from the smaller circle, into the center of the large one. That's what this thing of



following God's will is all about. God invites us into the center of His will. That arrow can never go the other way. He wants us "to will" to be drawn in. But He never forces us to come in. It is when we yield, as we are drawn by the Holy Spirit, that we become the winners in this game that is called "life".

The purpose of the message of this book is to help us all see how to become winners. The author has prayed much that you, as you prayerfully read, might find the discovery of, and the actual yielding to, God's patient and continual revealing of His will and ways to become that thrilling moment-by-moment victory experience that God wants every one of to have.

The eight chapters of this small book first appeared in the first quarter, 1985, issue of Youth Ministry Accent. The material was utilized by the Youth Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists as the content for its Week of Spiritual Celebration and Commitment around the world. Thus it has been translated into many languages to minister to the needs of senior youth the world over. Since the author feels it has an appeal to the needs of other youth who missed the week in their home church or school, and to persons of all ages, --for we all must enter the center of God's will if we are soon to live eternally with Him, --the messages are put into this easy-to-read form. And others may appreciate your sharing a copy with them, too.

CHAPTER ONE

He Will Direct Our Paths-If...



I am over sixty years old. I didn't choose to be. It is just one of those facts of life which I cannot change. It was decided by my father and mother, and that is that. None of us chose when to be born. None of us can do one thing about our age. Young people sometimes wish that they were older. Old people often wish that they were younger. But "wishing" is the best that any of us can do.

There is something far more important, eternally important, in life than our age. I have wondered, as I look back over my life, just how many forks in the road I have faced. You know, points at which I had to make decisions, points at which I asked, "Which way should I go?" Some of these forks didn't seem too important, such as what brand to buy of some item of clothing, whether to go to work when I felt only so-so, or even which college? It is true that some of these are probably not all that important.

But there have been other forks in my life, as I see it now, where the decision I made actually had something to do with eternal life. Take the summer after I finished the fifth grade, for example. I had no father by then, and mother was poor. I had been in public school. If I could earn enough money, should I use it to go to church school, or stay in public school and spend the money on myself? Or, when I was fourteen, should I accept my buddy's appeal to join the baptismal class with him? I had avoided it until then. Then came the time when I was faced with choosing a girlfriend, who later might become my wife. There were nice girls next door, on both sides of my house, but neither was a Christian. Virginia lived eight miles away, and she loved the Lord. We met in a Seventh-day Adventist school. I had to choose.

Another big choice we all have to make is in connection with what to do in life to earn a living. In academy, I considered being a medical doctor or an aeronautical engineer. Both seemed important. But I didn't have the money to go to college after academy, so I worked as a printer; then in a factory that made parts for airplanes. Then Virginia and I got married, and in a few months I was drafted into the army. You ask, How did I end up in the ministry? That involved another big choice. I'll tell you later in the book how

it happened.

In these few but important pages, let's consider together this vital, necessary, inescapable matter of choosing--making choices that many times could have a very real bearing on our destiny. We are all involved. God wants to lead us to choose His way--in all things. God knows that our eternity is at stake. And so does the devil. And the devil works every moment to get us to choose his way, and he offers us every conceivable suggestion to rationalize, to compromise, to choose against God's way. He knows where such choices will lead. Yes, you and I are caught right there--between choosing for God or for Satan. We are all involved now, and will be as long as we live.

In this first study, let's focus our attention on just one text in the Bible. A "wise" man wrote it. And God told him what to write. Read with me, Proverbs 3:5,6. Notice as we read that the text has four parts. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways ac-knowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Emphasis mine.) Each of the four parts, God makes crystal clear. God hasn't left us to guess what He is saying. And as we face the many forks in our lives, the many decisions that we all must make, God wants us to know that, as we follow the simple truths of this

passage, we can make every choice successfully. We can have lives that count for something on this earth, and that will share eternity with Him in the future, in the most exciting land of happiness.

Solomon begins with, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." How can we trust like that? Where does such trust come from? Is it easier for some to have it than for others? Does it mean that I am left without one minute for myself, except to trust, and trust, and trust, and never have another doubt? Must I be able to testify that my whole heart is in it, without reserve, without being dishonest about having even one inward, distrustful feeling?

What about this total trust? Could we begin with this--that to have such a trust is a "miracle"? Truly, it is. We must believe that. Where is this miracle to be found? How do we get it?

The Bible in its entirety is a revelation of Who God is, how He loves sinners and saints, what He has done to rescue sinners and help them become saints, and the eternity He has prepared for those who choose to let Him help them. In the Bible we find that God is trustworthy, fair, loving, kind, patient, and that He appeals to us over and over again to accept Him, even after we have said "No" over and over again. In short,

we see clearly in the Bible that God deserves to be trusted.

At this point, what Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 is very important. He says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We might paraphrase the verse to say, "So then faith (or the ability to trust) comes by prayerfully reading, hearing, listening to, what God says in the Bible." The Holy Spirit then gives us the ability to trust God as we study the Bible--the truth about God. What a wonderful miracle! Would it be fair to add that those who do not study the Bible would find the first statement of Proverbs 3:5 impossible?

What about the trusting "with all thine heart"? This really seems difficult. Actually, this is also impossible unless the miracle of coming to trust God is occurring in our hearts, and we are willing to accept God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit as we see in the Bible all that They have done for us. To accept One Who deserves our trust and our love, and do it with all of our heart, must be the "natural" next step after trusting. (See Jeremiah 29:13.) If this is true, our concern should begin with actually getting into meaningful Bible study, and letting the Holy Spirit do its work in us--which is the double miracle of trusting and total dedication. God loves to do these

things for us. And the devil hates to have us let God do them.

Now Solomon presents the second step, and it is a tough one for all of us. He warns, "And lean not unto thine own understanding." He says not to do the very thing that we all so easily do! Twice in Proverbs, God warns that "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25, emphasis mine.) Jeremiah 17:9 also warns that "the heart is deceitful above all things." It seems clear that God is plainly saying, "You cannot trust yourself, or your own decisions. When you come to a fork in the road of life, the only safe course to follow is to seek My counsel as to which way to go."

How we all hate to distrust ourselves and our own ability to think and decide what is best for us. It is so easy to refuse counsel from our Christian friends, from our father or mother, from our teacher or pastor, or even from God. After all, "I know what is best for me." I have wrestled with this problem personally for a long, long time. I'm still wrestling with it at times. At sixty-plus, I am still learning that I cannot trust to my own thoughts and desires. I must trust Him with all my heart. All of our lives, we must continue to study the

Bible, continue to let the Holy Spirit lead us to trust, and continue daily to let Him lead us to trust with all of our hearts. There is no other way to escape the peril of leaning on our own understanding. So many of us want what God gives, but we don't want God.

A few years ago I was on a plane that was taxiing down the runway, toward the point of takeoff. A very nervous woman across the aisle was trying frantically to get the attention of the stewardess. Finally, the stewardess got to the lady. The passenger asked her, "Is this plane going north or south?" "South," the stewardess told her. "I was supposed to be on the other plane," she said in tears. She hadn't asked anyone at the terminal which of the two waiting planes she was supposed to get on, and somehow no one had checked her ticket. Her "guess" was wrong. In life, God wants us to stop guessing, and ask Him which is the right way to go.

This leads to the third part of our text in Proverbs 3: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." If we choose to ask Him only part of the time, it will not work. If we choose to merely ask Him most of the time, it still won't work. God wants to lead us to trust Him all of the time, seek Him with all of our hearts all of the time, and acknowledge His

ways as right and best all of the time. Then the Holy Spirit can continue to work miracles in us, enabling us to willingly choose to follow His will in everything. Catastrophe is awaiting us if we ask Him to help us to find the right lifework, but refuse to let Him guide us in choosing the right life companion. Or we can ask Him to lead us to the perfect wife or husband, and then do our own thing in choosing a job where we can make lots of money, so that we can provide our companion with a lovely home, a good car, fine clothes, and, and, and. An "easy" life has led many to leave their "perfect" companions, and God, and live in misery. Money alone will never buy happiness.

The Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, Illinois, which for years has conducted a haven for life's real down-and-outers, prints a sticker which says, "God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him." On the same sticker are the words of Psalm 37:5: "Commit thy ways unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." In this matter of seeking God's will, we must arrive at one conclusion—we are either in it with our whole heart, or we are not in it at all.

For anyone who is in it totally, Solomon concludes, "And he shall direct

thy paths." Not maybe, or partly, or mostly, or almost, but He shall direct. We can trust Him to direct at every fork in the road of life. We can rely on Him in every crisis. He will never let us down. He will always give His best to those who seek His will and leave the choice with Him. Ellen White, in Desire of Ages, p. 668, says: "Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case to Him, just what course to pursue." (Emphasis mine.)

"Always let God drive your car. And you will never have to worry... -Kamii

As we set out to study this topic, we will become painfully aware of one point--that God reveals His will to us to go His way, never our own selfish way. Because we are human, this one point will often chafe us, even anger us at times. What we know is that God knows what is for our best good, always. He sees the end from the beginning, which we do not see too well. We tend to look at the present, while He looks from the perspective of our entire life, even eternal life. Thus, we need to relate to this matter as a patient needs to relate to a prescribed treatment of his illness by his physician--believe what the doctor says, and do it even if instant results are not seen. Human doctors may need time to discover just the right treatment, but they surely know a lot more about re-

turning me to health than I do. Our heavenly Doctor knows instantly what we need, and leads us always for our best good.

In the following chapters we will seek to discover just how to find more fully and personally, the thrill of living within God's will. God means business--He will direct every part of our lives. He wants us to mean business, too, and open to Him the opportunities to guide us and let Him prove that He is a trustworthy God. He will provide us with the life that finds the greatest happiness and fulfillment, and finally eternal life with Himself, Who is joy and love.



Ten Revelings of God's Will

In our first chapter, we talked about life's having many "forks" in the road, where there are two ways to go--a right way and a wrong way. These are the many, almost daily, places where we have to make decisions, some of which are very small, others very big. Some are of the nature that even our eternal life is involved.

A point that we must not miss is that God leaves us free to choose. Our free will He will never force. If He would refuse to force a once-holy angel who would blight God's beautiful universe with sin, He surely would not force us. Christian character is formed only when, knowing we are free to turn God down, we choose to do right because it is right. This free choice that God has given us is proof of His great love. He could never prove His love by the use of force. *And we can show our love to Him by choosing what's right and obeying Him.*

You and I are probably much alike. We have at times grown weary of deci-

sions, decisions, decisions. Every day, decisions to make. Why do we have to face them so often? Do all people have the same problem? Hasn't anyone ever been free from so much decision-making? When did it all begin? When will it end?

If freedom of choice is the right of every created being, then we could rightly answer that the making of choices began with God's creation of angels back somewhere in eternity. On this earth it began with God's creation of Adam and Eve. If free will is necessary to one's spiritual development, then the opportunity to choose to follow God faithfully began in Eden. Let's read it in Genesis 2:15-17: "And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

* God did not put that tree there to catch them in disobedience. Let's never accuse God of that! He put it there because His total love demanded that He allow men and women freedom of choice. He made them perfect. But even perfect people were to mature through-

out eternity, believe it or not. And God provided them with the only condition in which such spiritual maturity could take place. He could not have done it any other way, and still be "Love" itself.

Then, sadly, the leader of the fallen angels entered the scene, to provide the first fork in the human road of life. We all know the story. It is found in Genesis 3:1-6. We see clearly that at each fork in the road, at each decision point, there is a "right" way that God has made clear, and a "wrong" way that the devil would have us enter. But he cannot force us, either. Temptations he will give, wrong roads he will smoothly pave, but "sin" is our own act.

As Satan tempted Eve, he told her a lie about God. He told her she could disobey God and live. Then he presented a deception, telling her that God was hiding from her something better than she had. Then came those sad, sad words of the first wrong decision—she "did eat." And then the devil got her to play the game with him, and she went to Adam with a second piece of forbidden fruit—and he faced the first fork in his life's road.

I picture it this way: Beautiful Eve stood in front of handsome Adam with two pieces of fruit. The one in her left hand had a bite out of it. The one in her right hand was still whole and bright and

appetizing. And instantly Adam realized what Eve had done. She stretched out her right hand, closer to him. It is at this point that God, through Ellen White, gives us insight and lets us understand what, at that moment, took place in Adam's mind. Listen to the thoughts that dashed through his brain cells and terribly threatened his superior intellect:

"Adam understood that his companion had transgressed the command of God, disregarded the only prohibition laid upon them as a test of their fidelity and love. There was a terrible struggle in his mind. He mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side. But now the deed was done; he must be separated from her whose society had been his joy. How could he have it thus? Adam had enjoyed the companionship of God and of holy angels. He had looked upon the glory of the Creator. He understood the high destiny opened to the human race should they remain faithful to God. Yet all these blessings were lost sight of in the fear of losing that one gift which in his eyes out-valued every other. Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator—all were overborne by love to Eve. . . . He resolved to share her fate; if she must die, he would die with her." (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 56, emphasis mine.)

appetizing. And instantly Adam realized what Eve had done. She stretched out her right hand, closer to him. It is at this point that God, through Ellen White, gives us insight and lets us understand what, at that moment, took place in Adam's mind. Listen to the thoughts that dashed through his brain cells and terribly threatened his superior intellect:

"Adam understood that his companion had transgressed the command of God, disregarded the only prohibition laid upon them as a test of their fidelity and love. There was a terrible struggle in his mind. He mourned that he had permitted Eve to wander from his side. But now the deed was done; he must be separated from her whose society had been his joy. How could he have it thus? Adam had enjoyed the companionship of God and of holy angels. He had looked upon the glory of the Creator. He understood the high destiny opened to the human race should they remain faithful to God. Yet all these blessings were lost sight of in the fear of losing that one gift which in his eyes out-valued every other. Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator—all were overborne by love to Eve. . . . He resolved to share her fate; if she must die, he would die with her." (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 56, emphasis mine.)

commandments were first revealed, and how Adam and Eve, if they knew them, could have avoided their tragic mistake if they had cherished and clung to the unchangeable principles that the ten contain.

Let's attempt to answer the question as to whether Adam and Eve had a knowledge of the commandments before sin. In Romans 5:14, God tells us simply, "Death reigned from Adam to Moses." The Genesis story verifies this, beginning with Abel. Then in Roman 6:23, God adds, "For the wages of sin is death." In other words, if man had never sinned, there would have been no death. Finally, God says in Romans 3:20, "By the law is the knowledge of sin."

Thus, we can conclude that, even in Adam's day, he saw death which came only in a world where there was sin, which in turn was known only because there was a knowledge of the commandments. When Adam and Eve saw Abel dead, they knew it was wrong, terribly wrong. Why? And before that, when they ate that fruit, they knew it was wrong, terribly wrong, for Genesis 3:8 records that they immediately hid from God. Why? They had never done that before.

Let's try another approach to the same question. There are many texts in the Bible that clearly show the ten prin-

principles of the ten commandments to be simple revealings of the very nature of God. For example, the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." What does this tell us about God? God is the Creator, the Sustainer, the majestic One. There is no other true God. Therefore, all other "gods" are false, be they the sun, moon, an idol, money, fame—you name it. Jeremiah 10:10 says, "The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King." The first commandment simply states that there is no God but one, and as such He has a right to our total trust, and worship, and affections.

Take the seventh commandment in Exodus 20:14 as a second example. It states, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." What is God saying here? What is He revealing to us about Himself? Isn't it clearly, "Keep thyself pure, as I am pure." God is "purity" itself. And He wants so to lead us that even our thoughts are pure. (See Philippians 4:8.) Thus, He can say of any of us who are pure that they reflect Me in their purity.

Look at it in a broader way. Jesus once quoted two Old Testament passages to tell us that we can sum up the first four commandments in the statement, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Matthew 22:37; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5.) Then He said we can sum up the last six commandments in this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:39; cf. Leviticus 19:18.) God is love, and He reveals Himself through those ten principles of love. When we reflect that love, it could be said of us that we are like him. WOW! What Pkg

Now in addition to our first line of reasoning that from Adam to Moses there was death, therefore sin, therefore law, let's add this: All ten of the commandments reveal to us what God is. Place Adam and Eve in companionship with such a God, every day in person, comfortable with Him always, and then ask yourself this question, Did Adam and Eve have a knowledge of the ten principles of the law before sin came? They were daily with the "Law" itself! Thus Ellen White makes this conclusion: "Adam and Eve, at their creation, had a knowledge of the law of God. It was printed on their hearts, and they understood its claims upon them." (Ellen White, in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. I, p. 1104.)

Did they break one of those commandments in committing their first sin? What about commandment number one? Eve listened to and chose the way of the

one who then styled himself as prince or god of this world. (See John 12:31.)

Adam then did the same, as the devil worked through Eve. They both took God's name in vain in the sense of Luke 6:46, where Jesus said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" They breached their total loyalty to God which is symbolized by the fourth commandment. Eve became a temptress and led Adam to an action which would take his life. They violated their honesty—the principle behind the eighth commandment. They coveted a knowledge that Satan suggested to be available and superior to what God had given them. And they both broke the great principle of love which stood behind all ten—total love to God, and real love for others. Did they violate any of the principles of the commandments in Genesis 3:1-6? Yes, and it was "sin," and their sin led to the condemnation of death that day, and final dying many years later.

IF Eve kept real love for Adam, she would not have given it to him, and might not even do it in the first place

Ellen White tells us that the ten commandments were to be a "hedge," a "divinely erected barrier," and a "safeguard" to Adam and Eve, and to all of the human race through all the coming ages. (See Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 52; Ellen White comment in Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. I, p. 1084.) A hedge, barrier,

safeguard from what? If we read Genesis 3 in its entirety, we quickly find out. A loving God did not want Adam and Eve, or any one of us, to live outside of the garden of Eden, or be afraid, or blame others, or bring forth our children in sorrow, or have family troubles, or till a cursed soil, or get stuck with thorns and thistles, or earn one's living by the sweat of the brow, or see tragedy with their children, or die themselves. There are literally hundreds of such negatives recorded in the Bible that God never wanted man to experience. Our loving God wanted to safeguard us, protect us, hedge us in from every one of these miserable experiences in life, simply by revealing the loving principles of His own nature, the supreme source of joy and happiness. What a tragedy that Adam and Eve chose to break the hedge, trample down the divine barrier, and nullify the safeguard. And what a tragedy that we humans still so often look at the ten commandments as enemies of a happy and secure life. The devil is still walking about, tempting, deceiving, misleading all who will be deceived and misled.

I have been a pastor and Bible teacher for over thirty years. During those years, I have had hundreds of counseling sessions, with young people, and older people. I have

counseled young people through some forty weeks of prayer. Usually those who seek help are those who are experiencing the awful aftermath of the sins, mistakes, foolish decisions that they have made. I have visited with those who have done something very wrong, and are fearful of getting caught. They sit there, suffering terribly. Some have stolen, or been immoral, or cheated in an exam, or wronged their parents--the list is long. The point is that God would have delighted to spare them the agony they have, if they had just been willing to seek and follow His will.

Could we, together, write a summary of points from this second study? First, though God wants us to make every choice well, He will always allow us the total freedom to choose. This He must do, because He is love. Second, if we could always put God first, above everything and everyone on earth, we would then make right choices. "Human" nature wars against this simple guideline. Third, the ten commandments give us the clearest, the most comprehensive statement of God's will in the entire Bible. And in only fifteen verses. There are 31,158 more verses in Scripture. Yet the fifteen cover almost every type of temptation we could face; they give us clear guidelines in almost every area of life where we face forks in the road that demand decision-making.

Fourth, God gave us a revelation of His perfect will and character in the commandments to keep us from making choices that would lead to misery, guilt, fear, sickness, and death. He wants us happy, healthy, joyous, and He has, in His boundless love, given us all the secrets to find and enjoy such.

We must add one necessary point as we close: Of ourselves we can never resist the devil's temptations and deceptions; we can never stay off the wrong roads, or make even one successful advance in trying to "keep" the commandments. Nor can we find release from guilt, and shame, and remorse, and ugly scars. Not by ourselves. We must thank God, the God of perfect love, the God who revealed Himself in His safeguarding, protecting ten commandments, for being so selfless that He gave Himself in His Son. Then we must seek the gift of the Holy Spirit, and moment by moment let Him enable us to find the guidance and strength to make wise decisions and travel the right road—to a fulfilling and rewarding life.

The Printed Will of God



It is a staggering thought that God, Who has myriads of angels, and myriads of worlds spread out over billions of miles, and billions of creatures on just this one world, would take upon Himself the leading of every created being to know His will and have the opportunity to do it. About all we can do with such a thought is to believe that it is true. Just to believe it in relation to the four-billion-plus on our own earth is overwhelming. But it puts a sharp focus on possibly the most exciting word in all of the Bible, found in John 3:16: "...that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Whosoever." That means anyone among the over four billion inhabitants on this earth--on any continent, any island, of any race, any color, any culture, any personality, any heredity, any I.Q., any financial status, any anything. "For God so loved" that He took upon Himself the gigantic responsibility of providing every being with enough divine

guidance to be saved from their sins, overcome their weaknesses, put their footsteps in the footsteps of Jesus, and be able to be sure that eternal life will someday be theirs. Are you overwhelmed? I am.

We gasp, and ask, How? How does God provide everyone, everywhere, with adequate guidance to accomplish so much? Could we begin our answer with a wonderful insight given us by Ellen White. Listen:

3 ways

"There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others. How may we know His voice from that of a stranger? How shall we distinguish it from the voice of a false shepherd? God reveals His will to us in His Word, the holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings: and it will be recognized if we do not separate our souls from Him by walking in our own ways, doing according to our own wills, and following the promptings of an unsanctified heart, until the senses have become so confused that eternal things are not discerned, and the voice of Satan is so disguised that it is accepted as the voice of God.

"Another way in which God's voice is heard, is through the appeals of His Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the

heart, which will be wrought out in the character. If you are in doubt upon any subject, you must first consult the Scriptures. If you have truly begun the life of faith, you have given yourself to the Lord, to be wholly His, and He has taken you to mold and fashion according to His purpose, that you might be a vessel unto honor. You should have an earnest desire to be pliable in His hands, and to follow whithersoever He may lead you." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 512, emphasis mine.)

This statement has given me tremendous help in seeking to know God's will for my life, and how He will reveal it to me. We need to study it carefully. In this chapter, let's study just the first method that God has used, through the Holy Scripture. In Chapter 4, we will consider His second method, providential workings, and in chapter 5, His third method, through the impressions and appeals of the Holy Spirit.

In examining God's revealing of His will through the Holy Bible, we must also make a personal decision as to whether we will include the books that we call the "Spirit of prophecy"—written by Ellen White. She is not the Bible, or "another" Bible to Seventh-day Adventists. She has told us clearly that her writings are not such and we should not use them that way. But was she inspired

by God as were the Bible writers? Are her writings "her" voice or God's voice? If they are only her voice, then we can take them as good advice. But if God is speaking, then they can also reveal God's will to us, and that is important.

I personally believe that they are God's voice. My years of examining her claims and the contents of the books has led me to believe that God is speaking through them to me. I study the Bible daily. I also study her books carefully. They help me to understand the Bible better, see the lessons of the Bible more clearly, and have a broader and fuller understanding of God's will for my life. I personally have a growing appreciation for all of the instruction that God has given. I praise Him for all of it. Do you know what the great tragedy today is among us? It is that we are not studying this vast revelation of God's will very much. He has actually "published" His will on thousands of pages, for almost every situation of life, and we complain that we do not know what it is!

When I was a student in college, I lived in an area of quonset homes occupied by students who had been in the armed services of the United States. We were trying to raise money to build ourselves a chapel for worship. One evening two of us knocked at the door of a lady

physician on our campus, a lovely, retired lady affectionately known as "Doctor Mary" by the students and faculty. We wanted to secure a donation for the chapel.

As we were explaining our purpose to her, another lady knocked at the door, seeking some of her wise counsel relative to the right thing to do in connection with some personal problem. Doctor Mary excused herself and went into another room. Soon she returned with a Bible and several of the Ellen White books. As she handed them to the lady, we heard her say, "If you will study where I have placed the bookmarks, you will find God's counsel and His will for your problem." I learned something that night. Doctor Mary did not offer the lady any advice. She simply let her find God's will, the answers, from God's Word and the Ellen White books that she loaned her.

We all know that we should study God's counsels. God tells us that it is vital if we want to have eternal life. In Acts 17:11 we find that the early Christians in Berea "searched the scriptures daily." The text says that it made them "more noble" as they "received the word with all readiness of mind." Paul encouraged Timothy with the way he had spent his earlier years, reminding him that

"from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). In the previous chapter, he had said, "Study [or, strive diligently] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

According to God, our faith comes from Bible study. Paul said: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). So does our light. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). Bible study is crucial to our overcoming sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11). And we grow spiritually because we study. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

Knowing all these things, do we study? Do we have trouble studying the Bible? Is it too difficult? Is it kind of boring? Do we get sleepy and fail to concentrate? Is our mind too busy with the many cares in our lives? Is there too much going on—at school, at home, or even in church activities? Is there no quiet place, where people will leave us alone so that we can get something out of it? One of our friends rings the

doorbell. Another calls on the phone. Someone wants us to go somewhere. We have been through all of these things, haven't we?

To really get much out of Bible study (or reading of the Ellen White books), we must really want to do it. We must find a quiet time to do it, we must do it regularly each day, and use a method that produces worthwhile results. To be able to use the Bible (and the Spirit of prophecy books) as a tool to find God's will for our lives in the many ways we all need, and at the time we need it—that's exciting, challenging, highly rewarding.

I can hear your next question. And it is the right question to ask next. "How?" I've asked it, and I've tried hard for a long time to find the "how's" in discovering God's will for my life. I've struggled just as you have to find an effective method of Bible and Spirit of prophecy study that really produces results. Let me share with you two of the best study helps that I have discovered so far.

First, the Bible is very old. Moses, the first writer, lived about 3,500 years ago. The New Testament was completed nearly 1,900 years ago. Ellen White died about seventy years ago. Can we find, in such old material, sometimes with out-

of-date words, a message and meaning that is very personal to us? We need a personal God. We need to know the One Who died for us—the One Who is actually with us, Who will help us, Who actually will lead us.

Try this experiment. Find a paperback copy of the gospel of John, preferably in an easy-to-read translation. Using a ruler and a colored pen or pencil, underline each time you find Jesus talking with just one person. When you find the first such occurrence, underline it, and put a "1" in the margin beside it. Keep underlining and numbering all the way through the book. Do not mark anything else. You should find thirty-five in John's gospel. Then go back and actually draw a line through the name (Nicodemus, woman at the well, etc.) and write your name just above the name you've crossed out in each of these one-person encounters.

Just as God spoke to them, treated them, encouraged them, forgave them, led them to do His will, so He will do the same for you. Jesus will "call" you to be His disciple, He will "counsel" you, He will offer you "living water" and the "bread of life." I don't want to cheat you out of all the discoveries. Best—you will find for yourself an up-to-date, personal God. You will stay awake, and be chal-

lenged and thrilled.

"How" number two. I am indebted to Elder John Loor for the spark of this idea. God wills that we follow His footsteps in doctrine, and in personal living. Begin to develop a "trigger text" for each doctrinal and personal topic. What is a trigger text? Supposing you are considering the doctrine of tithing. What is the first text that pops into your mind? It might be Malachi 3:8-10, or it might be some other text such as Matthew 23:23. The important thing is that it is your text. It is the one that your mind triggers first.

Or, suppose that you need to live without guilt, especially after you have asked forgiveness. That is a struggle for almost all of us. What pops up this time? It could be 1 John 1:9, or Isaiah 55:7, or some other helpful text. (See examples in the two lists at the close of this study.) Make your own list for the doctrines and personal needs you have. Then either type them as in the sample given (with room for additional topics and trigger texts), and paste them (with rubber cement), on blank pages in the back of your Bible, or write them out carefully on those blank pages. Then choose a special colored pencil and underline your trigger texts throughout your Bible. Do not use the color for any-

thing else.

With the trigger texts all listed and underlined, you are then ready for a lifetime of creative Bible study, and a clearer and clearer understanding of God's will for your life. As you read in the future, begin to make "text clusters" in the margins of your personally marked trigger texts. To make it simple, let's say that you chose Matthew 24:44 as your trigger text for being ready for the second coming of Christ. One day you are reading the book of First John. In chapter 3, verse 2, you come across the idea that when Christ comes, we must be "like Him." We can then turn to our readiness trigger text, write "1 Jn. 3:2" in the margin, and we have started our text cluster on readiness. Before long, you will have several texts in that vital cluster. With years of reading, our clusters grow bigger and bigger, each providing a more certain knowledge of God's will in any situation.

We come to know the Author of Scripture more clearly as we continually see Him revealing His will to us. In profitable Bible study, we come to the point of trusting what God says more fully. He also works to motivate us to want to do His will—the product of a true love relationship. We learn to more quickly find where His will is revealed,

and to depend on the divine power that enables us to do it. Thus, we mature spiritually, we live in Christ confidently, we find it becoming a natural thing to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) in all things. We live in the "Light" and walk more and more apart from our old failings and stumblings. "Religion" becomes a rewarding "way of life," and we really discover what Jesus meant by "rest," "peace," "joy" and "reward." We discover the tragedy of rejecting these good things to seek our own good things, as we have regarded religion as a possibility only when we get white-haired, and into the days of the rocking chair.

The Scripture has been published for years, in hundreds of languages all over the world. The additional books by Ellen White are readily available. I enter many Spirit of Prophecy references into my text clusters, in order to remember the source of her important comments. God hasn't hidden His will from us. Get into a program of digging for it like you never have before. It will change your life, provide you with a living faith, a new hope, a living religion. And your readiness for the coming of Christ will be far more than an idea—it will be your daily experience.

DOCTRINAL BIBLE SUBJECT		The Author's Trigger Texts
Topic	Trigger Text	
Baptism	_____	Rom. 6:3,4
Bible, Inspiration of	_____	2 Tim. 3:16
Christ, Return of (Second Coming)	_____	Heb. 9:28
Christ, Sacrifice of	_____	Acts 4:12
Christ, Signs of Second Coming	_____	Matt. 24:3
Christ, Steps to	_____	Matt. 5:3
God's Last Warning Message	_____	Rev. 14:6-12
Grace, Salvation by	_____	Eph. 2:8
Healthful Living	_____	3 John 2
Holy Spirit	_____	John 14:26
Judgment	_____	Acts 17:31
Justification by Faith	_____	Rom. 3:24
Law and Grace (Relation of)	_____	Rom. 6:14
Law of God (Ten Commandments)	_____	John 14:15
Mark of the Beast	_____	Rev. 14:9-11
Millennium	_____	Rev. 20:1-3
Sabbath, Doctrine of	_____	Ex. 20:8-11
Sabbath, How to Keep	_____	Isa. 58:13,14
Salvation, Plan of (Restoration)	_____	John 3:16
Sanctuary, Earthly and Heavenly	_____	Ex. 25:8,9
Seal of God	_____	Rev. 7:1-3
Spirit of Prophecy	_____	Amos 3:7
State of the Dead (Life Only in Christ)	_____	Eccl. 9:5,6
Tithing (Stewardship of Our Money)	_____	Mal. 3:10
2300 Years, Daniel 8:14	_____	Daniel 8:14

(Add pages as you need them)

PERSONAL BIBLE SUBJECT		The Author's Trigger Texts
Topic	Trigger Text	
Acceptance by God, Certainty of	_____	Isa. 55:6,7
Bad Habits, How to Break	_____	Rom. 13:14
Church, My Responsibilities in	_____	Eph. 5:30
Dating, Guideline for	_____	2 Cor. 6:14
Decisions, How to Make	_____	1 Kings 18:21
Doubt, What to Do With	_____	Matt. 21:21
Education, Importance of Christian	_____	Luke 2:52
Giving of Oneself to Others	_____	Luke 10:33
Guilt, How to Overcome	_____	Rom. 8:1
Inward Adornment, How to Have	_____	1 Pet. 3:3,4
Love, How to	_____	1 Cor. 13:4-8
Mind, How to Strengthen	_____	Rom 12:2
Parents, How to Communicate With	_____	Prov. 13:1
Pray, Why We Should	_____	James 5:16
Prayer, Effective	_____	Matt. 21:22
Right and Wrong, Discerning Between	_____	Prov. 14:12
Temptation	_____	Matt. 6:13
Trusting God Fully	_____	Isa. 26:3,4
Witnessing for Christ	_____	Acts 1:8
Worth, of Others	_____	Luke 15:21-24
Worth, Self	_____	1 Cor. 6:20
_____	_____	
_____	_____	

(Add pages as you need them)



When God Chooses the Miraculous

In chapter 3, we examined God's great revelation of His will through some forty "penmen" who recorded His messages for almost sixteen hundred years. We also briefly considered God's revelations for almost seventy years to our own church--through a very dear lady who wrote more than 100,000 pages of manuscript in her lifetime. Ellen White averaged about four pages every day throughout those seventy years. Have you ever considered that each of us can sit at home, or in a library, with that much revealing from God at our fingertips?

Also we read that God reveals His will to us, primarily in three ways: through His inspired writings, through His providential workings, and through the appeals of the Holy Spirit. (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 512.) In this chapter, we want to examine carefully the second method, especially when it involves the miraculous. We have read about miracles in the Bible. We have heard of some in our own day. But will God really

use a miracle to guide me? Dare I ask for a miracle to make God's desire for me clear? When should I ask for such? Would God consider me bold or naive or presumptuous to ask for supernatural guidance like Gideon did? Can the devil perform miracles and deceive me?

There are some very important principles in relation to the miraculous leadings by God in the stories of Gideon and Naaman. Let's first review the story of Gideon in Judges 6. The chapter begins with Israel in real trouble. They had worshiped the Amorite gods in spite of God's warnings not to, they had been very evil in God's sight, and had not listened to Him. Thus, for seven years, God had permitted the Midianites, the Amalekites, and other tribes, to invade their land, ruin their crops, kill their livestock. The Israelites had hidden themselves in the mountains, in shelters, in caves. Finally they cried to God for help. (See Judges 6:1-10.)

It is hard to believe that God's people—then and still today—choose to walk so far from God's will that He is forced to let an enemy make life utterly miserable for them until they are brought to their knees, and cry out for help. This is even more unbelievable when we recognize that in following God's will and way there is joy and rest

and peace and fulfillment in life. When will we learn?

Our amazing God heard Israel's cry and sent an angel to Gideon. (See verses 11,12.) "The Lord is with thee," the angel said. Read Gideon's rather pathetic discussion with the angel in verses 13-16. It is very apparent that Gideon knew he was talking with the Lord. Shouldn't that have been proof enough that he could succeed against the enemy? But what did he ask God for? Read on in verses 17-24. Gideon heard the angel, saw the fire from a rock, lived through a face-to-face encounter with a holy angel.

That night God again revealed Himself, His will, and His power to Gideon. God told him to destroy his father's altar to Baal and the pole beside it that was a symbol of a heathen goddess. He told Gideon to build the right kind of altar to the Lord in its place and offer a burnt offering to God on it. Fearfully, Gideon did it under cover of darkness. But he did obey God. And God protected him from the uproar the next day. (See verses 25-32.) Then the enemies of Israel crossed the Jordan and camped in the valley of Jezreel. And the "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet," and gathered the Israelites for war. (See verse 34.)

You would think that Gideon by then would have been convinced that God was with him, and victory was assured. But what did he do? Read verses 36-38. Our gracious God is so patient, isn't He? He proves Himself, proves Himself, proves Himself, over and over again. Yet, with man's hesitancy, He provides a miracle to prove Himself again. Gideon did not need that dampened fleece, but God dampened it. And lo, and behold, Gideon asked for another sign—just to make sure!—this time for dry fleece and wet ground. And God did that, too! What a long-suffering God we have, so patient with all of our doubts and feeble fiddlings.

The sequel of the story in Judges 7 is well known. God tested Gideon and cut his army from 32,000 to 300 men. Here, God had one more miracle for brother Gideon. There was to be no way that Gideon and his army would take credit for their victory over the Midianites, not with only 300 soldiers. They had no tanks, no rockets, no air-cover, but were to fight with trumpets, jars, and torches—strange armament. But victory came by "the sword of the Lord" (verse 20). When the battle was over, and the dust had settled, the best those 300 men and Gideon could do was to sing the doxology, "Praise God from Whom all

blessings flow."

Turn to 2 Kings, chapter 5, and let's look in on another soldier, this time an army commander of the king of Syria. Naaman was a great soldier, but a miserable leper. In his house a captive Jewish girl was a servant for his wife. The Bible says that she was just a "little" girl, but she had "big" faith. One day she told Mrs. Naaman, "If only your husband would see the prophet, Elisha, who is in Samaria. He would cure him of his leprosy." Don't you love that? What was it that Jesus said about the faith of a child? "Commander Naaman, a Jewish prophet will heal you." The Syrian king told him to go, with the king's letter of recommendation to the king of Israel, and half a fortune in gifts.

Naaman came to the king of Israel with his royal letter. The poor king tore his clothes, believing that the whole thing was a scheme of the Syrian king to stir up trouble between Syria and Israel when he could not meet Naaman's request. "Am I God," he cried, "that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (verse 7).

The little maid had not sent her master to the king, but to the prophet, Elisha. Elisha heard about the king's confusion and set a message to him saying, "Let him come now to me, and he

shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (verse 8).

Read 2 Kings 5:9-13. Poor powerful Naaman couldn't handle being met only by the prophet's receptionist, or the thought of the disgrace of seven baths in a muddy river. I wonder if he thought of wringing a little maid's neck when he got back home! God's will had been revealed to Naaman through that sweet little girl and through a prophet, but he didn't like the "what to do" a bit, and almost went back home with his dreadful leprosy. Then he did what God said—exactly what God said—and God's blessing of healing and health was his.

In doing God's will, Naaman met God. After obeying God's will, he met Elisha, the prophet, in person. And then he told him, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (verse 15). He urged Elisha to accept his gifts, but Elisha refused. Naaman must also learn that the blessings of God cannot be bought, but are free to the one who believes. God used Gehazi's greed for the gifts, and the resulting curse of leprosy on him, to teach us all the same lesson.

What can we learn about the revealing of God's will in these two Bible stories? First, in both cases, God spoke His will, through an angel to Gideon, and through the faith of a little girl and a

prophet to Naaman. Really, there was no need for a miracle in either case. Except to get rid of the leprosy. But because of the weakness of human beings, and their difficulty in simply taking God at His word, God graciously adds miracles to make His way and will doubly clear. With Gideon, God used at least six miracles! He sent the angel with His message. That was a miracle in itself. Then God sent fire from the rock, Gideon survived a face-to-face encounter with the angel, he was spared after destroying the Baal altar and the Ashtoreth pole, his fleece was wet, and finally it was left dry. God went the sixth mile! It is amazing how far He will go to help us see and do His will.

In Naaman's case, God revealed His way to be cured through the faith of the maiden in Elisha, and through the simple, straightforward counsel of Elisha himself. God then used the miracle to confirm what He had said when Naaman obeyed the counsel. The lesson here seems clear. God wants us to have faith in what He says without any miracle. He wants us to come to the place where we can say, "It is so because God has spoken it." Isn't that the way the promises of the Bible work? They are true because God has given them, and God wants us to believe them and claim them as our own.

Like
When we don't
trust God and
worry instead, we
hurt God and say
He is a liar.
- Kemi

There exists almost an insult to God if He has clearly revealed His will to us in the Bible and the books of Ellen White, and we neglect to search out what He has said, but instead ask Him to use a miracle to show us His will when it has already been made clear. Don't you think so?

What about today? Does God actually still use miracles to guide us in our lives? Some people think so. Others do not believe in miracles. My answer is, that because God is still God, and people are still people, with their weaknesses of hesitating, inadequate Bible study, and with their inability to be able to "see" spiritual things and God's leading clearly, our loving, patient, fair, saving God still uses the miraculous if He sees it is needed. He wants us to know and do His will, and He will spare nothing to show us clearly the way even when we do not deserve it. Do you believe that? I do.

When I was born, my mother was a sweet Seventh-day Adventist. My father was an alcoholic. He left home when I was three. I had an older sister and a younger sister, and my cripple grandfather lived with us. Our home was very poor. When I was old enough to do yard work, I earned my tuition and entered church school for the first time in the sixth grade. I lived in the city as I

continued through academy.

Later, my wife-to-be hoped that we would move away from the city when we were married, to a place where we could live a real Christian life, but I was too happy with the things I did in the city to move. I always went to church on Sabbath, but I wasn't all that "churchy" the rest of the week.

In academy, and later when we were planning to get married, the matter of lifework became very important. God wants to lead all of us in choosing it. Back then, I told people that I wanted to be a medical doctor, or an aeronautical engineer. There is nothing wrong with such professions if our talents are in that direction, and if God leads us there. But I didn't ask God if that was His choice. And I was sure that it was what I wanted. I finished academy but could not go to college, for there was no money. So I went to work, first in a printshop, and then in a factory that made parts for airplanes. Then we got married, and soon I was drafted into the army.

Now, forty years later, I know that it was God's will that I went into the army; then, I totally questioned it. In the military, God did some marvelous things to help me find His will. He miraculously spared my life three times. Once, I almost fell under a large, moving coal

truck. Then he saved my life at sea in a torpedo attack on our troopship. On the way home, He saved me from an in-flight airplane fire. He worked hardest during the eighteen months I was stationed on an island in the North Atlantic. There God gave me time to read my Bible, and the book Great Controversy, and to find Jesus as my wonderful Saviour. There He led me to a desire to move away from the city when I got home.

Then somehow, and I didn't realize it then, He placed within me such a desire for service that later I was led to choose a new lifework in the ministry. He worked through my dear wife, through an army buddy, and through His quiet urgings, to lead me to college. In college, while preparing for the ministry, I prayed for four years not to have to go back into the city, but after graduation, God led me to my first pastorate in a large city! There I was associated with a talented pastor, and a very successful evangelist, whose leadership and counsel helped to develop my immature skills. God was leading, leading, leading.

Then years later, God led me to teach Bible in college. That was a difficult decision to make. After much heart-searching and prayer, I was impressed to prayerfully write down on

paper all the reasons for and against changing my work from pastor to Bible teacher. As a result, I clearly saw God's will. We must not forget that God has given us minds to use, through which He can speak; and the Holy Spirit did show me very clearly.

God has led me marvelously for many years. I see it clearly now. I share with you the agonies of trying to see it each day, at each turn in the road. Please re-read Proverbs 3:5,6. If we trust with all our hearts, and flee from our own understanding, and acknowledge Him in everything, He will still direct our paths. Claim that promise. It is true because He said it. And if miracles are needed, God will use them too. He is able.

About eleven years ago, our leaders in another college started an effort to get my wife and me to decide to join their faculty. We faithfully prayed about it, every day, but could not see God leading for two years. When they wanted us to come and visit their campus during the third year, we finally decided to make the trip. Because of bad weather in Chicago, our plane was ordered by the controllers to circle over Iowa for an hour. My wife and I, in that hour of circling, got to talking about how we would know God's will in a clear way,

even after our visit.

Sometime before this, we had, for the first time in our lives, developed a matching color scheme for our front room. You know, everything in harmonious colors—drapes, sofa, chairs, paint, wallpaper, rug. In that plane, during the hour over Iowa, we found we had both prayed that, if God wanted us to move, the rug in the home we would rent from the school would be the same type and color. I think we were almost embarrassed to find that we had both prayed for such an insignificant, "little" sign. I thought to myself, "Don't blame Gideon!" But a rug was bigger than a piece of fleece! Would you believe that the only home available, and it had become available only the night before, had an almost new rug with the same style and color. We moved that summer and felt certain that it was what God wanted us to do.

God will direct. We must search His Word, and the wonderful Ellen White books. If God sees that we need miracles to help us find His way, He will give them. He may provide such even without our asking. Some might be very small, some bigger. And He will whisper in our ears, too. God wants us to experience happiness now, and eternal life soon. He will stop at nothing to lead us each day, and finally into heaven.



When God Chooses to Whisper

Solomon has assured us that God will direct our paths if we will trust Him to do so, distrust ourselves and our own desires, and acknowledge Him in all our ways. (Proverbs 3: 5,6.) We must meet these conditions. We can begin this chapter by assuring ourselves that the voice of God, the leadings of God, will be made clear to those who have a personal relationship with Him. I can testify that God's leadings in my own life became much easier to discern after the Lord led me away from a nominal relationship to Him and the church, and to a very personal relationship with Jesus. I believe that Jesus is always waiting, ready to lead and guide us; but without a love relation to Him, it's something like being hard of hearing, and leaving our hearing aids turned off. His voice is there, but we don't hear it.

Ellen White wrote that there are three major ways in which God speaks to guide us. We have studied the first two--through His inspired writings, and by providential workings,

including the miraculous. In this chapter we want to examine the third method--“through the appeals of His Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the heart.” (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 512.)

This method seems marvelous and mysterious at the same time. How does the Holy Spirit make these "impressions"? How easy is it to be sure that we correctly understand? Why do we sometimes misunderstand or misinterpret them? Can we "hear" our own wishes and attribute them to God? Can we receive right impressions and not recognize them at all? The three conditions of Proverbs 3:5,6 are desperately necessary if we are to correctly evaluate these "whisperings" of the Holy Spirit. The wet or dry fleece is easy compared to feeling certain about all of the impressions that come to our minds from day to day.

Let's push this point a little further. The Holy Spirit is heard only by the one to whom He speaks. I must evaluate what I hear. I cannot hear what the Holy Spirit says to you, or how He impresses you. You must evaluate what you hear. It is critical here to realize that the devil also has his ways of making us think that his voice is the voice of God. Unless we recognize this potential problem, we are in great danger of being misled. We must have

tests that we ourselves can use. Is there any way for others to help us test what we believe we have heard?

Thank the blessed Lord, He does have guidelines--clear guidelines. He knows all about the devil and his tricks, and He doesn't want us fooled even one time. Really, we don't need to be deceived, even once. Our first testing point, or guideline, is this: The Holy Spirit will never whisper something to us that is contradictory to a guideline on the same subject that He has directed His prophets to write. God couldn't do that and still be God. In Malachi 3:6 He says, "For I am the Lord, I change not." The Holy Spirit was active in all of the development of Scripture, as Peter says: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21), and the same Holy Spirit, said Jesus, "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Here is the first way that we can test God's whispering ourselves and, if necessary, seek the help of others to test them.

Through my ministry I have been amazed at some of the things people have told me that God has said to them. Years ago one brother confided in me that God clearly told him that Jesus would return on January 4, 1954. Yet Jesus said long ago that the day and hour

was not known to man or to angels, but by "my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Time clearly proved this good brother to be wrong.

A lady told me recently that the "truth" as revealed to her by the Holy Spirit was separating her and her husband. They were both Adventists. She admitted that both of them loved the Lord. I asked her if God's Word recommended divorce. "No," she said. I reminded her of what the Spirit led Ellen White to write, in The Adventist Home, p. 94: "Hearts that are filled with the love of Christ can never get very far apart." She was very upset with me when I told her, "If what you feel to be 'truth' is leading you to separate from your husband, then you terribly misunderstand what you say the Holy Spirit has said to you." Matthew 19:29 surely has no application to her situation even though she said it did.

I have had young people tell me about God's sending them to school without any idea as to where even some of their expenses were to come from; about God's speaking to them, while they sat by the river, to leave school for some trifling reason; about God's telling them that marriage to one who was not a Christian or a member of their church was acceptable in their case; about all

kinds of things over the past quarter of a century as I have been on a campus. I surely cannot judge them—that is not my business. I know that the Lord has truly revealed many things which seemed strange to me, as He has whispered to many people.

But I do long to help people see if what they have "heard" is clearly in harmony, or out of harmony, with previously revealed truth in both the Holy Bible and the writings of the Spirit of prophecy. We all must keep our minds open to this first guideline, and to the safety that it contains as we check out the harmony between what we feel God has whispered to us, and what He has already spoken by His guiding Holy Spirit. The passing of time does not change God's ways or will.

The point here is that God has one unerring voice, and His guidance now will not be at odds with His voice of a long time ago. This first guideline would help us in many situations.

A second guideline is this: If we go in the direction of an impression that comes to us, will God be honored or dishonored? None of us would ever attribute to God any action in our lives which would lead to a dishonoring of God in any way--of His name, His truth, His Spirit, or of His Holy Word. God would never whisper to us any such thing.

★ This second guideline would protect us from an unwise dependence on our feelings, from various types of extremism or emotionalism, from rationalizing disobedience, from attributing to God something of our own devising or misunderstanding. I say this reverently, but many times I have tried to look at my idea or impression or action from the viewpoint of the Holy Spirit, to see if it would, or would not, honor God. Maybe we all need to do this before carrying an impression into action. Our lives then would be continually an honor to God and would fulfill His desire that we all live out the truth each day. God's truth is balanced, fair, wise, clear, uplifting, reasonable, appealing, saving, sanctifying. God forgive me for ever causing anyone to see it in any other way as the result of beholding some unwise or unbalanced example or teaching on my part.

All through the Bible the prophets and apostles claimed that what they spoke and wrote was the direct result of what they "saw" or "heard." In Daniel 8: 2, Daniel says that he saw something, and in verse 13 he said, "Then I heard." Moses saw and heard many times, and then would write, "And the Lord said. . ." (as in Exodus 19:24). The apostles of the New Testament saw and heard. Ellen

White says that she "saw" and "heard" hundreds of times. In it all, we see a beautiful harmony, and lives that attested to that harmony—a key way we can test both the writer and his or her writings. Isaiah 8:20 says that if there are any claims that are not thus in harmony, "it is because there is no light in them." Harmonious utterings are an honor to God. Unharmonious assertions dishonor Him.

Just so can we test our impressions, what we claim to be God's whisperings to us. There is no question that the "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) can and does still speak. The Holy Spirit is eternal. In Desire of Ages, p. 172, Ellen White makes this beautiful statement: "By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God—a patient, protracted process." (Emphasis mine.)

The Holy Spirit led the Bible writers to write correctly. The Holy Spirit speaks to "woo" us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit will continue to teach us (John 16:13), to guide us (Isaiah 58:11; Psalm 48:14), to whisper to us personally as long as life shall last. But in it all, there will be a harmony, an honoring of God.

Several years ago on a campground I met a Seventh-day Adventist lady who seemed very sad. As we talked together, I found that she had been praying for her non-Christian husband for twenty-nine years, but had never seen any signs that he was considering becoming a Christian or a church member. She told me, "I have quit praying for my husband for the past year, because God has never answered my prayers." I told her, "Then you have quit giving God an opportunity to answer your prayers of faith." I told her that God had answered every prayer of faith that she had ever offered in relation to her husband, and that the Holy Spirit was in the process (sometimes longer than we like) of wooing her husband to accept Him and give his heart to Jesus. We must come to know that God answers our every prayer of faith and that the Holy Spirit continues to whisper, impress, woo.

I saw that lady a year later on the

same campground. She was walking happily with her hand in the hand of a man by her side. Do you know what she told me? You're right. Her husband had accepted the Lord during the past year, and had been baptized. She had taken up real prayers of faith again, and rejoiced that the Holy Spirit had found some mysterious way to ripen the fruit.

If we claim to be Christians, and believe that Jesus is soon coming, and that we all have a work to do to hasten His coming, then a third guideline is extremely important: If I feel God impressing me in some way, whispering to me, will the direction I thus take lead me to greater usefulness in God's cause? I've seen so many isolate themselves from a world to be warned, into a type of hermitage, where they can be of help to no one. Just live righteously, all by themselves! And they say that God led them to such a situation. It is true that Jesus told us to be "not of the world" (John 17:14,16), in the sense of not being worldly, but He also told us to "Go, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). He intends that we all be useful in helping others find Jesus, and be ready for His coming. Any claim of a divine impression that would lead us to a "do nothing" way of life, would seem to stand in serious question as to its heavenly origin.

Witnessing is as vital to spiritual health as is exercise to physical health. Everyone can witness in some way. Any claim of having had an impression from God in which He exempts me from service, could not be from God. The devil knows all about the law of exercise and health, and the fact that God uses people to witness in the hastening of Jesus' return. Thus he speaks, too. He does not want us to work for Jesus, to be tools of the Holy Spirit to lead others to be free from the shackles of sin. How careful you and I must be to discern whose voice it is that is speaking.

There is a tremendous lesson for us in the events of Matthew 17. In the first eleven verses, three men were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Having seen real heavenly glory, Peter, James, and John wanted to stay up there forever. Down at the foot of the mountain, the other nine disciples were failing miserably as they tried to heal a sick boy. Jesus healed him and then, when alone with His disciples, told them that they had failed because of a faith problem. I have wondered if the three who had been on the mountain with Jesus weren't secretly grateful that they had not been down there with the failing nine. And the nine—maybe part of their failure was that they had been jealous for not having been invited up the mountain with the

three.

In connection with witnessing, they all had a problem. Possibly it can best be stated in a saying that I heard long ago. It went like this: The one who studies only (stays on the mountain) will become an extremist or fanatic; the one who witnesses only (without some mountaintop time with God) will be found to be superficial. The point is that it takes both to be effective witnesses and spiritually healthful.

The devil loves to have us feeling satisfied and holy—isolated on a mountaintop—or failing in the valleys of life. He'll do anything to keep us from a balanced, beautiful, effective inviting witness to a forgiving Saviour, and from seeing the Christian life as a life of genuine freedom and fulfillment.

This opens to us a fourth guideline. Is the impression we hear rational? 😊
Is it reasonable? God gave us all minds, to be used in determining if what we have heard is really sensible. The Holy Spirit speaks to our minds. Extremism, irrational actions, strange ideas, ridiculous assertions, unwise moves—how can they honor God? But how the devil loves to hear us claim they came from God! Adventism has been dotted with people here and there who thought it a sin to kill insects, who considered themselves

holy even while practicing immorality, who rolled like hoops in a meeting, who argued about gray hair in heaven—so many irrational things.

And what does God say about it all? He counsels: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40), and "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (verse 33).

Listen to these wise words: "Let God's people act so that the world will see that Seventh-day Adventists are an intelligent, thinking people, whose faith is based on a surer foundation than the bedlam of confusion. The people are hungry for the bread of life. Do not offer them a stone." (Selected Messages, Book 2, p. 24.) "Let us give no place to strange exercisings, which really take the mind away from the deep movings of the Holy Spirit. God's work is ever characterized by calmness and dignity. We cannot afford to sanction anything that would bring confusion and weaken our zeal in regard to the great work that God has given us to do in the world to prepare for the second coming of Christ." (Ibid., p. 42, emphasis mine.)

Of all the wonderful demonstrations of the calm and quiet working of the Holy Spirit upon human minds that I have ever seen, a thrilling occurrence took place during a week of prayer at

one of our colleges a few years ago. Evangelists Dick Barron and Ray Turner conducted the week. On Monday evening Brother Dick invited all who had never accepted Christ to come forward and accept Him. About three hundred students came. Then something marvelous began to happen. Though Elder Barron in no way mentioned such in his preaching, students from all over the campus went to teachers, confessing their dishonesty in class--in exams, quizzes, reading reports. Others confessed immorality and other sins. The Spirit just whispered, and impressed, and wooed the students. The results were quiet, calm, and reasonable--clear demonstrations of the power of the Spirit of God. What was done was done decently and in order, and God was honored and glorified. Many others rededicated themselves to God as they witnessed the changes in the lives of their fellow students.

Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). He also told us, "And when he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). God continually guides us by His Word, by providential workings, by the impressions of the Holy Spirit. The point is that he will never quit guiding us toward his kingdom, unless we turn Him away.

It is so crucial to be in tune with God, to operate on His wave length, to understand His voice. He is speaking to each one of us just now. Do you hear Him? What is He saying? "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "I will come again." "Be ye also ready." Will you answer, and place your footsteps in His, just now?

Seeking His Leadings Daily



Possibly the most exciting time of life is in our teen-age period when we stand at the beginning of life's untried road, looking into the future and realizing that we are at the point of choosing for ourselves just what our own future will be like. It is a time of maturity mixed with immaturity, of ambitions often larger than ability, of many dreams out of touch with reality, of impulse for the present outweighing considerations for life in years that lie ahead, of concern for this life seemingly more important than concern for eternal life.

Choices, choices, choices! What a challenge as we must make them in youth, in middle age, in older years. And what a fearful thing it is as we come to realize that we must face the results of our choices throughout our lives, possibly throughout eternity. What an important time it is, as our own life's happiness or unhappiness is all bound up with our decisions. What a time it is to seek the leading of God, and plead for His prom-

ised help to make right decisions, that our lives may become the outworking of His will.

You aren't finding it too easy, are you? None of us are. Often we find the "great controversy" suddenly alive, right in our own hearts. We find it to be the struggle of Christ and Satan, over us! We always thought it was a struggle for the world, and the billions on a fallen earth. But here we are, suddenly right in the middle of it—it's personal, real, scary. And again, God whispers softly, for He wants to be involved in our lives, the use of our talents, our time, our ambitions, our future. So does Satan, and he knows how to whisper, lure, entice, deceive. He misrepresents God's claim for our lives, and tries to lead us to think of our rights, our freedom, our fun, our way, our future. "Isn't God asking a little too much of you?" he cunningly suggests. And decision-making can become a struggle between our selfish wills and God's quiet, sweet voice—and too often God loses out. But in the process, we lose out. What a tragedy.

Have you ever read Ellen White's statement in Desire of Ages, p. 330? Listen to it: "Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their

feet." Can we see here the basic cause for a thousand joys, or a thousand heartaches? Can we hear that pleading, wise voice of God, saying to us, "Please, let Me help you with your decisions. I want you to find happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment in life, true success. I will help you, if you will let Me. I do not want you to fail, or be miserable. Please let Me guide you." Some of us a little farther along life's way can testify that Jesus has never failed us, that He has always given us life's best, when we have let Him direct us. Our problem is that too often we didn't let Him. And we have many scars to remind us that our own unguided ways didn't work.

In this study, we want to think together about some specifics. Too often we stop at generalities, and fail to discuss the exact problems and trials that we all have, and how to gain victory in each case. What are some of these critical decision areas that youth must face? And how can we successfully face and resolve them?

Of course there are the "basics"--such as choosing our life occupations and our life partners. These have not ceased to be the basics, and they are still critically important. Then there is our education. Someone else may have chosen for us the schools (public or church) where we have attended up to

now. But what about further training? There is also the need to choose how to resolve tensions with our parents, if such exist at times; the use of our money, the choice of friends, carefulness with our health, the kind of clothes we will wear, the use of our time, whether to continue to be a Seventh-day Adventist, whether to live morally, how to spend our spare time—the list is long. The point is that in each area there are critical moments, in which important decisions must be made, and each can have a very real bearing on our eternal destiny.

Let's begin by taking a fresh look at the two "basics," our choice of a life-work and a life companion. What occupation are you considering? Will it be honorable to God? How will it affect your relationship with God, and your usefulness to His church? Most people work for about forty years. That will total about 80,000 hours of your life, plus overtime. What will you do at work; what and whom will you see at work; whom will you befriend at work? How involved will you become in striving for success, or money? The point again is that our work can greatly affect our lives here on earth, and can affect our eternity.

Take courage that you do not have to preach or teach to work honorably in

the sight of God. The Bible contains records of honorable doctors, janitors, carpenters, secretaries, teachers, stonemasons, shepherders, preachers, kings, tax consultants, wives and mothers in their home, fishermen, farmers, nurses, musicians, chariot builders and drivers, messengers, storekeepers, vineyard-dressers—you name it. In our schools today we are training young people for hundreds of occupations, to use their minds and hands and skills to make a living and be useful in life. Underlining it all is the necessity of honoring God, of serving Him faithfully in all we do.

What are some other of God's guidelines, so that we might choose correctly, wisely, our occupation? God gives us the guidelines found in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). In verse 15, Jesus tells us that He has given to each person according to his ability. God wants us to use our talents, our abilities. In our faithfully doing so, He will multiply them. There are excellent bricklayers who would be poor preachers, and excellent preachers who would be poor bricklayers. There are excellent nurses who would be poor teachers, and excellent teachers who would be poor nurses.

The point is that God wants all of us to use the abilities He has given us,

and be excellent Christians and witnesses in the process. Jesus bought us "with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), Jesus gave us our abilities (Matthew 25:15), and He rightfully expects of us honest labor and faithful service. He rightfully asks us to return our tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8-10) to finish His work on earth; He wants our time, and our good influence in all that we do among men.

* Are you acquainted with the word, avocation? We know the word, vocation better. Vocation has to do with our regular work, avocation with something we do in addition to our regular work. Many people get so tied up in their job that there is no time left for God and the finishing of His work on earth. As far as our primary interest is concerned, shouldn't a real Christian be so absorbed in finishing God's work that it is his real vocation, and the way he makes a living, his avocation? Think that one through.

The record of the attitude of the man with the one talent is of great importance in connection with our life occupation and our church responsibilities. Do you remember how he answered God? "Lord," he said, "I knew thee that thou art an hard man" (Matthew 25:24). Let's say that he didn't have much ability, and did very common labor. That was no problem with God if he was

using honestly his one talent. But he didn't do his work with love—that was his problem. God had told another man 'that very same morning, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). And it is real love for God that leads even the poorest laborer to fulfill his God-given responsibility.

In seeking a lifework, we could ask ourselves such questions as these: (1) What are the abilities that God has given me? (2) Is the work I choose an honest, honorable profession? (3) Will I be able to be faithful to Christ in my work? (4) Will there be a temptation or a need to compromise my faith in any way? (5) Can I witness to others as I work? (6) Will I still have time and strength for personal devotions and faithful church attendance? (7) Are there any unnecessary, strong temptations connected with the job? (8) Will I leave myself open to a change in work if God impresses me in another direction later? The point is that, if we are absolutely honest with God, He will lead us in choosing the most rewarding lifework possible.

The second basic, choosing our life partner, is surrounded with peril today. The number of separations and divorces among Adventists is frightening. Of those who graduated from aca-

using honestly his one talent. But he didn't do his work with love—that was his problem. God had told another man 'that very same morning, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). And it is real love for God that leads even the poorest laborer to fulfill his God-given responsibility.

In seeking a lifework, we could ask ourselves such questions as these: (1) What are the abilities that God has given me? (2) Is the work I choose an honest, honorable profession? (3) Will I be able to be faithful to Christ in my work? (4) Will there be a temptation or a need to compromise my faith in any way? (5) Can I witness to others as I work? (6) Will I still have time and strength for personal devotions and faithful church attendance? (7) Are there any unnecessary, strong temptations connected with the job? (8) Will I leave myself open to a change in work if God impresses me in another direction later? The point is that, if we are absolutely honest with God, He will lead us in choosing the most rewarding lifework possible.

The second basic, choosing our life partner, is surrounded with peril today. The number of separations and divorces among Adventists is frightening. Of those who graduated from aca-

demy with one of our daughters about eighteen years ago, over half are divorced. I work with many college students who are already divorced and remarried. Something is wrong. What are the causes? What we discuss here will be very frank, but contains no condemnation of anyone. We are seeking to discover God's will, and the heart of the problem relates to whether we are truly seeking and following it or not.

Two Bible passages we have long used as guidelines include these words: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14), and, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). May I add my own translation of the seventh commandment, "Keep thyself pure" (Exodus 20:14), and Paul's admonition, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul gives us a warning against any kind of association with unbelievers that would place Chris-

tians in situations where they would find it difficult or impossible to avoid compromising principle. To be "unequally yoked" means to yoke in unequal partnership. Amos 3:3 refers primarily to the relation between God (the Bridegroom) and Israel (the bride). Israel had gone after other gods and thus had committed spiritual adultery against her true Bridegroom. The seventh commandment, in Exodus 20:14, reveals an attribute of the character of God--purity--which is critical in marriage and in our social relationships before marriage. 1 Corinthians 6:19,20 was written in the setting of the Corinthians' immorality and impurity. Your body and mind comprise God's temple, Paul clearly states, and must be kept unpolluted by the indwelling power of God, Who purchased you with the high price of Jesus' own great sacrifice.

After over thirty years of ministry, during which I have helped many youth with premarital counseling, performed to date seventy-one weddings, and spent hundreds of hours attempting to help marriage partners who are in trouble, I am more than ever convinced that God's guidelines are still beautiful but unbendable, and if followed, will avoid indescribable headaches and heartaches for every person who will listen. We must always remember that the devil's concern is to use all deviations from the natural, God-given

desire "to love and be loved," be it before or after the wedding day, to destroy our spirituality and keep us from eternal life.

The first key to happiness in life and in marriage is found in our own personal, real, living, satisfying, daily relationship to Jesus. Since this is unalterable, it becomes the first, absolutely necessary guideline of God in choosing a life partner. My first consideration must be, Do we both have that relationship? We have usually applied God's counsel of the "unequal yoke" to marriage with someone who is not a Seventh-day Adventist as we are. That is true. But we must also apply it even to another Adventist who is not a reborn Christian. It would be the marriage of a "Christian" to a "non-Christian." If you love the Lord, and your "beloved" does not, even when you are both church members, your marriage will be unequally yoked. I believe that this is a key reason for the many divorces among the members of our daughter's class, and among Adventists as a body. We must remember that promise that we read in chapter 5: "Hearts that are filled with the love of Christ can never get very far apart" (The Adventist Home, p.94).

We must take personal conversion seriously as the revelation of God's will in seeking a companion for life. If we

were truly wise, it would be a prerequisite even for the acceptance of a date. I know it narrows the field, but it will also serve to encourage us toward the kingdom of God; for that is what Christian friendships always do. Just as it may take only one peer-group friend to lead us on toward eternal life, just so it may take only one peer-group "friend" to lead us down the path of misery to eternal destruction. How carefully we must choose.

Another guideline in seeking and having a life companion is that we keep ourselves pure, before and after the marriage vows. There is much premarital and postmarriage-ceremony immorality among church members today, and it is almost always done in the name of "love." The old devil knows that such isn't love at all, but just plain "lust." And he knows (sadly, we often do not) that two "devils" will result.

First, lustful relationships, before or after the marriage vows, lead to a breaking down of respect for the other person, a fact we are not aware of at the time. Later that lack of respect surfaces and can destroy a marriage. Even then, most do not recognize the cause. Second, immorality before or after the day of marriage causes us to be unable to provide real, Christian commitment

to the one we marry. In terms of purity each one of us has an inner "most holy place"—which has only one key. If we follow God's will, that key can be given away only one time—at marriage. Then the sexual relationship becomes a beautiful, sacred act of commitment to each other. But should we give out a second key, or give the key away too soon, our ability to be totally committed in marriage is seriously damaged. We must recognize this, if our happiness is to be lifelong. Thank God for forgiveness and healing, but His will is crystal clear that we both think and act purely (Matthew 5:27,28; Philippians 4:8), thus letting Him save us from these two horrible interruptions to happiness and peace and satisfying joy in marriage, and in life itself.

To summarize, we need to ask and answer these questions: (1) Do I have a personal relation to Christ? (2) Does the one I am interested in have a personal dedication to, and love for, Jesus? (3) Are we both dedicated to the same Christian goals in life? (4) Are we seeking to protect the purity of each other? (True love always protects another's character, self-respect, purity. Lust, masked even in such endearing words as "I love you," is seeking to satisfy self at another's expense, with disregard for the other's virtue and reputation.) (5) How does the one I am considering treat his

or her own family? (6) How do our parents see the possibilities of our future together? (7) Accompanied by earnest prayer for God's guidance, have we studied inspired counsels either separately or together, and openly discussed the wiseness of our establishing a home together? God will guide, if we will let Him, for God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.

Could we take a moment to consider one other area in which we need so badly to seek and follow God's will? This concerns tensions that sometimes arise between us and our parents. Being a parent, I know better than to put all the blame for these tensions on our sons or daughters. But tensions do arise. And parents should be mature in admitting their faults if they have contributed to, or even sometimes caused, the problem. But let's honestly ask, What if it is your fault? I was the cause of such tensions too many times when I was young.

Not long ago I conducted a week of prayer on this topic in one of our academies. On Friday morning, a lovely girl asked me if she could talk with me. She was engaged to a boy who was not a member of her church, and her parents had tried to break it up. A "fight" followed, and she had refused to talk with her mom and dad about it for

months. In fact, she went home on leaves from school, only to see the boy.

But something during the week of prayer meeting the previous night had touched her heart as she listened to a fellow student speak on Christian parent-youth relationship. Do you know what she did? She decided to follow God's guidelines about not being unequally yoked. She broke off her engagement, and honored her father and mother with a sincere apology, and the restoration of happy family relationships. To put it plainly, she decided to act in harmony with God's will. And her Lord blessed her with personal happiness and--something that we all need so badly--a greater awareness of the love and acceptance and support that exists in parent-youth togetherness.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." All what "things"? A fulfilling lifework, a satisfying marriage, deliverance from "fools hill", a rewarding self-respect, a close family relationship, lasting friendships, better physical and mental health, an adequate income, time well-used, children with emotional balance--as we count our blessings, the list has no end. But it is based on a relationship with

God, because this is the way life and heaven work. And it takes only four words on our part to make it work: "Thy will be done." Will you, at this moment, repeat them in sincere dedication to God?

CHAPTER SEVEN

I Lay All My Plans at Thy Feet



I believe that the most important sentence in all the Bible is that uttered by Jesus on a Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsemane just before He faced an ugly cross the following day: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39, emphasis mine). “Thy will be done,” He said in verse 42. He could have refused to drink whatever was in that cup. “Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt, while He stood innocent before God.” (Desire of Ages, p. 688.) Have you ever given serious thought to what it would have meant if He had said instead, “Father, take Me back home; it isn’t worth it”?

I have never read of an estimate of how many billions of people have lived on this earth, since Adam and Eve. But the destiny of every one of them, including us, hung on Jesus' words, “Thy will be done.” And listen carefully; our destiny

also depends on our willingness to genuinely utter the very same words, "Thy will be done." As Jesus faced the worst of all deaths, and the importance of forming a bridge between earth and heaven for repentant sinners to be reconciled to God, He said, "It is worth it." And we must, as we weigh the Christlike life against an unchristian life, come to the same conclusion, "It is worth it."

Could our dear Lord who drank that terrible cup, be making an appeal to each of us right here in the introduction? Please don't wait until you have wrinkles and false teeth, and thin gray hair, and live most of the time in a rocking chair, to decide that it is worth it. If you decide that it is worth it right now, you can use your life to help dozens of others make the same decision. Our talent of influence is powerful, especially when the Holy Spirit energizes it. There will be no regrets later if you choose God's will now. Millions deeply regret in later life what they didn't do in earlier years. Ask the older ones in your church if you don't believe it. It is beautiful to see older folk give their lives to Christ, and begin to follow His will. But how much better it is to do it when young and then live a life of spiritual fruit-bearing with its accompanying deep satisfaction.

That cup! What was in that cup?

What made it so hard for our Lord to drink? Didn't He have special power? Could His crucifixion be that difficult to face if He knew He would rise again? We do not have all the answers here, but let us study this terrible moment in Christ's life and see how much we can understand. It can lead us to a turning point in our lives.

After the first Lord's supper in the upper room that Thursday night, Jesus and eleven of His disciples walked in the beautiful light of a full moon across the brook Kidron and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The City of Jerusalem was hushed, full of the tents of thousands of pilgrims who were there to celebrate the annual Passover. Before entering the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter promised that he would not be offended that night—he would not deny his Lord, even if everyone else did! But how well Jesus knew each of His disciples. How well He knows us, too.

In the short narrative just before Jesus entered Gethsemane, we need to note one thing that He said: "But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). Jesus did know that He would rise again, didn't He? This little piece of the story will help us see even more clearly the terribleness of those next few hours. (Read verses 36-46.)

In the light of that full moon, the disciples saw on Jesus' face something they had never seen before. He was changed. There was the look of a terrible sorrow. It frightened them, yet they did not dare ask Him its cause. He walked as if dizzy, as if about to fall. "Watch with Me," He pleaded, and then, after a few steps, He fell to the ground. Then came those words of anguish, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

That cup! What was in that cup? How many people have lived on this earth since creation? Every sin that every person has ever committed was in that cup. How well Jesus knew the history of the past centuries and the refusals to seek forgiveness for sin. How well He knew that He had come to His own world and people, to offer them forgiveness, but they knew Him not. (John 1:11.) How well He knew of the future centuries, of the future refusals to accept Him as Saviour. Then add the facts of that moment. His chosen people were in the process of getting rid of Him. Judas, one of the twelve, would shortly come with the kiss of betrayal. The other disciples would flee, and dear Peter, a real leader of the group, would even swear in his denial of his Lord.

There was more than all this in

that cup. Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned," and Romans 6:23 adds that "the wages of sin is death"—eternal death. Jesus must die the eternal death for sinners, that they might, when believing and accepting Him, have reprieve, and a open door to eternal life. There was no other way that this could be accomplished. "For God so loved the world," (John 3:16) that he would give it another chance. It is also because of His love that the day will come when He will not permit sin to mar His universe and bring misery to billions anymore. Many say today that God's coming final destruction proves that He is not love, when the truth is that it is final proof that He is love. Our point here is that the gift of eternal life all hung on Christ's drinking that cup. And the removal of sin's awful blight hung on His drinking it, too. Hebrews 2:14 assures us "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

But there was yet still more in that cup! "The sword of justice was unsheathed," Ellen White says, "and the wrath of God against iniquity rested upon man's substitute, Jesus Christ." (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, p. 1103.) "It is a fearful thing for the unrepenting sinner to fall

into the hands of the living God. This is proved by the history of the destruction of the old world by a flood, by the record of the fire which fell from heaven and destroyed the inhabitants of Sodom. But never was this proved to so great an extent as in the agony of Christ, the Son of the infinite God, when He bore the wrath of God for a sinful world. It was in consequence of sin, the transgression of God's law, that the Garden of Gethsemane has become pre-eminently the place of suffering to a sinful world. No sorrow, no agony, can measure with that which was endured by the Son of God. Man . . . will never know the horror of the curse of sin which the Saviour bore." (Ibid., emphasis mine.)

We noted that, in Matthew 26:32, Jesus talked of His resurrection. But in the horror of Gethsemane, as He faced the drinking of that cup, He could not see through the tomb to His resurrection. "The awful moment had come--that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. He might wipe the bloody sweat from His brow, and leave man to perish in his iniquity." (Desire of Ages, p. 690.)

Pause here for just a moment to

reflect very carefully on two vital truths. First, the Trinity—Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit—all love totally and equally. They are love itself. John 3:16 begins with four magnificent words, "For God so loved . . ." Jesus' love is identical. He testified, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Calvary is the great demonstration of the love They have for sinners, Their revelation of how far They would go to save anyone separated from Them by sin. Their nature, Their attitude toward the erring is forever love.

But Calvary teaches us a second point—the members of the blessed Trinity also equally hate sin. It has scarred Their universe. Scripture is clear that They will erase it forever. We have noted that Jesus' death guarantees that. And it was in His humanity that Jesus felt the awful separation from His Father that the unrepentant sinner will experience in the final death—from God, from Christ, and from the Holy Spirit. Praise God that He had made a way for us to be reunited with heaven, through faith in Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we need have no fear of any final death and eternal separation.

While Peter, James and John slept, the victory came—"THY WILL BE

DONE." From Gethsemane, Jesus walked as a victor to the cross. And from Gethsemane, those three who had not "watched" with Him as He requested, fled, to dishonor their beloved Lord and suffer bitter humiliation and shame. Aren't you glad that they sought and received forgiveness, and also for the marvelous record of their later triumphs for Christ in the book of Acts?

In our considerations so far of following God's will, and in our attempts to personally do this, we are all made painfully aware of our own successes and failures. Possibly, it is encouraging to us to know that those who lived with Jesus for over three years experienced successes and failures, too. But we must also take note that Jesus, our Example, who could have failed, didn't. And He wants to help us, every moment, with every choice, to be victorious, without failing. So many seem to have failed to see that not only did our Lord die to forgive our sins, but He lived again to enable us to live successfully in harmony with His will. This truth should thrill every one of us, but it also demands that we quit sleeping, and watch and pray continually for His help.

Just how does it work? We can understand forgiveness fairly well, but this matter of victory—it seems to slip out of our hands so easily, doesn't it? We all know. Let's spend a few minutes

investigating some ideas that will help us be successful.

First, how do you begin your day? When you awaken, do you land on your feet, or on your knees? So many of us just "get up," but forget to get down. It is good to begin the day with great expectation, but we must first have dedication. We must come to the place where we daily "awake" to the vital truth that victory comes only to one who finds that his or her day must start on the knees, in faith, at the foot of the cross. The Lord says that this is the highest place to which man may attain.

This demands that we spend a little time letting the Lord speak to us from the Bible, and also from the Ellen White books at times. Then we need to drop again on our knees and spend a little more time, thanking God for all that is revealed of salvation, and His will, and how to live successfully.

I recently found a prayer that I use every day. It works wonders for me. I put it together from two pages of a recent Morning Watch book, The Upward Look, Listen, and see if it might work well for you, too:

"Here, Lord, am I, Thy property;
Take me, use me today.
I lay all my plans at Thy feet;

I will have no way of my own in the matter.

My time is Thine,

My whole life is Thine. . . .

I am the Lord's.

In His Strength I am invincible."

--Pages 237,312.

If we memorize and repeat the Lord's prayer, why can't we memorize and use this prayer? It is power-packed. It contains the secret of personal religion, successful walking according to God's will, and the Source of all the power we could ever need.

Unfortunately, after we first accepted Jesus and dedicated ourselves to Him, even though we were re-born, we still must live in the same "house" we've always lived in—the same body, the same gray matter—but with a "new" heart. When Paul describes the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:3,4, he says that the "old man" dies and is buried, and then the baptized person comes up out of the water to "walk in newness of life." Galatians 2:20 begins this way: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live." You see, there is a new "I" at conversion. Something changes as I permit Jesus to take control of me. Paul makes it clear with the rest of the verse: "The life that I now live in the flesh I

live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." I love the Phillips translation of this: "The bodily life I now live, I live believing in the Son of God, Who loved me and sacrificed Himself for me."

We sing, "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus." If we fully let Him, and continue to fully let Him, every day ("I die daily," 1 Corinthians 15:31), then by our permission He helps us overrule the tugs of the flesh, the strong desires to have our own way, the pressures to walk over others to get to the top, the temptation to cheat on a quiz, the old tendency to show off, the awful desire to be improper with our date, the habit of "girl-watching" or "boy-watching," the craving to eat junk foods--God wants to help us nail tightly the lid on the casket that houses the "old man," the "carnal nature," the "lustful mind." Our trouble is that we pry up the corner every so often, and feed it a little--and keep it alive, just a little! Daily dedication keeps the lid nailed on.

I know what you are asking. Will we always be subjected to such a continual struggle? I believe that the answer is "yes" and "no." We all know that the followers of Jesus do not sin after probation closes. And we know that we receive immortality when Jesus comes.

So we know that there is a "no" answer to our struggling forever. But now you ask, What about before probation closes? Please help us with this problem in the here and now.

Could we share just two brief secrets as they relate to victory in the here and now? In prelude to these two ideas, remember that daily dedication, commitment, acknowledgment of God's right to our lives, is foundational. Without that, forget victory. What is the first secret? It is this. I believe that we can have our daily time of devotion in the morning, and then let it kind of escape us throughout the day as we get our day's living done—eight or more hours on the job, attending classes and studying hard in school, washing, ironing, doing dishes, dusting, vacuuming at home, even just busy with recreation on our day off. Try going at this matter of devotions just a little differently. Try memorizing a Bible verse from your morning devotional reading, a key verse that is the heart of what you study. Then repeat it throughout the day.

Even choose a song that fits the verse, and hum it, whistle it, sing the words, as the day goes by. If there is power in Bible study and prayer, there surely is power in reminding ourselves throughout the day of what we found

earlier in our devotions. A simple example that I one day found was this: A verse in the morning chapter said, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). I quickly memorized it (you can write it on a small card if you need to), and repeated it throughout the day, accompanied by humming, whistling, and singing (when no one could hear) the first verse of the hymn, "Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin," and so on. The result: My early morning power from the storehouse of God worked all day.

The second secret is this: Memorize, believe, and learn to claim Bible promises regularly, both day and night. There is unlimited divine power contained in every Bible promise. If you stub your toe and sin, claim 1 John 1:9—right then. In a moment, you are again rejoicing in the Lord. If you are tempted to think a wrong thought, claim Philippians 4:8. Repeat it to yourself, claim it for yourself, and the tempting thought will flee. If you try to do something in your own strength and fail, repeat the last part of John 15:5, and then Philippians 4:13. You will instantly know why you failed and will possess new power not to fail. Just watch success come. If your mind is troubled over something—any-

thing—claim Isaiah 26:3, and God, right then and there, will give you His peace. There are many hundreds of promises like these in God's Word, all waiting to be used by you and me.

Yes, we will have to watch, and pray, and rely on Jesus if we would be the daily victors over our weaknesses. But our struggles on this earth are not the point. The secret of Christ's victory in Gethsemane is the point—"Lord, Thy will be done." And just as heaven sent immediate divine help to Jesus' side, so heaven will send immediate divine help to our sides. God designs that we win this fight against sin, not fail. But we must learn how the winning is accomplished.

Let's all become absolutely silent for a moment. Shhh. Do you hear that soft knock? Do you hear what the Victor from Gethsemane is saying to you? It sounds like, "If any man [or woman] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him [or her], and will sup with him [or her], and he [or she] with me." (Revelation 3:20.) Open your door, just now. He will enter, with your victory.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Doing God's Will— the Acid Test



Years ago, I was shopping one day for books in a large, city, religious bookstore. As I moved from table to table filled with books, I noticed a very sharply dressed young man who had something on his coat lapel that caught my attention. It was a small, golden question mark. That's all. Intentionally, I looked at books in his direction until I was "accidentally" beside him. Then I asked him, "Sir, what does that represent?" Do you know what he answered? He said very warmly, "It stands for a question--are you saved?" Then he asked me, "Are you?" I don't know how you would have answered, but I told him, "I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart." He put out his hand and said, "Greetings, fellow Christian."

That set me to thinking. Just how do we recognize a genuine Christian? We could all wear golden question marks, or a small cross, or have a bumper sticker on our cars—"Honk if you are a Christian." We could say "Amen" a lot,

wear Sabbath clothes all week, look very pious. But is there any sure proof by which we can be recognized, by which other reborn Christians can be recognized?

We have discussed following God's will. Why do we even attempt to follow God's will? It surely isn't always convenient. Often it is anything but convenient. It can even be embarrassing at times. It can make us unpopular with others. Following and revealing God's will surely made Jesus unpopular with a lot of people. But He wasn't in a popularity contest. His deep, total genuineness also drew many to Him and to His Father, didn't it? He came to reveal fully God's will and to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He wants us to be revealers of God's will also, and join Him in seeking the lost for Him to save.

There is one point of unchallengeable proof that identifies a genuine Christian, that provides us with clear evidence that one is truly following God's will. It doesn't matter if a real Christian is covered with grease up to his elbows fixing a car, or on her knees scrubbing the floor, or behind the desk helping a client get his income tax form correctly filled out, or changing a dirty bed for a patient in a hospital room, or selling newspapers on a busy street corner—there is a way to know if one is

genuine or not in his or her relation to God.

What is it, you ask? Actually, it is very simple. But only the one who is dead-in-earnest about following Christ and His will can have it. No one else. To understand it, we need to begin with the creation of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 1:26, God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." "Image," "likeness"—what did God mean? Ellen White tells us that they were over twice as tall as we are physically (Story of Redemption, p. 21), and had twenty times our "vital force" (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 3, p. 139). The key point is, however, that they were given the ability to love in a way completely acceptable to God. The Bible tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and that the "great commandment" is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37,39). Adam and Eve reflected such divine love perfectly. Thus, they were in God's image.

But then the devil got into the act in Genesis 3. We reviewed this in chapter 2. Satan, speaking through a serpent, deceived Eve, and then Adam yielded. We need here to examine Genesis 3:6 more carefully. It says that "when the woman saw that the tree was

good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she... did eat." (Emphasis mine.) Yet God had said plainly, "Thou shall not eat of it" (Genesis 2:17). How many times have we been tempted by the same three things--appetite, what we see, desires for human wisdom apart from God?

Then, scene two. Beautiful Eve stood in front of marvelous Adam, holding out that piece of fruit to him. We studied about the terrible struggle that then took place in Adam's mind. Let's review just one sentence: "Love, gratitude, loyalty to the Creator--all were overborne by love to Eve." (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 56, emphasis mine.)

When Adam, because of his great love for the creature, chose to act in violation of his love for the Creator, he put a person above God; and at that moment, the word "love" had to be given a new definition. Steps to Christ, p. 17 redefines it in only six words: "Selfishness took the place of love," and from that point on the human race started down the road of selfish living. Selfish people are the actors in every episode of sin and every record of shameful living recorded in the Bible, in history books, even in today's newspapers and magazines.

Selfishness became the basis for

physical indulgence, for mental unreasonableness, and for spiritual opposition to the will of God. Do you know how bad it got? Genesis 6:5 records "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Verse 6 tells us that it "grieved" God in His heart. A true Christian, one who was really following God's will, was hard to find. So the Flood came, and that generation of self-centered people was destroyed, except for Noah and his family. The Bible records so many sins. And at the head of every category of sin known to man, the word "selfishness" must be placed. (See Life Sketches, p. 241.)

It is important that we pause here to re-examine our definition of the word "sin." We usually use the words of 1 John 3:4: "Sin is the transgression of the law." That is still true. But we might put it in different words, since both the Old and New Testaments, as we here studied, emphasize the idea that the ten commandments can be summed up in terms of loving God and loving man. Thus, sin is "lovelessness," and the deterioration of the human race following that first sin in Eden was characterized by the inability to love as God loves. Thus, mankind had an incurable "disease"--

lovelessness--that he could not heal. We still have it. Everyone who has ever lived has had it, except Jesus. And except for Jesus' help, we would all be helplessly lost.

It is exactly at this point that the truth of Luke 5:31 jumps out at us. When accused of eating with publicans and sinners, Jesus said: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." He wasn't talking here about people with blindness, or lameness, or leprosy. He was talking about people who were sick with sin. That includes us all, for spiritually we are all hopelessly sick—except for the hope we have in what the Great Physician can do. In Matthew 1:21, God instructed Joseph that he and Mary were to call her son Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins." The Bible word for "save" can also be translated "heal." Our Physician came to heal human beings, all of whom need healing. Peter, in Acts 4:12, told the Jewish leaders that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved [healed]."

Adam and Even found forgiveness and healing only by believing in the One to come, represented by the blood of that first innocent sacrifice. Every one of those countless millions of sacrifices

in the Old Testament taught the same lesson. Without faith in Jesus, Whom the spilled blood represented, those sacrifices healed no one. In Jesus' day, not one church leader or member was healed of his sin, or lovelessness, who did not accept Jesus as his personal Saviour. Today, not one of us is healed just because we are baptized and belong to the church. If our religion, even with all of the right doctrines, is not built upon a personal relationship and devotion to Jesus, we are still in our sins, unhealed of our disease.

It is beautiful that the work of the Holy Spirit is to "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). The New International Version reads, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness, and of judgment." The work of the Holy Spirit has always been to lead men and women, youth, boys and girls, to the foot of the cross--to the office of the Great Physician, the only place where the sinsick can find healing. If we refuse to come to Him, we will finally die in our sins, with our otherwise incurable disease. The Holy Spirit could never lead us to find satisfaction in legalism, or Laodiceanism, for there is nothing in them to heal. But the devil wants us to think that they

are adequate for salvation. He never lets up in his work, does he?

Now, let's return to our first question. How can we recognize a genuine Christian? Can you answer the question now? First, what is the basic characteristic of a person who is not a Christian? The contrast is made crystal clear in this one statement: "Selfishness is written on the human heart in plain, unmistakable characters. Just as soon as the love of God takes its place, there is the image and superscription of Jesus Christ." (Manuscript 24, 1888.) The unconverted person is characterized by selfishness. The converted person reveals the love of God. It is just that simple. Here is the acid test as to whether we are following God's will or not. And if we are, we are the recipients of the greatest miracle that God can ever perform--we are the revealers of God's divine love again, a change that we are helpless to achieve without Christ's divine touch.

Do you like nutshell statements? Here is the best that I have ever found: "When the gospel is received in its purity and power, it is a cure for the maladies that originated in sin. The Sun of Righteousness arises, 'with healing in His wings.' Not all that this world bestows can heal a broken heart, or impart peace of mind, or remove care, or banish

disease. Fame, genius, talent--all are powerless to gladden the sorrowful heart or to restore the wasted life. The life of God in the soul is man's only hope.

* "The love which Christ diffuses through the whole being is a vitalizing power. Every vital part--the brain, the heart, the nerves--it touches with healing. . . . It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul joy that nothing earthly can destroy--joy in the Holy Spirit--health-giving, life-giving joy.

"Our Saviour's words, 'Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest,' are a prescription for the healing of physical, mental and spiritual ills." (Ministry of Healing, p. 115, emphasis mine.)

When we come to Jesus, and totally dedicate ourselves to follow Him and His will, He begins the process of "restoring" us to be like Him again. Our total being--physical, mental, and spiritual--will be affected. He will teach us to love again, in a way similar to His way, and people will know we are genuine Christians. Then others will be led to seek the same rewarding experience through our witness. We "reflect" what we have found at Calvary. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And, "if

we love one another, God dwelleth in us" (verse 12). This can never occur if we are filled only with religious information, even about Christ. But it absolutely will take place when we open the door and let Jesus in. He brings in His divine yeast of grace, which changes every part of our lives just as the yeast we buy and put in the bread dough changes the entire lump. (See Matthew 13:33.)

Jesus made it plain that when His love gets into one's life, we have absolute proof that that person is following Him. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35.) He said that His love in our hearts would lead us to keep His commandments. (John 14:15.) In fact, we are told that we will "delight" to keep them when we are motivated by His love. (Psalm 40:8.) After all, these ten rules are ten statements of what God is like, and reborn Christians want to be "like Him" (1 John 3:2), and He is love (1 John 4:8). It all fits together, doesn't it? And it all makes sense to the one looking at us, who wonders what the true Christian life is really like.

We all long today for the great climax of earth's history--the return of Jesus. For just a moment, we need to consider two vital points, one that occurs before Jesus returns, the other

following. In both, only those who have experienced the miracle of Calvary and who are learning to love again are involved. Listen to the "before" event:

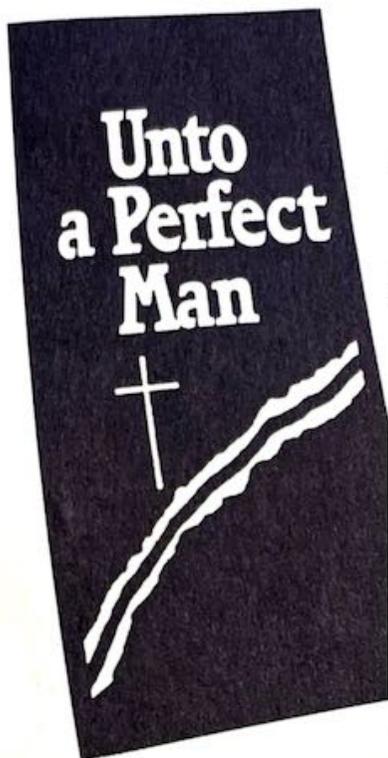
"The people of God will draw together, and present to the enemy a united front. . . . The love of Christ, the love of our brethren, will testify to the world that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. Then will the message of the third angel swell to a loud cry, and the whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord." (Evangelism, p. 693, emphasis mine.) What brings the loud cry? The united front presented to the world by those filled with the love of Jesus. The pretenders, the fakers, the lukewarm, the "professed" followers, are not in this closing program at all. Does that make an appeal to you like it appeals to me?

And the "after" event? Since Jesus has told us that "affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9) how could He take into His eternal kingdom of love any person who has not experienced this miracle we have talked about? Selfish people will not be there. Only those who let Jesus teach them to love again will inherit His kingdom. Does that appeal to you like it appeals to me?

On June 22, 1968, the finals of the

Miss California beauty contest were telecast from Santa Cruz, California. The final question to each contestant was this: "What is the most important attribute that parents should convey to their children?" Miss Torrance answered this way: "A personal relationship to Jesus Christ." She won!

God puts great emphasis on our following His will. If it is to be important to us, and if we are to be successful, the center of our attention must be on a daily relationship with Jesus. It is only as we love Him that we will want to live like Him. Thus, we must daily look to His great example of love and selflessness on Calvary, where He drank that cup for us. Then our lovelessness and selfishness will be seen for all that it is, and the dear Holy Spirit will help us to desire what He was and is. Will you look, and live, today? Jesus waits to give you a new heart, a new name, a new robe. Soon, it'll be a new home. It is all yours--if you choose it.



A Valuable Tool for Your Soul Winning

Unto a Perfect Man presents a salvation-centered approach to Bible truth, focusing on the Bible's central theme, the redemption of man *and* the resulting restoration of the repentant sinner to the image of God. "In Christ," the sinner enjoys both a secure relationship with his God and daily growth into His likeness. The theme is illustrated by thirty-three Bible study outlines, the result of the author's many years of study and experiment.

Carl Coffman is Professor of Religion in the College of Arts and Sciences at Andrews University. He is an ordained minister with over three decades as a church pastor and college religion teacher. He has three teaching "loves"—homiletics, pastoral ministry for the future minister, and the dynamics of witnessing and Bible study work for both the minister and laity. He has traveled extensively in North America to conduct seminars in preaching and witnessing.

