

A person wearing a white short-sleeved shirt is shown from the chest down to the waist. Their hands are clasped together in a prayer position, resting on an open book that lies flat on a wooden surface. The background is a soft-focus view of the person's torso and arms.

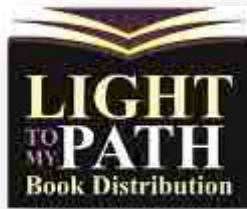
# WAITING ON HIS COUNSEL

*Is Our  
Human Wisdom  
and Experience  
Sufficient?*

F. Wayne MacLeod

# **Waiting on His Counsel**

*Is Our Human Wisdom and Experience Sufficient?*



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

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## **Waiting on His Counsel**

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## Preface

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Some time ago I was reading Psalm 106. As I read, verse 13 seemed to stand out and speak to my heart:

But they soon forgot his works;  
they did not wait for his counsel.

The context of the Psalm speaks of the wonderful work the Lord God had done for Israel in taking them out of bondage in Egypt and delivering them from the hand of their enemy. This was a time of great rejoicing for the people of God. In those days they "believed His words; they sang His praise" (Psalm 106:12). This rejoicing and praise did not last, however, for the very next verse tells us that they soon forgot what God had done for them and did not wait on His counsel.

What does it mean to wait on the counsel of the Lord? In an age of education and knowledge, why do we need to seek this counsel? The Bible has much to say about this matter. In fact, it may be that one of the greatest problems in the church of our day is that we have become like Israel those days and no longer seek His counsel.

Judges 17:6 says:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Could this describe the church of our day? Have we abandoned the counsel of God to do what is right in our own eyes?

The purpose of this brief study is to examine what it means to seek the counsel of God and to see what the Scriptures teach about trusting in our own wisdom and understanding. I pray that this study will open our hearts to see the purpose of God for our lives in a new way.

F. Wayne MacLeod

## Chapter 1 - The Need of His Counsel

As I mentioned in the preface, the motivation for this study comes from Psalm 106:13. Speaking of his own people the psalmist says: "But they soon forgot His works; they did not wait for his counsel." I was struck by the phrase: "they did not wait for His counsel." I wondered as I reflected on this if this could be said about me and my society.

We place a high value on education and experience in our day. While this is admirable, I wonder if we have somehow lost our sense of need. Some years ago I was at a conference where the speaker shared an illustration of his young son. His son was playing when he fell down and hit his head against a hard object. The result was that he was knocked unconscious. Seeing his son in this condition the father gathered him up and brought him immediately to the hospital. Only when he had committed his child into the hands of the doctor did he realize that he had never prayed about this. Convicted of this, he confessed his sin and placed his son in the Lord's hands.

The point this speaker was making was that his temptation at that time was to trust the doctor more than God. I wonder how often we do this. Have we become so educated that we no longer see our need of the counsel of God? Do we trust our abilities more than we trust God? Have we forgotten the work of God's Spirit? Have our programmes and experiences replaced our need for God? Have we been blinded by the degrees behind the names of our Christian leaders? Could it be that the reason we struggle



in the church today is because we have become so focused on our own ability that we no longer wait for or sense the need of God's counsel?

As we begin this study, it is important that we recognize our need for the counsel of God. Let's begin by taking a moment to examine what God says about us as human beings. A Biblical understanding of our nature, heart, and mind is essential if we are to understand our need of God's counsel in everything we do.

What God created was pure and holy. Genesis 3, however, recounts the story of mankind's fall into sin. Notice how sin entered the world. Eve and Satan spoke together in the Garden. She knew that God had told them that they were not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but Satan challenged that command, telling Eve that if she ate of it, she would have her eyes opened. In fact, he told her that she would become like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5). Eve listened to the argument of Satan and thought about it. In Genesis 3:6 we read:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

What does this tell us about Adam and Eve? It shows us that even before sin entered the world there were many things they did not understand. They listened to Satan and his argument and were deceived by the beauty of the tree, the taste of its fruit and the potential in eating from it. This disregard for the counsel of God concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil had tremendous implications. Sin entered the world and from that point onward it

would ravage the earth and the mind of every human being.

What is important to note here, is that even before the entrance of sin into this world, Adam and Eve needed the counsel of God. They did not have in themselves the ability to live independent of God. They needed His advice and wisdom even in a perfect world. In fact, it was their refusal to walk in obedience to that counsel that brought their downfall.

In the days of Noah, God looked on the earth and described the thoughts and intentions of humankind:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was very great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

There are some very strong words used in Genesis 6:5. Notice that the wickedness of man was "very great." Notice also that "every" intention of the thoughts of his heart was "only evil continually." Every intention of man's heart was evil before the Lord. In fact, God tells us here that every intention was completely evil all the time. Can this possibly be true? Do we really believe what this verse tells us? How could the thoughts and intentions of human beings be only evil all the time? Had this not come from the lips of God, would we not have trouble believing this statement? Yet this is how God saw mankind in the days of Noah. The thoughts of his heart were influenced by the sin that had taken over his nature. Every intention and every thought was stained by sin.

Isaiah the prophet describes the spiritual condition of humankind in the following terms:

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. (Isaiah 64:6)

This "uncleanness" affects every part of our life. Jeremiah describes the human heart in these terms:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Have you ever had someone counsel you to "follow your heart" in the decisions you make? The problem with this suggestion is found in how Jeremiah describes our heart. The heart is "deceitful" and "desperately sick." Can we follow a deceitful heart? Can we listen to the counsel of a heart that is desperately sick?

Listen to what the Lord Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 15:19-20 about the heart:

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. (Matthew 15:19-20)

What would happen if we did whatever was on our heart to do? Jesus tells us that all kinds of sin originate in the human heart. Our heart is not something we can trust. If we follow our heart, without being guided by the counsel of God, we will soon find ourselves in sin.

Listen to what the apostle James has to say about the desires of our heart:

14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

These are not easy verses to accept. James tells us that we are tempted by our own desires. These desires give birth to sin and ultimately destroy us.

The apostle John spoke of the same thing when he said:

16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

Notice what John says here. He tells us that the desires of our eyes are not from God but from this world. All those desires will pass away from us—they are temporary and fleeting.

In Joshua 7 we read of how Achan's desire led to the defeat of Israel. God told Israel that when they conquered Jericho they were to take no spoil. They were to destroy everything. Achan saw a beautiful cloak, 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold and coveted (desired) them. He followed the desire of his heart and took these articles, hiding them under his tent. His actions led to the death of thirty-six Israelites and their humiliating defeat at Ai. His sin was to follow the desire of his heart.

Listen to the testimony of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:18-19:

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Paul's statement here is very powerful—"nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh." This is a truth we have a hard time accepting. Somehow we believe that there is good in us. Somehow we believe that we can serve God in our wisdom and human ability. We feel that all we need to do is to tame our flesh and control it and we can serve God as we should.

Paul would go on, however, to say:

7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8)

Paul tells us quite plainly that the mind of the fleshly man is hostile to God and cannot submit to God or please him. In fact, the only thing we can do with our flesh, passions, and desires according to Paul, it is to crucify them:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:24)

We get the distinct impression from Paul that there is nothing good in the flesh. It is hostile to God and will not submit to His law. The only thing we can do to it is to crucify it. If we want to follow the Lord Jesus we must learn to die to the desires, thoughts, and impulses of the flesh and seek His counsel and purpose.

How can we, as mere humans, understand God and His purpose? God's ways are not our ways.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

Human reason is insufficient to understand the purpose of God. He works in ways we can never understand. Job had to learn this as he sat in the ash heap after losing everything that was precious to him. As Job looked over the events that had taken his family and possessions from him, leaving him sickened and helpless, he failed to see the purpose of God. Human reason was not enough to make sense of what God was doing. In the end, all he could do was trust God and His purpose. How can I possibly understand the all-knowing mind of God? I do not have the intellectual capacity to grasp even a portion of His infinite wisdom. I cannot imagine how He will unfold His purpose. I could never comprehend how He can use tragedy to accomplish good. These things are too complicated for me to understand. All I can do is trust in this infinite wisdom and rest in His purpose.

Not only is human wisdom insufficient to understand the mind of God, but Scripture tells us that our nature has been so affected by sin that our thoughts, desires, and intentions are distorted. To follow our heart and our desires will lead to death and separation from God.

Where does this leave us? Our mind is not capable of understanding God and His ways. Our heart and our desires are untrustworthy. How are we to live the life God requires if we cannot trust our mind, heart, and desires? All we have left is the counsel of God. If we are to live the life God requires, we will need His counsel and wisdom in all that we

do. We must learn to bring Him into every decision and every action. We must allow Him to shape our understanding and teach us what is right. We must learn to trust God's leading and direction more than our own understanding. This is an affront to our human ability and intelligence. The fact of the matter is that much work is done for God but not enough is done in His way. We busy ourselves serving God but have all too often failed to obey Him and walk in His counsel and leading.

If we are to become what God intends us to be, we will need far more than what our human wisdom, heart, and desires can bring. We will need the counsel of a wise and all-knowing God all along the way. We will need to be a people who distrust human wisdom and planning and rely more fully on God, His Word and His Spirit. May the Lord teach us to wait on His counsel

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trusting in your own wisdom and experience rather than in God? Explain.
- Is it possible for us to fully understand the mind of God and His ways?
- What caused the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in the Garden of Eden?
- How does the Bible describe our heart? Can we follow our heart?
- What is the nature of our fleshly desires? Can we trust them to be our guide?
- How important is it that we seek the counsel of God? Can we expect to become all God intends us to be in our own reasoning?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you accept what He says about the human heart and desires. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have trusted in them more than in His counsel.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to seek Him in all you do. Ask Him to teach you what it means to wait on His counsel.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to lead and guide you. Thank Him that His counsel is available to all who will seek it.





## Chapter 2 - The Command to Seek His Counsel

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In the first chapter, we spoke about the reason we need the counsel of the Lord—first, because our limited understanding cannot possibly grasp the fullness of God's mind and purpose, and second because our heart, passions, and thoughts have been affected by sin and lead us away from God and His purpose.

As we continue in this study it now falls on us to examine the specific command of Scripture to seek the counsel of the Lord. Let's begin with a passage from Psalm 10:4:

In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

What is significant for us in this verse is the statement: "the wicked does not seek Him." While there are many ways to understand this verse, it is clear that one of the characteristics of unbelievers is that they do not take God or His will into account. They do things their own way without seeking the purpose or counsel of God. God calls this wickedness.

Listen to what Job says about the wicked in Job 21:14:

They say to God, "Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways."

One of the central characteristics of the wicked person is that he or she does not desire to know or seek the counsel of God and His ways. What is at the very heart of sin? Is it not a desire to do things our own way without seeking the counsel of God? This is not just the sin of the unbeliever but of the believer as well. Even believers can live in this wickedness of not seeking God's heart and straying from the path He has laid.

Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah has to say in Jeremiah 10:23:

I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

Consider what the prophet is saying in this verse. He tells us that "the way of man is not in himself." In other words, if we want to know the way we are to live we cannot look inside ourselves and do what is in us to do. We must look outside ourselves—to our Lord God. It is not for us to direct our own steps. We are to be obedient to a higher authority. We are to live as God determines. To do this we must be willing to die to our own ideas and plans.

This runs against the philosophy of the world that tells us to follow our dreams. The world tells us to follow our heart. It tells us that we can do whatever we set our minds to do. Jeremiah challenges this attitude and calls us rather to submit to the counsel and guidance of God. He challenges us to stop looking for what we want in life and to seek what God wants. The interesting thing about this principle is that it brings more satisfaction and joy in life than anything we seek for ourselves. God knows what is best for us and as we seek His counsel we can be fully satisfied in Him. The

temporary pleasures we seek for ourselves fade into insignificance in comparison to the purpose of God for our lives.

One of the clearest commands of Scripture about seeking God's counsel found in Proverbs 3:5-6:

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your way acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

This verse has often been a very strong challenge in my personal life. There is a very clear command in these verses—"do not lean on your own understanding." It could not be any clearer than this. God is commanding us not to trust our own understanding. Instead, we are to "acknowledge Him." To acknowledge God is to bring Him into every part of our lives and the decisions we make. We are to place every decision before the counsel of God and do what He would have us to do. As we do so, the Scripture tells us that "he will make straight your paths." He will bring clarity and direction when you acknowledge Him and seek His purpose.

Repeatedly, in the Scripture the Lord commands His people not to trust in the wisdom of man but to seek Him and His counsel:

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man,  
in whom there is no salvation (Psalm 146:3)

This verse is a command. The believer is not to trust in princes for his deliverance from trouble. The implication here is that instead of trusting in human leaders the believer is to seek God and His counsel in their day of trouble. This same thought is repeated in Psalm 118:8-9:

8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord  
than to trust in princes.

What are we to do in the day of our trouble? The Psalmist tells us that we are to run to the Lord for refuge. We are to seek Him, His wisdom and His comfort. How easy it is for us to trust in our own plans and ideas to sort through these problems. How easy it is for us to turn to someone else for the help we need. The psalmist reminds us of how foolish it is to trust in man when all the wisdom and counsel of God is available to us. Run to God in your day of trouble. Take refuge in Him and in His counsel. This is the challenge of the psalmist to all believers. Make God your first thought in your day of trouble.

Isaiah takes this a step further when he says:

Stop regarding man  
in whose nostrils is breath,  
for of what account is he? (Isaiah 2:22)

Isaiah challenges us to stop focusing on human beings for the help and direction we need in life. Isaiah tells us not to put our trust in human wisdom and strength.

If we are not to trust in man and his wisdom, where are we to turn in our time of trouble? Psalm 37:5 gives us the answer:

Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him and he will act.

Writing in Psalm 55:22 the psalmist adds:

Cast your burden on the LORD,  
and he will sustain you;  
he will never permit  
the righteous to be moved.

Solomon was one of the wisest men of his day. Listen to his advice in Proverbs 16:3:

Commit your work to the LORD,  
and your plans will be established.

Even wise Solomon challenges us to commit our plans to the Lord. To commit our plans to the Lord is to surrender them to His purpose and wisdom.

What we have seen in these Old Testament passages is also clearly revealed in the New Testament. Jesus tells us that we are to be a people who seek His kingdom:

29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, not be worried, 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:29-31)

What is clear from these verses is that the Lord Jesus is challenging us to seek the things of His kingdom more than the things of this world. Our hearts and focus are to be on the purpose of God for our lives. We must be a people who are seeking His will and His counsel.

The apostle Paul tells us that whenever anxieties come our way, we are to cast them on the Lord:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

As we cast these worries and anxieties on the Lord we come to Him and surrender to His purpose. We recognize Him as a sovereign God who promises to counsel and guide us in whatever trouble comes our way. We surrender to Him and to His purpose in this trial.

In Philippians 4:6 the apostle Paul says:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

He told the Philippians that "in everything" they were to let their request be made known to God. In other words, they were to bring God into every aspect of their lives. They were to go to Him for wisdom and guidance in everything that caused them anxiety or trouble. They were to seek His counsel in everything.

The apostle Peter repeats the same thought when he reminds believers:

Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Let me summarize what we have seen in the verses we have examined so far. Wickedness can be defined as not seeking the counsel of God in what we do (Psalm 10:4). Scripture commands all believers not to lean on their own

understanding but to acknowledge God in all things (Proverbs 3:5-6). We are to stop looking to man for help and guidance (Isaiah 2:22; Psalm 118:8-9). Instead, we are to commit our way, our work, and our anxieties to the Lord (Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 16:3; 1 Peter 5:7). In everything we do, we are to bring our requests to God, seeking His guidance and counsel (Philippians 4:6). We must recognize that it is not for us to determine our steps (Jeremiah 10:23).

The command of Scripture is quite clear. We are to be a people who constantly seek the counsel of the Lord in all we do. We are to willingly die to our own ideas and plans to seek God's heart. This requires that we be in regular communication with God. It requires that we submit all our ways to Him. Could it be that the reason for the weakness of the church of our day has to do with the fact that we have never truly learned this lesson? Have we come to believe that we have, in ourselves, the wisdom and strength necessary to accomplish the work of God? If we are to become all that God intends of us, we must obey what God says here. We must stop trusting our own wisdom and experience and seek His counsel in all our ways.

#### For Consideration:

- What is the connection between wickedness and not seeking God and His counsel?
- Jeremiah tells us that the way of man is not in himself. What does he mean by this? How does a man determine his way?
- What does it mean to acknowledge God in all our ways?



- What is the difference between asking God to bless our human ways and committing our ways to the Lord?
- Jesus tells us to seek first His kingdom. What is the implication of this in the decision and actions we take every day?
- To what extent has the church of our day been successful in teaching people to seek the counsel of the Lord and not trust in their own wisdom and understanding? What is the result of seeking our own understanding?
- How much of what you have done today have you committed to the Lord? Have you acknowledged God in the decisions you have made today?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to seek His counsel in all that you do today.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have not sought His will but have chosen to do things your own way.
- Ask God to teach you more about what it means to seek His counsel and not lean on your own understanding.

## Chapter 3 - The Dangers of Ignoring God's Counsel

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As we continue our study on the need to seek the Lord and His counsel, it falls on us now to examine some of the warnings of Scripture to those who choose not to listen to God and seek His counsel. There are some very strong warnings in the Scriptures to those who would ignore the counsel of God.

Let's consider the example of King Amaziah of Judah in 2 Chronicles 25:14-16. Amaziah had gone to war against the Edomites. He prepared 300,000 of his men and hired another 100,000 from Israel. God warned him, however, that He would not be with the soldiers he had hired from Israel. Reluctantly, Amaziah let them go and went to battle without them. With his 300,000 soldiers Amaziah slew 20,000 Edomites in an overwhelming victory. 2 Chronicles 25:14, however, tells us that when he returned from this battle he brought the gods of Edom with him and worshipped them.

God was angry with Amaziah and sent a prophet to speak to him about his sin of idolatry. Amaziah refused to listen to the prophet God sent, saying: "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be struck down?" (2 Chronicles 25:16a). Amaziah refused to listen to God and to His counsel. As a result, the prophet of God spoke these final words to the king before he left his presence that day:

"... I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel." (2 Chronicles 25:16b)

These are very strong words spoken against the king of Judah. God had determined to destroy him because he had not listened to His counsel through the prophet He sent.

Later in 2 Chronicles 33, we read about King Manasseh. 2 Chronicles 33:9 describes this period of Judah's history:

Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.

What is significant for us in this context is what 2 Chronicles 33:10-11 tells us about Manasseh:

10 The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. 11 Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon.

Notice particularly that while the Lord spoke to this evil king, he and his people paid no attention to the counsel of the Lord. The result of refusing the counsel of the Lord was that the whole nation was taken from them and given over to the Babylonians. This was a direct result of refusing the counsel of the Lord.

The book of Psalms also contains striking warnings about those who ignored the counsel of God. In Psalm 81:11-12 we read:

11 But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.

The apostle Paul says a very similar thing in Romans 1:28-31:

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

As God gave Israel and the people of Paul's day over to their own counsel, their society deteriorated. Crime, violence and all sorts of evil flooded in and destroyed them. Notice the reason for this evil in their land. God's people did not listen to His voice (Psalm 81:11) and they did not see fit to acknowledge Him (Romans 1:28).

The writer to the Proverbs warns us that human wisdom and understanding is insufficient when he says:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

To ignore the counsel of God for our society and personal life is to follow a path that leads to moral decay and death. If we want our society to be healthy and blessed, we need to seek God's purpose and heart for that society.

It is a fearful thing to be given over to our own ways. Our newspapers report, on a regular basis, stories of men and women who choose to ignore the counsel of the Lord and do things their own way. The implications of their actions and decisions are devastating. Often these individuals destroy their own lives by their decision to ignore God's counsel. Listen to what the writer of the book of Proverbs tells us about those who ignore God's counsel:

29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, 30 would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, 31 therefore, they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. 32 For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them. (Proverbs 1:29-32)

Those who "would have none" of God's counsel and despise His reproof will eat the fruit of their own ways—death and destruction lie ahead for all who will ignore the correction and counsel of God.

Scripture does not stop there. It goes on to say that God will ignore those who refused His counsel in the day of their calamity. Listen to the words of Proverbs 1 again:

24 Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, 25 because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror

strikes you, 27 when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. 28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. 29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, 30 would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof.

In the midst of the terror and storms of life, when these people were distressed and crying out in anguish to God, He would refuse to listen to them. The reason for this is because He had offered them His counsel but they refused it. Their anguish was the fruit of their own refusal to seek God and His wisdom.

Speaking about those who refused the counsel of God in his day, the prophet Jeremiah said:

9 The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom is in them?  
10 Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. (Jeremiah 8:9-10)

Those who were wise in their own eyes rejected the word of the Lord. As wise as they were, they would be destroyed. Their wives and their fields would be given to others, as a direct result of their refusal to seek the Lord's counsel and walk in His ways.

Probably one of the most powerful statements about trusting in our own wisdom and strength is found in Jeremiah 17:5-6:

5 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes the flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. 6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Notice what the Lord tells us through Jeremiah about the man who puts his confidence in his own strength and wisdom?

First, he would be like a shrub in the desert. A shrub in the desert does not receive the water it needs to grow tall and flourish. It is small and often fruitless. It will never reach its potential without the life-giving water it needs. In a similar way, we can never reach our full potential outside of the life-giving purpose and counsel of God.

Second, he will not see any good come. The blessing of God will be removed from his life. He cannot experience this blessing outside the purpose of God. He cannot live in rebellion and ignore the counsel of God and expect to see ultimate good come his way. He may prosper in this life, but true good can only be found in the purpose of God and in His counsel.

Finally, He will dwell in parched places. We can accomplish many things in our own strength and wisdom. We can grow our business and become rich and famous. We can have everything this world has to offer us but still live in a parched place. The living waters of God's abundance are found in His counsel. This does not mean that life will be

easy. I have met individuals, whose life on this earth has been trying and difficult but whose heart is glad because they are walking in the fullness of God's purpose and counsel for their lives. Don't be fooled by the exterior. Only in the counsel of God can we be fully satisfied.

What do we see from the warnings contained in this chapter? Let me summarize what these passages of Scripture have told us. We have seen examples of kings who refused to seek the counsel of God. Amaziah chose to ignore God's counsel to his own destruction. Judah, under Manasseh, rejected the counsel of God and this resulted in the nation of Babylon invading and taking everything they had. For seventy years they were held in bondage to a foreign power. The writer of the book of Proverbs tells us that there is a way that seems right to our human reason but that way ultimately leads to death. God turns His back on those who have rejected His counsel so that in the time of their terror and anguish, they are left to their own wisdom to fend for themselves. Jeremiah warned the "wise" of his day that their wisdom would lead to their wives and their land being stripped from them. He would go on to tell his readers that as long as they rejected the counsel of the Lord God they would never reach their full potential or experience the good that God wanted to bring. Instead, they would live parched and empty lives.

We have read these warnings, but what will we do with them? Do we really believe what these Scriptures teach us? Do we believe that we desperately need the wisdom of God? Or do we somehow still feel that we can make it on our own? Do you still believe that your human wisdom is able to cope with anything life has to throw at you? Do you still feel that your training and discipline will enable you to find the answers you need?



In these three chapters we have examined the fact that our human mind will never truly be able to understand the mind of God—His ways are different from ours and His thoughts are different from ours. His ways do not always make sense to us. We have seen that our minds and thoughts have been affected by sin and this distorts our experience of God and His purpose. We have examined the command of Scripture to seek God in all our ways and to refuse to lean on our understanding. We have seen the curse on those who fail to take this command to seek His counsel seriously. Ultimately the question is, what will we do in response? Will we seek the counsel of God and listen to what He is telling us in these Scriptures or will we persist in doing things our way? The decision is up to us, but the consequences of choosing to ignore God's counsel may be devastating.

#### For Consideration:

- What was the result of ignoring the counsel of God in the lives of Amaziah and Manasseh?
- What would your society be like if it were not governed by the counsel and ways of God? What would it be like if everyone did whatever they wanted?
- Jeremiah describes the person who does not seek the Lord to be like a desert shrub that does not see good but lives in a parched and salted land. Can those who do not seek the Lord prosper in this life? What does Jeremiah mean when he says that these people will live in a parched land?

- Do you feel that Christians really see the need to seek God and His counsel? Are we tempted to trust in our own ways and methods?
- What particular warning do you take from the passages quoted in this chapter? How will this change how you do things in the future?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not really sought Him or His counsel but have chosen to do things your own way.
- Take a moment to pray for your leaders. Ask that they would truly seek the Lord and His purpose in the decisions they make.
- Ask God to teach you what it means to seek His counsel and to acknowledge Him in all your ways.
- Ask God to show you if there is anything you are doing apart from His purpose. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to help you to make things right and get back on track with Him and His purpose for your life.



## Chapter 4 - The Counsel of Scripture

In the first three chapters, we have examined what the Scriptures tell us about the importance of seeking the counsel of God in all that we do. The question we need to ask ourselves now is: Where do we find this counsel of God? To answer this, let's begin with Psalm 119:9:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

The psalmist pictures before us a young man at the prime of life looking ahead to a great future. As the psalmist looks at this young man with all his potential, he also realizes the temptations on the path before him. The journey he is about to embark on is filled with dangers and detours. There are many enemies on the road he is about to take. How does this young man live the life God requires and reach his full potential? How can he avoid the temptations and snares along the way? What will keep him safe until he arrives at his destination? The answer to these questions is found in the Word of the Lord. It is the Word of God that will protect this young man on the road of life. It will open his eyes to what is right and wrong. It will expose the temptations along the way and show him the right path to tread. As he walks according to the clear counsel of God as found in the Scriptures, he will keep his way pure.

In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 we read of God's requirement for the kings of Israel and Judah. The role of a king was a

very important role. How was the king to make wise decisions for the nation? Listen to the command of God in Deuteronomy 17:18-19:

18 And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them...

One of the most basic requirements for every king of Israel and Judah was that he was required to read the Law of God every day of his life. In a day when people did not have a physical copy of the Law of God, a special copy was made for the king. This copy was approved by the Levitical priests as being an exact copy of the original. This law would be the king's guide in all matters of state. By studying and reading the word of God, he would be guided in the decisions he made. All his decisions were to be in accordance with the counsel of God as found in the copy of the Book of the Law prepared especially for him.

Joshua 1 tells us that story of the people of God preparing to cross the Jordan to possess the land God was giving them. Imagine what it would be like for these men and woman who had spent the last forty years in the desert wandering as nomads. The land before them was inhabited by nations prepared to fight for their land. After many battles, Israel was to settle in this land and become a nation. Consider the responsibility that lay on the shoulders of Joshua as he led these people. Where was he to find the wisdom necessary to accomplish this task? Listen to God's advice to Joshua as he prepared to lead his people:

6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Notice what God tells Joshua in this passage. In order to be successful in this undertaking, he would need to be careful to do all that was in the law that Moses had given them. He was never to turn from that law. It was to influence all that he spoke to the people. He was to meditate on it day and night. This written law would be his counsel and guide. It would reveal to him the purpose of God for his life and the lives of his people.

It is quite easy to see the significance of the Word of God in the lives of those God had chosen to lead His people. This law was to be their guide. They were to make it a priority every day to spend time in this Word to understand it and walk in its ways. This would guarantee success in their leadership and in their nation.

The psalmist understood the value of the Word of God when he wrote:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

The Word of God is a lamp to our feet. Picture an individual walking in the forest at night. He doesn't know what he is going to step on or what is going to trip his feet. The Word of God, as light, shows us the obstacles on the path of life that can trip us or make us stumble. It is a light for our feet warning us of the dangers that lie on the path before us. This Word is also a light to our path. It not only reveals the dangers at our feet but shines on the path ahead to show us the direction we are to take. It is our guide and protection on the path of life.

The Scriptures we have today are not the thoughts of mere humans but the words God spoke through them to us:

20 knowing this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

This is why the Scriptures can be a sure guide in life. The Scriptures are the words of God to us. They reveal God's purpose for our lives and the direction He wants us to take.

Speaking to Timothy, the apostle Paul would say about the Scriptures:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

There are some very important details in these words of the apostle Paul we need to underline here. Notice, first, that all Scripture is from God. He is the author. Second,

notice that these Scriptures are useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. In other words, they teach and train us in how God wants us to live. If you want to live life to its full, you will need to be a student of the Scriptures. In these Scriptures, we find the counsel of God in how to live the life He requires. Notice, third, that Paul tells us in these verses that by allowing these Scriptures to counsel and guide us, we will be "complete" and "equipped for every good work." This shows me that there is nothing lacking in these Scriptures to form me into all God wants me to become. They will equip me for every task that God has for me to accomplish.

This means that everything I need to know to walk in righteousness can be found in the counsel of God found in the Scriptures. Everything I need to know to see my church become all God intended is found in the Word of God. Nothing is missing. God inspired the writing of the Scriptures in such a way that by following them, not only will they make us complete but they will also equip us in anything we undertake in His name.

This does not mean that everything in life will go smoothly if we follow the counsel of Scriptures. Men and women who remained faithful to these Scriptures often found themselves in difficult situations. The apostle Paul was persecuted for his obedience to the Word of God. The apostle John was sent into exile for preaching the truth of these Scriptures. Even in these difficult times, however, these Scriptures come to our aid. Listen to what Paul said about the comfort of Scriptures in times of adversity:

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)



What do we do when everything seems to be crashing in on us? Where do we find the encouragement and counsel we need in difficulty. Paul tells us that the Scriptures will bring us the encouragement we need in those times. Through their counsel, we will have hope.

The wisdom and counsel of God as found in the Scriptures provides us a solid foundation on which to build our lives and ministries. They give us stability and a clear direction in life. Writing to the Ephesians Paul says:

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone... (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Notice how Paul told the Ephesians that they were built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. That is to say, the faith of the Ephesians was founded on the teaching of the apostles and prophets as found in the Scriptures. These men wrote as they were inspired by God. This foundation was secure and solid.

One of the keys to the success of the early church in the book of Acts is found in Acts 2:42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Notice that one of the key devotions of this early church was to the apostle's teaching. This teaching is now written down for us in the New Testament Scriptures. This devotion of the church to the teaching of the apostles gave them

strength and influence in their community. Lives were radically impacted in those days. Why was the work of God so powerful in those days? In part, it was because the church was devoted to seeking the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures. The believers lived as the Scriptures taught. They sought God's heart as found in the Scriptures. The result was a powerful work of God in their society.

What do we see from these passages? We see that the counsel of God is found in the Scriptures. God has given us His word to be our guide and direction. This Word shows us what we need to know about God and how to live under His blessing. This was so important that God commanded kings and leaders to read and meditate on the Scripture every day so that it would be their guide in matters of state and church.

How easy it is to be always looking for something outside of the Scripture. God is telling us that we are to be faithful to the teaching of His Word. Consider for a moment what would happen if believers made this their lifelong goal—to know God's Word and walk in absolute obedience no matter the cost. What would be the result in our church and in our community? Would our society not be changed?

In the Scriptures, we can know the counsel of God. To walk in that counsel is to know the blessing of God and to experience life as He intended.

For Consideration:

- What is the role of Scripture?

- How important were the Scriptures to be in the lives of the kings of Israel and Judah? What did God expect of these kings in regards to the Scriptures?
- How is the Word of God a light to our path? Give an example of how the Word of God was light to your path.
- Who is the true author of the Scriptures? What, according to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 was God's intention in giving us these Scriptures?
- What difference do you think there would be in your church or your society if every believer made it their priority to seek the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for giving us the Scriptures to counsel and guide us on the road of life.
- Ask God to help you to be more faithful in your study of the Scriptures. Ask Him to reveal His purpose through those Scriptures to you.
- Ask God to make you more willing to walk in absolute obedience to the teaching of His Word.
- Ask the Lord God to stir up a deeper thirst for the truth of God's Word in your church and society.
- Ask God to forgive us for not taking His Word as seriously as we ought.

## Chapter 5 - The Spirit of God and the Scripture

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In the last chapter, we examined the counsel of God as it is found in the Scriptures. In this chapter, we will examine the counsel of God as given by the Holy Spirit.

In the history of the Christian church, Scripture has often been misused and misapplied to suit the needs and sinful desires of its interpreters. Scriptures have often been taken out of context and used to justify wars and cruelty of all kinds.

Consider for a moment what the Scriptures meant to you before you came to know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. How much of the Bible could you really understand? Were not many of its truths hidden to you? A quick look at the disciples of Jesus in the Gospels reveals that over and over again they failed to understand what Jesus was telling them in His teaching. Listen to Mark's account of the disciples' response to Jesus' teaching:

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee, and he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. (Mark 9:30-32)

Notice particularly how the disciples did not understand what Jesus was teaching. This is not an isolated incident. These disciples often did not understand what Jesus was telling them (see Mt. 16:11; Mk. 6:52; Lk. 2:50; 9:45; Jn. 8:27; 10:6; 12:16).

Notice what John 20:8-9 tells us about the disciples who went to the tomb after Jesus had risen from the dead:

8 Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;  
9 for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

The disciples did not understand the Scriptures. They had the Old Testament Scriptures available to them, but many of the truths about Jesus were hidden from their eyes. They simply could not understand what God was saying in His Word. How can sinful human beings, with a limited understanding, ever truly expect to be able to grasp and apply the truth of God's Word? Often His word runs contrary to our own understanding and logic.

Before Jesus left to be with the Father, He made a promise to His disciples.

25 These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:25-26)

Jesus told His disciples that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit of God would teach them and bring the teachings of Jesus to mind at the right time. They would not have to fend for themselves. God

would send the Holy Spirit to explain to them what Jesus had taught and helped them to apply that truth to their lives.

Later on in the Gospel of John Jesus would tell His disciples:

12 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:12-13)

As Jesus ministered and taught His disciples, He understood that at that time they did not have the capacity to understand the truth He was trying to communicate. His words did not make sense to them. They needed the Holy Spirit to reveal these truths in a way they could understand.

Writing to the Corinthian church the apostle Paul said:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

There is a great divide between God and humankind. The ways of God do not make sense to us. God is not governed by human ideas. He defies logic. He pushed back the walls of the sea so His people could walk across on dry land. He made the sun stop so his servant could defeat their enemy. He brought water from a rock to quench the thirst of His people in the desert. He defeated giants with a young boy and a sling slot. He shut the mouths of hungry lions so that

they would rest quietly with his servant. None of these things make sense to our human mind. We have trouble believing the things God does—they are "folly" to our human understanding.

One night a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus came to Jesus to listen to His teaching. Jesus told Nicodemus that evening that unless he was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Nicodemus was totally confused by what Jesus told him that day.

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4)

Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus that there were two births. The first was the birth by water and the second was birth by Spirit. "That which is born of flesh is flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit," Jesus told him (John 3:6). This teaching of Jesus was too much for Nicodemus. "How can these things be?" he asked (John 3:9). In response, Jesus answered:

10 ... "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Nicodemus was incapable of fully understanding what Jesus was saying. Jesus' teaching did not make sense to him. If he was to grasp the significance of the teaching of Jesus, he would need an understanding that was beyond his human ability. He would need spiritual understanding.

In Luke 10:21-22 Jesus prayed to the Father. His prayer is significant in what it reveals to us about our need for the work of God's Spirit to understand spiritual truth.

21 In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father for such was your gracious will. 22 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

The spiritual truth of God is hidden from the wise. This is because this truth is not understood with human logic. The truths of God are revealed to those who are willing to accept what God says even though it does not make sense to their human mind just as a child will accept the word of their parents.

We have in our day elevated human logic and science so that it has become the measure of all truth. However, God is above this. He is not restricted by science and logic. God's ways cannot be learned by human skill. They must be revealed to us. God has chosen to reveal Himself and His purpose by means of the Scripture, and He has given us His Spirit to guide us into these spiritual truths.

As Jesus prepared to go to His Father, He told His disciples:

15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even



the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

There are several important details we need to notice in these verses. Notice, first, that Jesus tells His disciples that if they loved Him they would keep His commandments. In other words, they would walk in the counsel of God as revealed in the Word of God. How were these disciples to walk in obedience if they did not understand what Jesus was teaching them? The answer comes in verse 16 where Jesus tells them that He would give them a Helper who would be with them always. This Helper was the Holy Spirit, who would live in them and teach them what God required.

Notice also in these verses that Jesus taught the disciples that the Holy Spirit could not be known to the world because He could not be seen. Human wisdom accepts what it can see, smell, touch or taste. The work of the Holy Spirit was not of that nature. We cannot see the Holy Spirit. He generally does not speak to us in a human voice; He quietly speaks to our spirit. The world cannot believe what it cannot see. By faith, however, the believer can accept the work of God's Spirit and experience the reality of His presence and guidance.

The world around us does not understand the work of God's Spirit. I would even go as far as to say that many Christians have failed to understand the work of God's Spirit. There are those who feel that they are able to communicate the truth of the Scriptures without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They rely on their human reason and understanding to communicate spiritual truth. What we see in this chapter is that the role of the Spirit of God is to open

our minds to the truth of the Scriptures in a way that we could never understand in human wisdom.

The truths of Scripture have been around for thousands of years. Many people have read and studied Scripture, but have never been changed by it. Some have even preached the Scripture from pulpits or taught it to others without ever experiencing the reality of the words they teach. What is missing in the lives of these individuals is the ministry of the Spirit of God, making the truth alive and real to them. Truth in itself will not change people, but truth empowered by the Spirit of God is life-transforming.

If we are to understand the wisdom of God revealed in His Word, we will need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us. As we confess our need of the Spirit and open our heart to Him, we will see Scripture in a new light. God's Spirit will teach us things in the Scriptures and show us applications of truths we had never before understood. All too often we have failed to see our need of the Spirit to understand and apply the truths of Scripture. We have pushed Him aside in our reading, interpretation, and preaching of His Word. If we are to understand the truths of God we must first recognize our need of His Spirit's guidance and teaching.

This chapter calls us to study God's word in a way that may be different from what we have been used to. We need the Holy Spirit's guidance and teaching because our human reason and understanding are not enough to grasp the fullness of the truth God has revealed in His Word. The Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide in the understanding of truth. We must open our heart to Him and let Him show us the wonders of the Word. We must humble ourselves and recognize our need of Him as we open the

pages of the Word. There is no teacher like the Holy Spirit. His instruction is life- changing.

For Consideration:

- Did the disciples of Jesus fully understand what He was teaching them?
- What did Jesus teach would be one of the key roles of the Holy Spirit?
- Is human wisdom sufficient to understand and apply the Scriptures? Explain.
- Does the counsel of the Lord always make sense to our human minds?
- Why is it important that we understand the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit? Can we truly understand God's ways and counsel without the Holy Spirit?
- How much do you recognize your need for the guidance of God's Spirit when you read and study the Word of God? Do you try to understand the Scriptures in your own mind or do you seek the guidance and direction of the Spirit of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth of God.
- Ask God to help you to rely more on what the Spirit of God reveals to you than on what you learn in your own human wisdom.
- Ask God to forgive you for thinking that you could understand spiritual truths in your fleshly wisdom.

- Ask the Lord to open your heart to the work of His Spirit in teaching you the truths of Scripture.



## Chapter 6 - The Counsel of the Spirit

In chapter 5 we examined the role of the Spirit of God in opening the Word of God to us. He reveals the counsel of God as it is contained in the pages of Scripture. What we need to understand is that it is the role of the Holy Spirit not only to reveal the truths of the Scriptures but also to enable us to apply those truths to the situations we encounter each day. In fact, the Holy Spirit will actively lead us into situations where we can demonstrate and apply the truths He is teaching us.

In Ezekiel 8 we read how the prophet was in his home with the elders of Judah sitting before him. Obviously, they had come to hear the counsel of the Lord. As they sat together that day, the hand of the Lord fell on the prophet and he saw a vision of a man who, from the waist down, appeared to be on fire, and from the waist up was as bright as "gleaming metal" (Ezekiel 8:2). Listen to what happened as Ezekiel describes His vision:

He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. (Ezekiel 8:3)

That day God revealed hidden things to Ezekiel about the state of Israel's faith. In that vision the Lord showed the

prophet the idolatry that was taking place in Israel and just how angry God was about it. He told the elders present that day that He would not listen to them or hear their cries to Him because of this terrible sin in that land. God revealed the hidden sins of His people to Ezekiel.

What is true of the prophet Ezekiel was also true for the apostle John in the New Testament. The book of Revelation is filled with references to the work of the Spirit in revealing the purposes of God to the apostle.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (Revelation 1:10)

Notice the reference in Revelation 1:10 to John being "in the Spirit". What we need to understand from this is that it was the Spirit of God that was revealing these truths of God to John. He told Him to write down what He would show him for the benefit of the seven churches. This phrase "in the Spirit" is repeated different times in the book of Revelation. It is an important phrase because it shows us that the visions of John were not from his own imagination but revealed to him by the Holy Spirit of God.

We see clearly in the life of Ezekiel and John that the things they saw were revealed to them by the Spirit of God. The apostle Peter tells us that all prophecy of Scripture has its origin in the Spirit of God:

20 Knowing this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the

will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The Spirit of God led His servants, the prophets, to speak the mind and heart of God. He revealed to them things that could not be seen with human eyes. He imparted to these prophets the wisdom of God.

What was true for the prophets who wrote the Scriptures was also true in the lives of the more ordinary people of Israel. In Luke 2:25-26 we have the account of a devout man by the name of Simeon. Luke 2:26 tells us:

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Notice clearly again that it was the Spirit of God who revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. While he knew from the pages of Scripture that the Messiah would come, these Scriptures did not tell Simeon that he would personally see the Christ. This was a personal revelation from the Spirit of God to him. That day when the Lord Jesus came into the temple with His parents, Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed the Lord God for sending the Messiah and giving him the privilege of seeing Him.

Philip the evangelist was in the midst of a great revival in the region of Samaria. An angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him to leave Samaria and go to the desert region of Gaza. Philip obeyed the angel and, as he traveled, a chariot carrying an Ethiopian official passed by. Listen to Acts 8:29-31:



29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

That day Philip had the opportunity to share the truth about Jesus with this Ethiopian man. Notice how all this came about. An angel told him to go to the desert of Gaza. The Spirit of God that told him to go over and join the chariot. God specifically led Philip to minister to that Ethiopian so that he could come to understand the prophecy of Isaiah and accept the Lord Jesus.

It is easy to focus our attention on the specific leading of the angel and the Spirit of God and forget how Philip was also being led by the written word. You see, the words the Ethiopian was reading were the words of Scripture. The words Philip explained were the words of Scripture. It was when that written word was opened up to the Ethiopian by the Spirit of God using Philip that the Ethiopian finally came to accept the Messiah. The specific leading of God and the counsel of God's Word worked hand in hand to accomplish the purpose of God in the life of this confused official. The Spirit of God led Philip to open up the Word of God to a man seeking the truth as he traveled through the desert of Gaza.

Acts 11:28-30 speak about a prophet by the name of Agabus. Verse 28 tells us that "by the Spirit" he foretold that there would be a great famine over all the world. The Scriptures, themselves, did not speak of this famine. It was specifically revealed to Agabus. Notice the result of this in Acts 11:29:

So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

It was the purpose of the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about this famine so that the church could apply the teaching of Scripture in showing compassion and generosity to their brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the early days of the church, the believers ministered only to the Jews. They were not convinced that salvation was also for the Gentile. To correct this, the Spirit of God began to reveal to them the heart of God for the Gentiles also. On one particular occasion, Peter was resting on the roof of a house when the Lord gave him a vision of a sheet filled with unclean animals coming down from heaven and a voice calling him to rise up and eat. Peter was perplexed about this vision and as he pondered it, the Spirit of God spoke to him:

19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold three men are looking for you, 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." (Acts 10:19-20)

The men who had come to see Peter took him to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. This man also had a vision leading him to send for Peter, who would tell him what he needed to hear. That day Peter shared the message of the gospel with Cornelius and his family. They received the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of God fell on them in such a way that Peter understood that God had accepted Gentiles into His family.

This leading of the Holy Spirit would shake the entire church. Some believed that if a Gentile was to be a follower of Jesus they also needed to become a Jew and follow the Law of Moses. In fact, there was such a disagreement over this issue that a meeting was called in Jerusalem to discuss the matter. The result was a letter written by the Council of Jerusalem to Gentile believers stating the following:

28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:28-29)

What is important for us to note here is the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the church into this decision. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," the letter read. The Holy Spirit revealed the heart of God to the early church by giving Peter and Cornelius a vision. He would speak to the hearts of the apostles in Jerusalem in such a way that when they made this final decision they did so knowing that it came from the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:28).

In Acts 13 the church of Antioch gathered together to pray. As they were praying, the Spirit of God spoke to them:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2)

Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were sent on their first missionary journey because it was revealed to the church by the Spirit that this was the will of God for them. These truths were not written down in the pages of the Scriptures they had, but these men went with the assurance that they were being clearly led by God. They would go in the leading of the Spirit to plant many churches among the Gentiles. As they travelled on their missionary journeys, these apostles were constantly being directed by the Spirit of God as He led them to the people who were ready to hear the truth of the Scripture they taught. Acts 16:6-9 tells us:

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they came to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas, 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Notice that the Holy Spirit forbade them to speak in Asia. He would not allow them to go to Bithynia. He did, however, speak to Paul in a vision and lead him to go to Macedonia. These apostles were sensitive to the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit in their ministry. Sometimes that direction went contrary to their own plans. They would have gone to Asia and Bithynia if it were up to them, but the Spirit of God had a work to do in Macedonia and so they followed His leading.

Sometimes the leading of the Spirit of God was to go to into very difficult situations. In Acts 20:22-23 we read:

22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Paul was "constrained by the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem. He knew that this was the leading of God's Spirit in his life. He also knew that great difficulties awaited him as he traveled to Jerusalem, but he committed himself to follow the leading of God's Spirit.

Knowing and following the leading of the Spirit of God was a key ingredient in the ministry of these apostles. They did not have long-range plans for their ministry. Their primary goal in life and ministry was to honour God by walking in obedience to the leading of His Spirit no matter the cost. They did not depend on their own wisdom and experience. They lived and taught, without compromise, the counsel of God as found in the truth of Scripture. They followed the counsel of the Spirit and went wherever He led.

Following the leading and counsel of the Spirit was so important to Jesus that in Acts 1:4 He ordered his disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the promised Holy Spirit. This was because their wisdom and understanding was insufficient for the task. They needed the wisdom of God if they were to accomplish the task He had called them to. Without the counsel of God as revealed to them by the Word and the Spirit, these men and women were blind and helpless. They needed the Holy Spirit to guide them step by step. He would lead them to people inquiring about salvation. He would move them to send their best leaders on a missionary journey. He would hinder them from going to certain locations and move them to go where He wanted to work. In all this, the Spirit of God

was counseling His people and revealing to them the purpose of God.

What is true of the prophets and apostles is still true for us as believers today. The apostle Paul taught that those who belong to God are led by His Spirit:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:14)

We understand from this that as sons and daughters of God today we are also to be led by the Spirit. God wants to lead us into the application of His truth in our lives. It is not only our privilege but our obligation to be people who are led by the Spirit of God. The apostle Paul reminded the Roman believers of their need of the Spirit when he said:

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:26)

What do we learn from these passages? We see that it is the role of the Spirit to lead and direct us into the will of God. He will reveal the specific purpose of the Father to us. He who inspired the Scriptures will lead us into how to apply them. The Spirit of God is our counsellor. We do not know how to pray as we should, but He will lead us and pray for us. We do not know what God wants to accomplish, but He will move us in the right direction. We do not know what words we need to say, but He will counsel us and give us those words.

We cannot do the work God requires on our own, yet how often we try. We depend on our own wisdom and training as if it were sufficient. The reality of the matter, however,

is that until we are ready to listen to the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures and in the leading and direction of His Spirit, we will be more of a hindrance than a blessing in the work of the Kingdom. The words of the prophet Zechariah are important to us in this regard. Speaking to Zerubbabel, the Lord says:

6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" (Zechariah 4:6-7)

This counsel of God to Zerubbabel is for us today as well. It is not by our might or by our human power that the work of God will be accomplished, but by the Spirit of God as He counsels and empowers us step by step. We may not know what is ahead. It may mean following even when it doesn't make sense. The Spirit of God, however, will lead and guide us if we are willing to listen to His voice. May God give us the grace to listen and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For Consideration:

- What is the role of the Spirit of God in revealing the truth of God to the prophets?
- How did the Spirit of God reveal the specific purpose of God for Simeon and for Philip? Does God's Spirit still lead us in this way today?
- Consider the task of expanding the Kingdom of God today. How important is it that we follow the leading of the Spirit of God in this? Do we

have the wisdom and skill in us to understand the purpose of God?

- How has the Spirit of God been leading you?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Holy Spirit that He is the author of prophecy and that He reveals the truth of God to His servants.
- Thank the Lord that while the task before us is too big for us, He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us step by step.
- Ask the Lord to help you to learn to hear the leading and prompting of His Spirit so that you can be effective in the work of the kingdom of God.
- Ask God to forgive you for times when you have trusted your own wisdom and did not see your need of the Spirit of God.





## Chapter 7 - The Law and the Specific Leading of God

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Some time ago I was having a conversation with a friend. At that point in my life, I was preparing to go to go overseas as a first-time missionary. In the course of the conversation, I told him that God had been leading me to Mauritius. "What do you mean God is leading you to Mauritius?" he asked. I told him that I felt that this is what the Lord was telling me in my heart and that I had a sense of His direction to this specific country.

As the conversation continued, my friend went on to tell me that God didn't lead like this. He believed that God only leads us through the Scriptures. As we read the Scripture we see that God calls us to go into all the world. We also see that He gives gifts to His servants. According to my friend, all we had to do was put these together and determine where we could best use our gifts and strengths. He did not feel that God had a specific place for a believer to serve. Each believer offered his or her gifts to the Lord in the way they thought best in accordance with the teaching of Scripture.

As we begin this reflection, let me be very clear about one thing. The Bible is our guide into the purpose and plan of God. The Scriptures are authoritative in the life of the believer and the definitive guide to all that God intends for us and this world. Our lives must be solidly built on the teaching of Scripture. The Bible is applicable to all times and

cultures. God will never lead us contrary to His will as revealed in the pages of His Word. All truth and practice must be measured by the standard of God's Word.

While there can be no doubt about the authority of Scripture in our lives, there are decisions in life that are not easily answered by a passage of Scripture. Consider the pastor wanting to know whether he needs to accept the call to a particular church or to wait for another call. What about the missionary trying to understand where he or she needs to serve? How about the young man needing to decide whether to accept the job being offered him in another town or stay with the job he already has. How are we to make these kinds of decisions?

There are those who say that the answer lies in our study of Scripture and our personal preferences. A pastor may decide, for example, that his gifts would be better used in a big city than a rural area and accept a call to a church on that basis. Some time ago I was speaking to a pastor who had been a number of years in his church. He told me that another church called him to be their pastor. He wrote to this church telling them how much money he was making and all the benefits he was enjoying at his current church and asked them how they would make it worth his while to leave and be their pastor. Are these the kind of things that ought to determine where we serve the Lord?

Throughout the history of the church, we have seen men and woman leave everything to follow the Lord. When the Lord Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, they left their families and their nets to obey that call. These men were willing to die to everything they had. They left prosperous professions and the security of home to risk their lives in service of the King of kings. They were motivated by something greater than personal preferences or human reason.

There was a call on their lives from which they could not escape, nor did they want to escape.

Jeremiah, the prophet, ministered to a people who did not want to listen to his preaching. In fact, the more he preached the more they persecuted him. On one occasion he cried out to the Lord:

7 O Lord, you have deceived me,  
and I was deceived;  
you are stronger than I,  
and you have prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all the day;  
everyone mocks me.  
8 For whenever I speak, I cry out,  
I shout, "Violence and destruction!"  
For the word of the Lord has become for me  
a reproach and derision all day long.  
9 If I say, "I will not mention him,  
or speak any more in his name,"  
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire  
shut up in my bones,  
and I am weary with holding it in,  
and I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:7-9)

There were times when Jeremiah wanted to stop preaching in the name of the Lord but he couldn't. Humanly speaking, there may have been other place this wounded prophet could have preached the truth God was giving him. Humanly speaking, we wonder if he was really the best person for the job because nobody seemed to listen to him and there were no signs of fruit for his labour. However, there was a call on Jeremiah's life that would not go away. He knew he needed to persevere even if that meant persecution, mocking and insult. Though this was not what

he would have humanly chosen for himself, he was faithful to what he believed God was calling him to do.

Over and over again in Scripture, we see men and women like Jeremiah putting aside personal preferences and stepping out in what they believe to be the call of God on their lives. That specific call of God is not written out for them in the pages of Scripture, but they know that to disobey it would be to disobey God.

Does God only lead us by His Word or does He also lead us very specifically, by other means, to places and ministries he has prepared for us? To answer this (at least in part) I would like us to go back to the Old Testament. We can understand that God would have to lead Adam and Eve specifically because they did not have the written Word of God so let's go to the time of Moses after the Lord gave His people the written Law.

God commanded Moses to write down this law so that it could be passed on from generation to generation as a guide to faith and practice.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. (Exodus 34:21)

In obedience to the Lord, Moses wrote out the terms of the covenant God had made with His people. Moses would lead his people in accordance with these words. They were the expression of God's heart and purpose for His people, and God required obedience to every word at the peril of one's life.

While these words were clearly written down for God's people, they were not the only means by which God led them. Listen to Exodus 13:21:

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

As the people of God traveled through the wilderness they brought the written covenant of God with them as a guide to how God expected them to live, but they were also led in a very specific way by the pillar of cloud. When that cloudy pillar moved, they moved. When it stood still, they remained where they were:

20 Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the Lord they remained in camp; then according to the command of the Lord they set out. 21 And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until the morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. 22 Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out but when it lifted they set out. (Numbers 9:20-22)

God led the people by means of His written covenant, but also through the pillar of cloud. This leading was very specific. God determined how far they would travel, the route they would take and when they would rest. God's people would not find the route they were to take in the pages of the Law. For this, they needed the pillar of fire.

In Exodus 23:20-22 the Lord spoke to His people and said:

20 Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared, 21 Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. 22 But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

God made it clear to Israel that He was going to send His angel before them to guard and prepare the way. Notice particularly that God commanded Israel to obey this angel because God's name was in Him—he had God's authority. This angel would guarantee safety and guide them to the place God had prepared for them. The words of this angel were not found in the pages of the covenant that God's people carried with them, but His people were still commanded to follow the counsel of this angel.

As we examine the Law of Moses we see that God required that the priests carry with them two special stones known as the Urim and Thummim. We read about them in Exodus 28:30:

30 And in the breast piece of judgment you shall put the Urim and Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly.

These two stones, the Urim and the Thummim, according to this passage, were used in "the judgement of the people of Israel." They were used to discern the will of the Lord.

We see this in Numbers 27:20-21 when Moses commissioned Joshua to take his place. On that day the Lord told Moses to make Joshua stand before the priest and all the people, while the priest sought the will of the Lord by means of the Urim:

21 And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord... (Numbers 27:21)

It was by means of this stone that God would reveal to the people that Joshua was indeed the one He had chosen to take the place of Moses as their leader.

1 Samuel 14:41 gives us an even clearer picture of how these stones were used to determine the will of God in specific matters. Saul, who was king of Israel at that time, was at war with the Philistines. As he fought this enemy, Saul placed all his men under a vow saying:

Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged of my enemies (1 Samuel 14:24).

Jonathan, his son, was not present when Saul made this rash vow, and during the course of the day he dipped his staff in some wild honey and ate it, breaking the vow. Saul's army defeated the Philistines that day and Saul wanted to go down to their camp, plunder it and destroy every remaining soldier. Before doing so, however, he built an altar and sought the will of the Lord. But God would not answer Saul. By this Saul determined that one of his men had broken the vow he had made to God. In order to determine who that individual was, Saul used the Urim and the Thummim. We read in 1 Samuel 14:41-42:



41 Therefore Saul said, "O Lord God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim. And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. 42 Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken.

In this case, the Urim and the Thummim were used to determine who was guilty before the Lord. What is important for us to note is that these stones were not a superstitious invention of the human mind but a direct commandment of God found in the Law of Moses. The priest was commanded by God to carry these stones in order to determine His will in specific cases.

The Urim and Thummim were not the only way of determining the specific will of the Lord. In Numbers 5 we have the law of God relating to a man who suspected his wife of committing adultery. In this case, the man was not able to actually prove his wife had been unfaithful—he only had suspicions. The wife, on her part, was unwilling to admit any guilt. To settle this matter, the man was to bring his wife to the priest. The priest would take some dust from the tabernacle floor and mix it in water that had been consecrated to the Lord. The priest then placed this woman under an oath before God saying:

19 "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while you were under your husband's authority, be free from the water of bitterness that brings the curse. 20 But if you have gone astray, though you are under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself, and some man other than your husband has lain with

you, 21 than (let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse and say to the woman) 'the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh fall away and your body swell. 22 May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels and make your womb swell and your thigh fall away,'" And the woman shall say, "Amen, Amen." (Numbers 5:19-22)

The Law of Moses instructed the people of God in what was appropriate behaviour before God. In this particular case, however, the priest needed further revelation from God to know if the woman was guilty. By drinking this water, the Lord would reveal the truth to the jealous husband and the wife would either be honoured or judged according to the Law of Moses.

The written Law did not remove the obligation of God's people to follow His specific leading and calling in life. Nor did the specific leading of God in matters not covered in the Law remove the obligation of God's people to be diligent in their study of the Law. God expected His people to walk in obedience to His written word but also to follow His specific leading as they wandered through the wilderness. God provided ways for the priests to determine His specific will in the application of the Law.

When they were uncertain as to how to apply the principles of the Law of God, He provided a means by which they could determine His will. The Urim and the Thummim or the oath of the woman suspected of adultery are examples of how God would reveal His will in these particular cases. Joshua was chosen by God to be the successor of Moses. God revealed this to His people by means of the Urim. Jer-

emiah was also called of God to preach His word, and despite the fact that at times he wanted to give up, he could not because the call of God burned in his bones.

Even after God gave His Word in written form, He still continued to lead His people. The written word did not remove their need for God's specific leading in their lives. If anything, it increased their need for this leading. As God's people came to understand more of their responsibilities before God through the written word, they would have an even greater need for God's direction and leading in the specific application of that truth to life. Knowing that God calls us to be His witnesses challenges us to seek His leading in how and where He would have us minister. Knowing that God has commanded us to be holy, creates a need in our lives for the specific guidance in how we are to conquer the sin the keeps us from walking in holiness. What parent has not cried out for guidance to know how to raise their children as they should?

The written Word creates a need for God's specific leading and guidance. It causes us to seek God more deeply in order to know how we are to apply His truth. How thankful we need to be that God is willing to help us apply the truth His Spirit is teaching and that He leads us not only by means of His written word but also in very specific ways into the application of that truth.

For Consideration:

- Can we truly understand and apply the truth of Scripture apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

- After giving His people the written law, how did God lead them through the wilderness? What does this teach us about Israel's need for God's specific leading?
- What were the Urim and Thummim? What does the fact that God commanded their use show us about how He led the people of Israel?
- What did the Law of Moses teach about dealing with a jealous husband? How was the will of God discerned in this situation?
- Does having the written Word remove our need of God's specific leading?
- How does the written Word of God create an even greater need for the leading and direction of God?

#### For Prayer :

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He has given us His Holy Spirit to open up the Word of God to us and to lead us in its application in our lives.
- Thank the Lord that He continues to guide and lead us into His specific calling and purpose.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to apply the truth of the written Word to your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to see your need of His guidance and leading each day. Ask Him to teach you to be more sensitive to His specific leading in your life.



## Chapter 8 - The Blessing of His Counsel

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In the past four chapters, we have examined the counsel of the Lord as it is found in the pages of Scripture and applied by the Holy Spirit in our lives. These resources are at the disposal of every believer and all who belong to the Lord God are commanded to seek His counsel in all they do. The writer of Proverbs has some very powerful things to say to those who have the wisdom and counsel of God at their disposal and choose instead to trust their own wisdom.

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?  
There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 26:12)

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. (Proverbs 28:26)

These are strong words. If you trust your own wisdom, according to the Scripture, you are a fool. Human wisdom is not able to understand the mind of God. Some time ago I was speaking with a man about the doctrine of the Trinity. He told me that he could not believe that God could be three persons yet One at the same time. He told me that it did not make sense and therefore he could not believe it. Knowing the futility of trying to argue with him about this point, I said: "You know, I am so glad that there are things

about God that I cannot understand. If I could understand everything about God, then He would be no bigger than my mind. I'm glad that He is bigger than me because that gives me the confidence to trust Him all the more."

You see, we simply cannot understand all there is about God. He is too big for us to understand. We can understand bits and pieces about Him. Our theology attempts to define Him but is inadequate to measure who He really is. I would go as far as to say that it is blasphemous to assume that we can define Him completely and understand all about Him. He is bigger than our loftiest thoughts about Him. To reduce Him to a God we can define in our mind is to diminish Him in our hearts. There will always be things about God we will never understand. He's just too big.

If we cannot truly understand God, how can we understand His purposes? Yet often we think we know what God wants and that we can accomplish that in our own wisdom and strength. We seek to build our churches and ministries without seeking God or being sensitive to His counsel and direction. We do this for Him, but we do it in our own wisdom. We elevate our education and training. We choose our leaders based on their human education and experience. We trust them to lead us and move us forward in our spiritual walk. What does God think when He looks down on our well-educated leadership and all their human plans? According to the writer to the Proverbs, He shakes His head and calls us fools.

The path to true victory is not in our own wisdom and understanding but in seeking the counsel of God. In this chapter, I want to take a moment to examine a few passages of Scripture that reveal the promise of God to those who will trust in His counsel and follow His leading.

Listen to what the Psalmist tells us about the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures:

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
8 the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes (Psalm 19:7-8)

Let's take a moment to consider what the Psalmist tells us about the Word of God. This Word will revive our souls. It will make the simplest person among us wise. It will rejoice our heart. It will enlighten our eyes. While trusting human wisdom is foolish, listening to and walking in obedience to the Word of God will bring revival, wisdom, rejoicing, and enlightenment.

Psalm 34:8-10 tells us that those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing.

8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!  
9 Oh, fear the Lord you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!  
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

God knows exactly what we need. As we come to Him and seek His purpose we find all we need. Our human wisdom will mislead us. Our society will tell us what they think we need, but God knows us. As we seek Him, we will lack nothing we need for He will provide and care for us.



How easy it is to be misled by our own wisdom. The Psalmist reminds us, however, that if we delight in the Lord's way, He will establish our steps and hold our hand:

23 The steps of a man are established by the Lord,  
when he delights in his way;  
24 Even though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong,  
for the Lord upholds his hand. (Psalm 37:23-24)

The Psalmist took great delight and comfort in knowing the counsel of the Lord. Listen to his testimony in Psalm 73:23-24:

23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you;  
you hold my right hand.  
24 You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will receive me to glory.

Notice the great confidence the psalmist has in knowing the counsel of God. As he chose to walk in God's counsel, he knew that His Lord would lead him into glory. He was assured of this glory because he walked in the counsel of God.

This is not to say that we will never have difficulty in life. Life will have its trials and as followers of the Lord God, we will have many enemies. Listen to the promise of God, however, for those who listen to Him:

13 Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! 14 I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.

Notice the connection in this verse between Israel listening to God and the subduing of their enemies. It was the desire of God to subdue their enemies. The only obstacle that stood between them and this purpose was their willingness to listen to God and walk in His ways. If they would heed the counsel of God, they would see victory over their enemies. If they chose to continue in their own ways, however, there was no guarantee of such victory.

Not only was victory secured by walking in obedience to God and seeking His counsel but the Psalmist goes on to say that the counsel of God brought deep satisfaction and joy to his life:

Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. (Psalm 119:111)

Only as we walk in the counsel of the Lord God can we know this wonderful joy.

Isaiah the prophet promised the fruit of listening to the counsel of the Lord was peace.

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. (Isaiah 26:3)

As we walk in the Lord's ways and set our heart to follow Him and listen to His counsel we can experience this perfect peace. This peace is not the absence of trouble in life. Stephen knew this peace when he was being stoned to death in the book of Acts. I believe Daniel also knew this peace when he chose to obey God and was thrown in the den of lions. The peace we speak about here is the fruit of obedience even when that obedience leads to a deep trial. We can face whatever trial life throws at us with perfect

peace because we know we are walking in the counsel of God.

Jeremiah has many things to say about the person who waits on the Lord and trusts in His ways.

7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.

8 He is like a tree planted by water,  
that sends out its roots by the stream,  
and who does not fear when heat comes,  
for its leaves remain green,  
and is not anxious in the year of drought for it  
does not  
ease to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

He who walks in the counsel of the Lord and trusts in Him, according to Jeremiah, is like a tree planted by water. Like the tree, he will be fed by that stream and even when trials come his way he will remain healthy and encouraged. He will continue to produce fruit even though he faces great opposition in life. He is nourished by the counsel of God and as he walks in obedience to that counsel, he remains healthy, blessed and fruitful.

This is exactly what the Lord Jesus taught in the parable of the sower in Mark 4. Speaking of the seed sown in the good soil, Jesus said:

But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.  
(Mark 4:20)

Notice that those who bear this fruit are those who hear the word of God and accept it. They are the ones who listen to the counsel of God and commit themselves to walk in His ways. Do you want to know this increase of thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold? The only way to experience this kind of fruitfulness is to cast aside all confidence in yourself and your own wisdom and seek the counsel of God.

Listen to what Jesus told the Jews who believed in him in John 8:31-32:

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

Notice three things that Jesus says here about those who abide in His word. First, those who abide in His word were His true disciples. To abide is to remain in constant communion with God, walking faithfully and obediently in the counsel of His Word through the Holy Spirit. If you are not walking in obedience and confidence in the Word of God, then you are not living as a true disciple. All who truly belong to Him will desire to commit themselves to follow His Word.

Second, those who abide in the word of Christ will know the truth. There are many different ideas in churches and in our society today. The only authority we have is the Word of God. His Word is the basis on which all other ideas are judged. Anything you hear from the pulpit on Sunday must be judged on the basis of the Word of God as found in the Scriptures. Though we understand this principle in our heads, we can easily become sidetracked by human ideas and programmes. It is surprising how many people

in our churches claim to believe that all truth must be measured by the Word of God, yet find themselves falling prey to human ideas and philosophies of life.

Finally, notice that the truth of the Word of Christ will set the true believer free. He will be set free from error, sin and a life of wandering. He will be set free from powerlessness in ministry and released onto a path of victory and joy.

As we examine these passages of Scripture we see that God chooses to bless those who walk in His counsel. He promises revival, wisdom, rejoicing, enlightenment, provision, security, guidance, glory, victory, peace, health, fruitfulness, truth and freedom to all who will seek His counsel. These are promises we cannot ignore, especially in light of the warnings given to those who choose to follow their own wisdom and understanding.

The path to true victory and satisfaction is to be found in the counsel of God. Only by walking in obedience to Him and His guidance can we experience the fullness that He promises in these passages of Scripture.

For Consideration:

- How easy is it to rely on our own understanding rather than seeking the counsel of God?
- Have you been seeking God's direction in your ministry and personal life? Are there areas of your life and ministry that you have not submitted to His counsel and leading?
- What promises does God make to those who will follow His counsel? Make a list of these promises.

- Have you been experiencing the fulfillment of these promises in your life?
- What keeps us from seeking God's counsel?
- What does it mean to abide in the Word of Christ?
- Can we expect true fruitfulness apart from the counsel of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the blessings He promises to all who seek His counsel.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there are areas of your life where you are not seeking His counsel and missing out on His blessing.
- Ask the Lord to teach you to seek His wisdom and counsel more. Ask Him to teach you to submit more of your life to Him for His guidance.
- Ask the Lord to use your life to bear greater fruit for His kingdom as you learn to seek His purpose, timing, and method.



## Chapter 9 - Moses and the Counsel of God

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I would like to conclude this study with some real-life examples in Scripture. The first example I would like us to consider is that of Moses. The phrase "the Lord said to Moses" is repeated 147 times in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This shows us something very important. Moses was in constant communication with God and listened to His counsel.

It was not always like this for Moses. Early in his career, he depended on his own strength and influence. At the age of forty, Moses visited the Israelites and saw one of them being wronged by an Egyptian. He defended the Israelite and killed the Egyptian. Acts 7:25 tells us the motivation behind this action:

He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

At the age of forty, Moses had everything going for him. He believed that by defending the Israelite, he would gain the confidence of the Hebrew people and that they would trust him to be their deliverer. God closed the door for Moses and send him into the desert instead, where for forty years he would be a shepherd. He would be humbled during that time so that he no longer trusted his own wisdom and strength to do the Lord's work. Only when he was



eighty years old, broken and humbled, did God call him to return to Egypt to deliver His people from bondage.

Moses accepted the Lord's call reluctantly. He no longer had confidence in his own strength and wisdom. His influence in Egypt had diminished and he no longer spoke the Egyptian language as he had done forty years previously. When God called him in to return to Egypt, in Exodus 3, Moses was afraid and said:

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? (Exodus 3:11)

He did not want to go to Egypt or take on this great responsibility at the age of eighty. God would not release him from this call, however, and so in obedience to the counsel of God, Moses left for Egypt. He went, not because it was his idea but because the Lord had spoken to him and told him to go.

Moses arrived in Egypt in obedience to the command of the Lord. How was he now to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelite slaves go? He brought this matter to the Lord for His direction and counsel (Exodus 4:1). God's counsel was not what Moses expected. He told him to throw his shepherd's staff on the ground. When Moses obeyed, it became a snake. This was to be one of the signs Moses was to use before Pharaoh to show him that he was a true servant of the Almighty God. With all his powers of reasoning, Moses would never have thought to do this. It would never have entered his mind to perform such a sign before Pharaoh. God's counsel that day defied human reason, but when Moses obeyed, God worked in miraculous ways.

Over the weeks and months that followed, God counseled Moses in how he was to speak to Pharaoh and what he

was to do in his presence. Through Moses, God would send ten plagues on the nation of Egypt, bringing it to its knees. Each time a new plague was to break out on the land the Lord would counsel Moses in what to say and what to do. As Moses obeyed, the Lord unleashed His power. It was God who won the victory over the Egyptians.

As the Israelites were leaving Egypt, Moses must have wondered how he would provide for them in the wilderness. The task of providing for an entire nation was beyond his capacity. God counselled Moses in what to do. He told Moses to get each of the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for provisions. As they obeyed, the Egyptians lavished great gifts on them. A nation that had been devastated by God now supplied His people with the provisions they needed for their journey. A nation that had depended on the Hebrew people to work as slaves for them, now blessed them as they left. As Moses listened to the counsel of God, the people were well provided for.

Throughout their journey, the Lord would lead them step by step. Exodus 13:21 tells us that He went before them in a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. He directed their path in the wilderness. Moses did not have to decide the course they were to take. His task was simply to lead them in the path God had already chosen.

As the people arrived at the Red Sea they found themselves hemmed in on all sides. The army of Pharaoh approached from behind and there was no way of moving forward. Again they found themselves in an impossible situation. Moses did not know what to do, but God did. He counselled Moses to raise his staff over the Red Sea. When he did, the waters of the sea parted, opening up a path for the people of God to pass safely across to the

other side. When the chariots of Pharaoh pursued them, God brought those walls of water down, destroying the army of Pharaoh. What human reason would have arrived at this solution? Only by listening to the counsel of God was Moses able to deliver the people safely across the sea.

As the people of God moved forward, they entered the wilderness of Shur (Exodus 15:22). After three days of walking, they had found no water. Arriving in the region of Marah, they finally found a source of water. However, it was so bitter they could not drink it. The people complained, and once again the Lord gave Moses His counsel. He told him to throw a certain log into the water. When he did this, the water became sweet and the people had all they needed to drink.

When the people again complained to Moses about a lack of food, Moses did not know what to do. He had no solution to their need. The Lord spoke to him and told him that he would rain down bread from heaven for His people. God counselled Moses in what to tell the people about this bread. They were to gather each day only what they needed. For the next forty years, that manna would be found every day on the desert floor. It would nourish the entire nation and provide for their every need. Again, what human reason would have ever been able to find such a solution?

In the region of Rephidim, the people of God again lacked water to drink. Moses was without a solution to their problem. The Lord counselled him in what to do. God told him to strike a certain rock with his rod. When he did, water flowed out of that rock providing the nation with all the water they needed. It was the counsel of God that revealed the solution to Moses.

In that time of wandering in the wilderness, Moses spent much time in the presence of the Lord, listening and writing down His commands for His people. The laws that resulted from those times in the presence of the Lord were not of human origin. They were given by God to Moses as he listened to His counsel.

When Moses was overseeing the work on the tabernacle that God had commanded him to make, God counselled him in who he should ask to do the artistic work. In Exodus 31:1-6 we read that God counselled Moses to instruct Oholiab and Bezalel to do this work. These men were not Moses' choice—they were God's choice. Moses simply listened to the counsel of the Lord and instructed them in what God required.

When the people of Israel complained against God and His servant Moses, the Lord sent snakes among them. These snakes bit many of the people and they died. The people came to Moses confessing their sin and asking him to pray that the Lord would take these snakes away from them. When Moses went to the Lord, the Lord again gave him His counsel. He told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who looked on that bronze snake would be healed of the poisonous bite. What human wisdom would have ever come up with such a remedy for a snake bite? It didn't make medical or scientific sense, but it brought healing to the people of God who obeyed.

We could go on and on with illustrations from the life of Moses. What we have seen, however, is enough to get the point across. What was the reason for the success of Moses' ministry? How was he able to accomplish the enormous task before him? Moses consistently sought the counsel of God. Where would Moses have been without this counsel? Could he have managed to lead the people

of God through that wilderness without the counsel of God? The secret to the successful ministry of Moses is not in his human strength and wisdom, but in his willingness and desire to hear and follow the counsel of God.

#### For Consideration:

- Consider Moses at the age of forty and Moses at the age of eighty. What is the difference? How would Moses have led the people at the age of forty? Where would his confidence have been?
- Consider the counsel of God in the life of Moses. Did God's advice or commands always make sense to Moses? Would Moses have ever been able to come up with such solutions to the problems he faced using his own human reasoning?
- How important was it for Moses to seek the counsel of the Lord in his ministry?
- Could it be that one of the reasons for the powerlessness of the church of our day is that it has not seen its need of God's counsel and leading?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to understand the source of your confidence in life and ministry. Ask Him to show you if you are trusting in Him or if you are trusting in your own wisdom and understanding.

- Ask the Lord to show you the importance of learning to understand His counsel and follow His leading.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have failed to walk in His counsel.
- Ask God to give you more of the heart of Moses that sought God's counsel in every situation.



## Chapter 10 - Joshua and the Counsel of God

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In this chapter, we will take a moment to examine the life of Joshua, the successor of Moses and the role of the counsel of God in his ministry. In the book of Joshua, we have some clear examples of how this warrior, not only listened to the counsel of the Scriptures, but also to the counsel of the Spirit of God.

One of Joshua's first tasks as the leader of the people of God was to bring Israel across the Jordan River into the Land of Promise. This was not an easy task. Remember that a great multitude of people had left Egypt. Joshua knew that the task ahead of him was a very large one. The nations into whose land they were entering would not appreciate their presence and would likely fight to hold onto their territory.

Joshua had two things in his favour from the beginning of his ministry—the call and the promise of God. In Joshua 1:1-3 we read:

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will



tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.

This call and promise of God gave him confidence in ministry. Personally, there have been times when I am not sure I would have continued in my ministry if it were not for the particular call of God on my life. God spoke to Joshua and give him a clear sense of his purpose in life. He also reassured him that He would go with him and give him success. Joshua did not choose this ministry. God called Joshua as His representative to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. Joshua heard the command of God and responded.

I am sure that Joshua would have had many questions in those days. How was he going to conquer all the nations settled in the Promised Land? The Lord spoke very particularly to this in Joshua 3:7:

The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

As Joshua prepared to take those first steps into the Promised Land, God reminded him of His presence. He would be empowered by God for the task before him.

We are left to wonder where Joshua would have been were it not for these words from the Lord. He was able to boldly lead the people of God because the Lord had called and empowered him for the task. As Joshua stepped out into this calling, God would continue to guide and counsel him each step of the way.

One of the first obstacles Joshua faced in his ministry was leading God's people in crossing the Jordan River. How

was Joshua to get the people across this river safely? In Joshua 4 we understand that this river was quite wide and deep. God counselled Joshua in what he was to do. The Lord commanded Joshua to tell the priest to take the Ark of the Covenant and carry it to the "brink of the waters of the Jordan" (Joshua 3:8). When the soles of the priest's feet touched the water of the Jordan, the waters were cut off from flowing and the people passed over on dry land (Joshua 3:17). Joshua would never have thought of such a thing himself. This was clearly the direction of the Lord.

When the men of Israel arrived on the other side of the Jordan, news of their presence spread throughout the land. Israel now needed to prepare for battle against the inhabitants of the land. Preparation for battle was not just a simple matter of having the right weapons. There was another matter that needed to be addressed. For the army of Israel to be victorious, they needed to be in a right relationship with God. The men of Israel who had been born in the wilderness had never been circumcised. (Joshua 5:5). To prepare these men for battle, God commanded that every one of them be circumcised. In Joshua 5:2 the Lord counselled Joshua to make flint knives to circumcise the men of Israel so they would carry the sign of God on their flesh and walk in obedience to His command for them as a nation. How easy it would have been for Joshua to be so focused on the battle before him that he overlooked this important principle.

God had His priorities. Our ways are very different from God's ways. From a human point of view, we would fail to see how circumcising the army of Israel would have made them better warriors. From God's perspective, however, it brought them into obedience to His covenant and opened the door for His blessing in their lives. Had Joshua not listened to the counsel of God in this regard, he would have

surely been defeated by the enemy. As we open our ears to hear the counsel of God, He reminds us of His priorities.

One of the first cities Joshua was to conquer was the city of Jericho. Here again, God counselled Joshua in what He expected him to do:

2 And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor, 3 You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. 4 Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him. (Joshua 6:2-5)

This plan would not have made sense to Joshua's military mind. By sending his men to march around the city walls each day, he was exposing them to danger from the enemy's arrows. How would blowing a trumpet make the thick walls of the city fall down? This, however, was the counsel of God to Joshua and Joshua chose to obey. Faithful to His word, the Lord God brought the walls of the city down and gave His people victory. Again, Joshua was successful because he chose to walk in obedience to the counsel of the Lord. I am convinced that Joshua would have done things quite differently had he planned the attack of the city himself.

Joshua did not always seek the counsel of the Lord. There were times when he chose to use his own wisdom. On one of those occasions, he sent his men to the small town of Ai to spy it out. His spies returned telling him that it was a small town and that he only needed to send two or three thousand soldiers to attack it. Joshua listened to their advice and did not seek the Lord's counsel. The result was that thirty-six men died and the Israelite army was defeated in the attack. It was only after this humiliating defeat that Joshua went to the Lord to ask Him what had happened. The Lord told him that someone in his army had taken articles from Jericho that God had forbidden him to take. The Lord then revealed the clan, family and the actual individual who was guilty of this act. Achan was stoned to death for his disobedience and the evil was removed from the land.

The evil of Achan was not something Joshua would have known about. God and Achan alone knew about this sin. When Joshua made his decision to attack Ai without consulting the Lord, he set himself up for defeat because of this defilement in the camp. He needed the counsel and wisdom of God to make the right decision. In the same way, we don't have all the information we need. We do not know what God knows or see what God sees. We desperately need His wisdom if we are to be victorious in the battles before us.

After the death of Achan, the Lord counseled Joshua to attack Ai again. This time, God told Joshua exactly how he was to attack the city:

And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it. (Joshua 8:2)

God gave the Israelites the spoils from the city of Ai. He also told Joshua that instead of making a clear frontal attack, he was to set an ambush against the city from behind. This was not Joshua's idea but the military counsel of the Lord. When Joshua obeyed, the Lord gave him success and he overthrew the city of Ai.

When the battle for Ai was over, Joshua renewed his covenant with the Lord. He did so by building an altar and offering burnt offerings. Notice particularly what Joshua 8:30-31 tells us about the altar that Joshua built:

30 At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, 31 just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings.

What is important for us to note here is Joshua's commitment to make this altar exactly as the Lord God had commanded in the Book of the Law of Moses. Joshua knew the Scriptures and made sure he was walking in obedience to them when He made this altar. To make it in any other way would have been to walk in disobedience. Joshua's heart was to follow the written Word of God.

Learning to wait on the Lord's counsel was not always easy for Joshua. Ai was not the only time when he failed to consult the Lord. When we come to Joshua 9, we meet a group of people called the Gibeonites. These people knew that they could not defeat Joshua and the Israelite army by force. They resorted, therefore, to deceit. Dressing up in old clothes and taking worn out bags and old food

they approached the camp of God's people claiming that they were from a distant land. By this means, they tricked the Israelites into making an agreement with them. Joshua 9:14-15 is a very important verse for us to notice in light of the subject of this study:

14 So the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the Lord. 15 And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

Notice how verse 14 tells us that they took their provisions without asking for the counsel of the Lord. They were deceived because they did not ask the Lord for guidance. They saw the old bread and worn out clothing and believed the Gibeonites. All evidence pointed to the fact that what these deceivers said was true.

The men of Israel looked at the evidence before them and drew their own conclusion. There are many things like this in life. What we need to remember, however, is that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). He deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden and he continues to deceive today. His lies are so convincing that often we do not feel the need to consult the Lord or seek His counsel. This is what happened in the days of Joshua and the Gibeonites. It continues to happen today.

We see from these verses that Joshua needed the counsel of the Lord to overcome his enemies. His own reasoning led him astray. His personal wisdom and understanding were insufficient. As he listened to the leading of the Spirit of God and walked in obedience to God's Law, however, he was given wonderful success. Through him, the Lord would settle the entire nation of Israel into the land He had

promised Moses. There is certainly an important lesson for us to learn in the life of Joshua about waiting on the counsel of God.

### For Consideration

- How does knowing the specific call of God on our life give us confidence and boldness to face the battle before us? Have you ever had times in your life when that call of God got you through difficult situations?
- Did the counsel of God always make sense to Joshua? Give an example of how God's counsel seemed to go against human reason.
- God reminded Joshua of His priority in the matter of the circumcision of the men of his army. Are our priorities always the same as God's? What does this teach us about the importance of being in a right relationship with God if we want to be His instruments?
- Give some examples of times where Joshua needed the counsel of God simply because he did not have all the information he needed.
- Is it possible for us to draw the wrong conclusion based on what we perceive to be clear evidence before us? How does Satan, as the father of lies, deceive us? How was Joshua deceived in the matter of the Gibeonites? What does this teach us about not trusting our own reasoning?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the assurance of His call on your life.
- Thank the Lord that while we are often deceived and draw wrong conclusions, He knows all things and will counsel us in what is right.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to guide us each step of the way. Thank Him that as we walk in obedience to Him and His leading, we can overcome.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have failed to listen to His counsel.





## Chapter 11 – Saul and the Counsel of God

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Not all of God's servants were willing to seek His counsel. King Saul is an example of a man who often resisted the counsel of God, choosing instead to do things his own way

When we first meet Saul he is out searching for his father's donkeys, which had strayed from their home. What Saul didn't know was that this search would lead him to Samuel the prophet and to a whole new career. As they came to the land of Zuph, Saul's servant told him that there was a prophet in that city who was "held in honor" and that everything he said came true (1 Samuel 9:6). Saul's servant suggested that they should go to this prophet to see if he could tell them where the donkeys had gone. Saul agreed and together they went to meet Samuel.

The Lord spoke to Samuel before these men arrived and told him that Saul was His choice to be the King of Israel. When Saul presented himself before Samuel, the prophet told him that the donkeys had been found. Samuel went on to say to Saul:

And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house? (1 Samuel 9:20)

Saul was taken aback by this statement of the prophet and reminded him that he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the

humblest of all Israel's tribes. He did not understand why Samuel would speak about him in such an honorable way.

Before Saul left, Samuel took a flask of oil and anointed the head of Saul, declaring that he would be king of Israel. To prove that Saul was the Lord's choice to be king, Samuel told him that when he left he would meet a group of prophets. When he saw them, the Spirit of God would fall on him and he would begin to prophesy like them. Everything happened as Samuel had said.

Arriving home, Saul met his uncle who asked him where he had been. He told him that he had been to see Samuel the prophet. When his uncle asked him what Samuel had told him, Saul simply replied: "He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found." He said nothing about Samuel anointing him to be king. When Samuel came sometime later to Mizpah, to declare Saul king, Saul hid from him (1 Samuel 10:20-24). Saul knew the counsel of the Lord but he wasn't sure he wanted to walk in it.

As king, Saul initially enjoyed the blessing of God on his reign. He had a tendency, however, to be impatient and found it difficult to wait on the Lord. In 1 Samuel 13, we see how the Philistines prepared to do battle with Israel. 1 Samuel 13:5 tells us that the Philistines had 30,000 chariots and 600,000 horsemen as well as "troops like the sand of the seashore in multitude." Israel was very afraid of the Philistines and some of Saul's soldiers began deserting.

Before going into battle, the army of Israel would offer a sacrifice to the Lord. These sacrifices were made by the priests of Israel according to the Law of Moses. Samuel was going to offer this sacrifice but it was seven days past the agreed time for the sacrifice, and Samuel had not yet arrived. Saul knew the Law of Moses, but he also saw how

his men were deserting their posts. He decided to do something about the situation, and so he called for the sacrifice to be brought and offered it himself. In offering this sacrifice, himself, he ignored the Law of Moses. Saul wanted the sacrifice to be made so that he could have the blessing of God, but he did not feel he had the time to wait on God, so he took matters into his own hands. The sacrifice was made, but it was not made as God required. This was not the only time in the life of Saul that he let his impatience keep him from doing things God's way.

In those days, Saul's son Jonathan and his armor-bearer staged an attack on the Philistines and caused panic in the Philistine camp (see 1 Samuel 14:6-15). They did this without Saul's knowledge. Saul heard that there was movement in the Philistine camp and immediately called for the Ark of the Covenant to be brought so that he could consult the Lord and seek counsel for this battle. The ark was brought and, as the priest stood before Saul to seek the counsel of the Lord, the noise of panic in the Philistine camp increased. Saul became impatient and nervous hearing this noise. As the tension in his heart and mind built up, he sent the priest away saying: "Withdraw your hand." Saul could no longer wait on the Lord. That day, instead of waiting on the counsel of the Lord, Saul chose to trust his own reasoning. He felt he needed to respond to this noise in the Philistine camp. He did not have time to spend waiting for the priest to bring him the word of the Lord. He rallied his troops and sent them to battle.

Who among us has not felt this temptation? Situations in life come upon us and demand immediate attention. We just don't seem to have time to seek the Lord for these matters. We rush ahead, doing things the best way we know how, but we often do not wait on God or seek His counsel.

Saul's tendency to trust his own reasoning would get him into trouble on many occasions. On one such occasion, as they were pursuing the Philistines, Saul placed all his men under an oath that they would not eat any food until they had completely defeated their enemy. His son, Jonathan, had not been present when the oath was made. During the course of that day, Jonathan dipped the tip of his staff in a honeycomb and ate the honey.

After the defeat of the Philistines, Saul asked the Lord whether he should go down into their camp to plunder them. The Lord did not answer. When they inquired as to the reason for the Lord's refusal to answer, it was discovered that Jonathan had broken the oath his father had made. Were it not for the pleas of the soldiers on his behalf, Saul would have killed his son for breaking that oath. This oath was made without consulting the Lord and almost meant the death of Saul's own son.

Saul's resistance to the counsel of God can also be seen in 1 Samuel 15. The Lord sent Samuel the prophet to Saul with a command to attack Amalek. Of particular significance is the word of the Lord through Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:3:

Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.

Saul was commanded by God not to take anything from Amalek but to kill everyone and everything.

Saul went to war against Amalek and defeated him. Notice, however, what 1 Samuel 15:7-9 tells us:

7 And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatted calves and the lambs, and all that was good and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

Saul only partially obeyed the counsel of the Lord. He killed what was worthless to him but kept the best. When asked by Samuel why he had disregarded the counsel of the Lord Saul said:

But the people took of the spoil, sheep, and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal. (1 Samuel 15:21)

He claimed that it was for a good cause. Since he was sacrificing these sheep and oxen to the Lord, Saul felt he was justified in disregarding the counsel of God. Samuel reminded Saul that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

After the death of Samuel, the Philistines again posed a serious problem for Israel. Saul sought the Lord's counsel but the Lord would not answer him. When he saw that the Lord was not answering him, Saul chose to consult a medium so he could speak to the spirit of Samuel. Notice that while Saul wants to speak to Samuel, whom he trusted to have the word of the Lord, he disregards the counsel of God in the Law of Moses:

10 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens or a sorcerer 11or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)

Saul's heart was not completely devoted to God. He sought His counsel when it was convenient but ignored it when it was inconvenient. There was an element of God in what he was doing but Saul did not walk in total obedience.

When Samuel told Saul that God was going to take away his reign and give it to someone else, Saul suspected that it was David who would become king in his place (see 1 Samuel 20:30-31). As a result, he fought against the purpose of God until his dying day. He pursued David in the wilderness, sought to kill him as he played music to him and told his servants to kill him in his bed. Saul found no rest in his spirit as long as David was alive. He could not accept the will of God to take his throne from him.

God would stop giving Saul his counsel because Saul did not obey it fully. God would ultimately take Saul's reign from him because he did not walk in His purpose. The story of Saul is a warning for us all. It is a story of compromise. It is a story about a king who sought to do what he thought was best but ignored the wisdom and counsel of God. It is the story of a man who simply did not have time to wait on God and suffered for it.

- For Consideration:
- Have you ever found yourself questioning the will of God for your life? Explain.
- There were times in the life of Saul when he felt he had to make a quick decision and did not have time to wait on the Lord. What were the results? Have you ever found yourself in such a situation?
- Saul proved to be a king who was not totally committed to obeying the counsel of the Lord, although he did seek it. Have you ever found yourself seeking God's will and not obeying it? Why?
- There were times in the life of Saul when he chose to justify his disobedience. He told Samuel, for example, that they had spared the sheep to sacrifice them to the Lord. Is it possible to do things for the Lord but still be living in disobedience? Does doing a good thing justify disobeying the Lord?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you any areas of your life where you have sought to excuse your disobedience to his counsel and will.
- Ask God to help you to wait on His timing and walk in obedience even when things are very stressful and difficult.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times when you have trusted in your own reasoning rather than in His clear command.





## Chapter 12 - David and the Counsel of God

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In the history of Israel, the name of David stands out as one of the greatest kings the nation ever had. What was the secret behind his success as a political and military leader? The answer to this question lies in the repetition of a simple phrase scattered throughout the story of David. The phrase "David asked the Lord" is repeated many times in the account of his life. As powerful as David was, unlike Saul before him, he did not depend on his own reason but sought the Lord's counsel in the affairs of the country. Let's take a look at this phrase as it concerns David.

Throughout the early history of God's people, the Philistines were a constant threat. They often attacked and raided the territory of Israel causing difficulty for its inhabitants. We have an example of this in 1 Samuel 13:5-6:

5 And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-Aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns.

In this example we have the Israelites fearing for their lives. They hid in caves, holes in the ground, tombs and water cisterns as they fled from the fearful Philistine warriors. These were difficult days for Israel under the threat of the Philistines.

In 1 Samuel 23:1 David is told that the Philistines were raiding the threshing floors of Keilah and taking grain. As David considered this threat to the wellbeing of the inhabitants of Keilah, notice the first thing he did:

1 Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." 2 Therefore David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." (1 Samuel 23:1-2)

Notice how these two verses are connected by the word "therefore." David heard of the problem with the Philistines, "therefore" he inquired of the Lord. This appears to be the very first response of David. He did not trust in his own instinct or reason. He immediately went to the Lord to seek His counsel. An old missionary friend once told me, "It's not that we don't pray; it's that we don't pray first." In other words, we often pray only when we are backed into a corner and have nowhere else to turn. David made prayer and seeking the counsel of the Lord the first thing he did.

While God clearly told David that he was to attack the Philistines and free Keilah, his men were afraid. They knew the power of the Philistines, and they were not sure they wanted to risk their lives to free the inhabitants of Keilah.

This placed David in a difficult situation. He was commanded to go, but his men were unwilling. Notice, again, what David did when he encountered this difficulty.

Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." (1 Samuel 23:4)

Faced with the unwillingness of his soldiers, David's first response was to return to the Lord for his counsel in what to do. The Lord reassured him of victory, so David and his men attacked the Philistines and struck them down as the Lord had said.

King Saul heard that David was in the region of Keilah and sent his soldiers to pursue him. When David learned that Saul was plotting to harm him, once again, his response is to go to the Lord for counsel.

9 David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10 Then David said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. 11 Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you." (1 Samuel 23:9-12)

With this threat from Saul, David went to the Lord. His heart was to know the will of God. In the case of the threat

from the Philistine raiders, the Lord told David to attack. In the case of the threat from Saul, David had no such direction from the Lord—he and his men, therefore, retreated. After such a wonderful victory over the Philistines, it would have been easy to assume that he could have defended himself against Saul and even defeated him. He could also have assumed that the people of Keilah would have stood behind him because he had delivered them from the Philistine threat. Had he made those assumptions, however, he would have been defeated. It was because David sought the counsel of the Lord that he was able to escape. David understood that each new situation required fresh counsel from the Lord.

As we continue into 2 Samuel we see the same principle working itself out in David's life. Saul and Jonathan (his son) had been killed in battle. For years now David had been running from Saul and his army. When he heard that Saul had died, one of the first things David did was to inquire of the Lord:

After this David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And the Lord said, "To Hebron." (2 Samuel 2:1)

With Saul no longer king, David again needed direction from the Lord. He knew that God had anointed him to be king over His people, but he did not take matters into his own hands. David sought God's counsel, asking Him if he should return to Judah. The question in my mind is this: How could David have been king over Judah if he did not live there? Humanly speaking, this would have been a common sense issue. But David does not trust his own reasoning. Instead of making up his own mind, he chose

to ask the Lord about it. He wanted to know if this was the time for him to go to Judah. He wanted to do things God's way. The Lord told him that it was the time for him to return.

Notice, however, that while David knew that the Lord was telling him to return to Judah, he also wanted to know where he was to settle. He inquired of the Lord, who told him that he was to live in the city of Hebron. David would return with his men to Judah and to the city of Hebron with full assurance that this was the time and place God had for him. David believed that God had a specific purpose for his life. He wanted to be in the centre of that purpose. He maintained constant communion with God, seeking His guidance each step of the way.

When the Philistines heard that David had become king, they decided to attack. The Philistines gathered their army and spread out over the Valley of Rephaim (2 Samuel 5:18). David heard that they had amassed their army to attack him and once again his first response was to go to the Lord for counsel:

And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand? And the Lord said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand." (2 Samuel 5:19)

In obedience to the counsel of the Lord, David took his men into battle and defeated the Philistines. So great was the victory that David compared this attack of Israel to a great flood breaking through every obstacle in its way (2 Samuel 5:20).

While they were clearly defeated in the battle in the Valley of Rephaim, the Philistines would not accept defeat. They gathered their forces again to prepare for another attack in that same valley.

It would have been easy for David to assume that because the Lord had told him to go up against the Philistines the first time, then it must also be His will this second time as well. David does not make this assumption. He understood that every situation required the counsel of the Lord. Seeing that the Philistines had regrouped, David again went to the Lord to seek His counsel.

22 And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. 24 And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines. (2 Samuel 5:22-24)

Notice that the counsel of the Lord was different this time. God told David that he was not to attack the Philistines directly. Instead, God set out the plan of attack David was to follow. He was not to make a frontal assault but instead to attack them from the rear. God told David where he was to attack the Philistines—opposite the Balsam trees. Finally, God told David when he was to attack—when he heard the sound of marching in the trees.

God had a very specific plan for this battle. Only by consulting Him, did David learn of this plan.

Listen to what 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 says about King Saul:

13 So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. 14 He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

Saul died because he did not seek guidance from the Lord. David, on the other hand, sought the will of the Lord in the things he did. He chose to make himself dependant on God's counsel. He remained humble enough to realize that his own wisdom and understanding would not accomplish the purpose of God.

This is not to say that David sought God in all things. The story of his affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband in an attempt to cover up his sin is an example of one of those times when he did not listen to the counsel of God. His actions that day would have a very negative impact on his life and the lives of those around him. Generally, however, the heart of David was to do the work of God in God's way.

For Consideration:

- Take a moment to compare the reigns of Saul and David. How do they differ?
- David's first response in many situations seems to be to run to the Lord. How often have we made



prayer and seeking God our last resort? Why is this?

- Is God's plan the same for every situation? Why is it important that with each new situation we seek fresh counsel from the Lord?
- David sought the counsel of the Lord in when or if he was to go to battle, if he was to move, where he was to live and how he was to do battle. Are there areas of your life where you are not seeking the counsel of the Lord?
- What is the difference between serving the Lord by constantly seeking His counsel and doing what we can for God in our own wisdom and understanding?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there are areas of your life that you have not submitted to Him and his counsel.
- Ask God to help you to live in a state of constant dependence on Him and His counsel.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have chosen to do things your own way without seeking His counsel.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to guide us in every aspect of our lives.

## Chapter 13 - Jesus and the Counsel of the Father and the Spirit

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We have taken a look at the lives of some Old Testament characters and how they depended on the counsel of God in decisions they faced. The New Testament also has examples of those who sought the counsel of God in all they did. Let's begin with the example set for us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While it is quite clear from Scriptures that the Lord Jesus was fully God, He lived His life as a man in total dependence on the leading and counsel of the Father and the Spirit. This is a powerful witness to us of our need to follow in His footsteps. If the Son of God depended on the counsel of the Father and the Spirit, how much more should we!

Jesus was guided by the written counsel of God as found in the Scriptures. As we read the account of His temptation in the wilderness, there is one powerful theme that comes through. Jesus overcame the temptation of the devil by continually turning back to the teaching of Scripture. When the devil tried to tempt Him to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied:

It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."  
(Matthew 4:4)

When the devil told Him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus replied:

Again it is written, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." (Matthew 6:7)

Finally, when the devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if only He would bow down to him, Jesus answered:

Be gone, Satan! for it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." (Matthew 4:10)

How did Jesus overcome the devil in those days of temptation in the wilderness? He did so by continually turning to the Scriptures. He trusted the truth of Scripture and committed Himself to walk in absolute obedience the counsel of God as found there.

As Jesus ministered, He consistently returned to the Scriptures as the basis for His actions and responses to people. In Matthew 21:13 Jesus went to the temple and saw the merchants buying and selling. He was enraged by what He saw that day and responded by overturning the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who were selling pigeons. What was it that motivated such an angry outburst? The answer is found in Jesus' words to the money-changers and the sellers He met that day:

He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers. (Matthew 21:13)

It was the Scriptures that motivated Jesus to overturn the tables of the money-changers and cast out the merchants.

He took the Scriptures seriously. They taught that the temple was to be a house of prayer. This principle of Scripture was being defiled that day and Jesus was angered.

In Luke 10:25 a lawyer came to Jesus with a question: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Notice the response of Jesus to this man:

He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26).

To answer this critical question, Jesus pointed the man to the Scriptures, where he could find his answer in what was already written.

Jesus had a high regard for the Scriptures. Speaking to the crowd that had gathered to hear Him speak on the mountain top, Jesus said:

17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, nor a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus had full confidence in the Scriptures and taught that everything in them would be accomplished just as they predicted. In fact, He would go on in this passage to say:

19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them

will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Notice the phrase "whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments." What does it mean to relax a commandment? The Greek word used here is the word "lyo" which literally means to loosen, break up, dissolve or melt. It has to do with compromising what the Scriptures teach. Notice, in this verse, that Jesus speaks about "the least of these commandments." This is not to say that there are any commandments more important than others. What Jesus is telling us here is that even the smallest commandment was not to be compromised. Obedience to the Scriptures was to be complete. Anyone who compromised in even the smallest matter of the Scriptures was considered to be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. This shows us the significance of the written word of God for Christ.

There are many more examples of how Jesus walked in obedience to Scripture but these are sufficient to make the point. Jesus was committed to walking completely in the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures. He overcame temptation by turning to the Scriptures; He was motivated in His ministry by the Scriptures and taught absolute obedience to the written counsel of God.

Not only do we see Jesus seeking the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures but He also sought the counsel of the Spirit in everything He did. One of the first examples of this is found in Mark 1:12. We have already mentioned the temptations of Christ in this chapter. It is important to note how Jesus came to be in the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil:

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty

days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. (Mark 1:12-13)

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. In fact, Mark tells us that the Spirit "drove" Him into the wilderness. The word Mark uses is quite strong. Jesus was driven, thrust or pulled into the wilderness by the power of the Spirit of God.

As He faced His imminent death, Jesus took His disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane. There in that garden, He cried out to His Father in His hour of need. He asked His Father to take the cup from Him, but ended His prayer with the words: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). His heart was to do the will of the Father no matter the cost. His human nature was not looking forward to the pain and agony before Him, but Jesus sought the counsel and purpose of God for His life.

Jesus describes His commitment to the counsel and leading of the Father in John 5:30 when He says:

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgement is just because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Jesus did nothing without seeking the will of the one who sent Him. In everything He did, He was committed to the will of God. This required that He be in constant communion with the Father, seeking His counsel in all things.

Earlier in John 5, Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5:19)

This is a powerful verse. Jesus says that He could not do anything of His own accord. He refused to work independently of the Father. He only did what He saw the Father doing. He only did what the Father counseled Him to do. How often do we take matters into our own hands? We do all we can for God in our human strength and wisdom but we are not necessarily doing what God has asked us to do. There is a world of difference between doing only what the Father counsels us to do and doing all we can for God in our own wisdom and strength.

Jesus describes His whole purpose in ministry in John 6:38:

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Jesus did not live for Himself. He did not come out of any self-centred desire for His own glory. His heart was to do the will of the Father who sent Him.

The words Jesus spoke were the words the Father gave Him to speak:

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. (John 12:49)

Jesus had confidence before the Father that He had been faithful in proclaiming the words the Father had given Him:

For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. (John 17:8)

There are other passages that speak about the Lord Jesus only speaking the word the Father had given Him (see John 7:16; 8:26; 14:10; 15:15; 17:14). What we need to understand is that Jesus depended on the counsel of the Father as He spoke. He did not preach human ideas, but only the words the Father gave Him to speak. Everything He said came from the Father. If only we could say this about our own lives and ministries. What a difference it would make in our lives and churches if the words we spoke were only words we had received from the Father.

More than anything else in life, Jesus' desire was to do the will of the Father. Listen to what He tells His disciples in John 4:34:

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

As the Son of God, He lived all His human life under the authority of the Father.

So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. (John 8:28)



Everything Jesus did, He did under the authority of the Father and according to His counsel and will. He did nothing on His own authority. Just as Jesus lived under the authority of the Father, everything we do in life is to be under the authority and according to the purpose and counsel of the Father. If this is how Jesus lived His life, how much more do we who are sinners by nature need to follow His example and seek God's counsel in all we do? Do we dare trust our sinful nature? Do we dare trust our limited knowledge and understanding? May we take to heart the example of Christ.

Jesus, who was the perfect Son of God, taught that we must live in complete obedience to all of God's commandments. He trusted fully in the counsel of Scripture to face the temptations of the devil. He surrendered His life to the will and purpose of God in all things. He spoke only what the Father gave Him to speak and did only what He saw the Father doing. His great commitment was to die to self and seek only the counsel and purpose of God in His life and ministry. Could this be said of us?

For Consideration:

- What was Jesus' view of Scripture? How did Jesus use Scripture in His life and ministry?
- How did Jesus use Scripture to overcome temptation? What role does Scripture have in overcoming temptation today?
- Give an example of how Jesus was led by the Spirit. Are you being led by the Spirit of God in what you do?
- Jesus only said what the Father told Him to say. He only did what He saw the Father doing. What does

this tell us about the kind of relationship He had with the Father? How important is it that we have this kind of relationship as well?

- The great purpose of Jesus was to do the Father's will. Is that your purpose in life? How can you know the will of the Father for your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you more about the importance of Scripture in the Christian life. Ask God to help you to learn to walk in absolute obedience to the counsel of God as found in Scripture.
- Thank the Lord for the counsel Scripture gives.
- Ask the Lord to teach you more about how to walk in the leading of the Spirit of God. Ask Him to show you what He would have you do.
- Ask God to give you more of the attitude of Christ, whose desire was to do only the will of the Father. Ask God to help you to die to your own ideas and plans so that you can walk fully in His counsel and purpose.



## Chapter 14 - Paul and the Counsel of God

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The final example I would like to consider is that of the apostle Paul. A quick examination of the teachings of Paul shows us beyond doubt what he believed concerning the written counsel of God as found in the Scriptures. Writing to Timothy, his son in the faith, the apostle advises:

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from who you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Paul's advice to Timothy was to hold firmly to the teachings of Scripture. To hold firm to these teachings is not just about believing them but putting them into practice. Notice how Paul went on to tell Timothy that the reason he was to hold firmly to the Scripture was because they were "breathed out" by God and were useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Paying attention to the Word of God would bring fullness and equipping to do God's will.

While there is much more we could say about these verses in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, what is important to note, in this context, is Paul's view of the written counsel of God as found in Scripture. Paul was convinced that Scripture was from God and that by walking in obedience, the man or woman of God would be equipped in righteousness and every good deed God had called him or her to do.

I am afraid that sometimes we miss the significance of what the apostle is telling us here. He is telling us that by means of the Scripture we can be complete and equipped for every good work. Do you want to know what will make your church grow? Study the Scriptures. Do you want to know how you can get closer to the Lord? Take time in His Word. Do you want to see a revival in your nation? Start by learning to obey the written counsel of God. Scripture will equip you for anything the Lord has called you to do, bringing guidance in the path to victory and blessing in His presence.

Paul had a high regard for the Scriptures. He committed his life to walk in obedience to the teaching of the Word of God as his authority and guide. This was the Word he preached and was willing to die for.

Paul also believed in the importance of seeking the counsel of the Spirit of God. All evidence shows that Paul was a very intelligent man. Prior to becoming a Christian he had led a campaign against believers and was considered to be a significant leader in the Jewish faith. After coming to know the Lord Jesus, however, things would change for Paul. While his intelligence is evident in his writing, he did not depend on this human intelligence and skill in his ministry. In fact, writing to the believers in Rome, he told them: "Never be wise in your own eyes." (Romans 12:16). And to the Corinthian church he would say:

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows that thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. (1 Corinthians 3:18-20)

Paul understood that human wisdom and skill would not accomplish the glory of God and expand His kingdom. As intelligent as the apostle was, he did not base his ministry on his own understanding. As we have already seen, he submitted himself to the teaching of the Scriptures and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The conversion of Paul in Acts 9 was not an intellectual conversion. His intellect told him that it was important to stamp out Christianity. It was his dramatic encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, however, that changed his life. There on that road, the apostle heard the Lord Jesus speak to him, confronting his faulty understanding of faith. There, for the first time, he understood that his reasoning had led him down the wrong path.

Paul's salvation came through a direct revelation of Jesus. His ministry calling also was through the counsel of the Spirit. As the church gathered to pray in Antioch, listen to the description of what happened:

2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)

Paul was thrust into ministry as a result of the counsel of the Spirit of God as the church in Antioch worshipped and prayed. This was not his decision but God's. Paul simply stepped out in obedience.

Throughout his ministry, the apostle Paul constantly depended on the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit along with the clear teaching of Scripture. In Acts 13, soon after they had left Antioch, Paul was confronted by a magician named Elymas. Elymas opposed Paul and his teaching and sought to turn the proconsul of Paphos against him. Notice what took place that day:

9) But Saul who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10) and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11) And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. (Acts 13:9-11)

As Paul stood before that demonic magician, the Spirit of God filled him and counselled him in what to say.

On another occasion, the apostle Paul was in the city of Lystra when he saw a crippled man (Acts 14:8). Acts 14:9-10 tells us:

9) He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10) said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. (Acts 14)

Notice something particular about these verses. Verse 9 tells us that Paul saw that "he had faith to be made well." Faith is not something we can see with our physical eyes. What Paul saw that day was what God wanted him to see. He heard the counsel of the Spirit who revealed to Paul that it was the purpose of God to heal this man. On the basis of that counsel, Paul boldly commanded the man to get up on his feet. Paul was being led by the Spirit of God, who showed him something that his physical eyes and human intelligence could not see.

As Paul traveled on his missionary journeys, he trusted the counsel of the Spirit of God to lead him in where he was to minister. Acts 16 is a clear example of this.

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. 7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So, passing by Mysia they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:6-10)

Notice in these verses that the apostles moved from place to place. In verse 6 we see that they did not go into Asia because the Holy Spirit had forbidden it. They attempted to go to Bithynia but the Spirit of God did not allow them to go there either. They chose to go to Macedonia as a result of a vision of God given to Paul. These men had no long-range goals and agendas, except to do the will of God.



They moved as the Lord led them. They sought the counsel of the Spirit of God and walked in obedience to His ways.

When Paul was serving in Corinth, he was opposed by the Jews who rejected his message. God, however, spoke to Paul in a vision:

9) And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10) for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." 11) And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9-11)

This must have been a discouraging time for Paul as he faced so much opposition. In this time of trouble, he needed a word of encouragement from the Lord. God counselled him to remain in the city and to continue preaching. He assured him of protection and that there would be a harvest. With that word of encouragement and direction from God, Paul remained in the city for a year and a half.

In Ephesus, Paul gathered the elders of the church together and spoke to them. That day he shared with them his desire to go to the city of Jerusalem:

(22) And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, (23) except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. (Acts 20)

The apostle knew that going to Jerusalem was dangerous. He also knew that he would be imprisoned if he went. Humanly speaking, there would have been any number of reasons to advise him against this plan. Paul, however, was not guided by human wisdom but by the counsel of God. He told the elders at Ephesus that he was "constrained" by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem despite the danger. He committed himself to go in obedience to the counsel of the Spirit, and willingly chose to face affliction and imprisonment for the sake of his Saviour.

What do we learn about Paul in these verses? We see that he was committed to seeking and walking in the counsel of God as found in the Scriptures and in the leading of the Spirit. He listened to the counsel of the Spirit to know where he was to minister. He spoke the words the Spirit of God gave him to speak. He obeyed the Spirit's counsel when he was told to remain in a certain location or go to another city. He willingly walked in that counsel even when it meant certain struggle and affliction. Paul refused to trust his own human wisdom and skill and chose rather to listen to the written Word and the leading of the Spirit of God. God blessed that commitment and used Paul in mighty ways.

For Consideration:

- What was Paul's view of Scripture as the written counsel of God?
- Paul taught that Scripture equips the believer for every good work. Have we fully understood this in our day? Why is the temptation of our day to minimise the Scriptural counsel of God and seek advice elsewhere?

- While Paul was a very intelligent and capable man, what role did the counsel of God have in his life? Did he trust his own wisdom and ability?
- How important was it for Paul to trust the counsel of God's Spirit. What was he willing to face to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit?
- How important is it for you to walk in the counsel of God? What are you willing to face to be obedient to that counsel?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the Scriptures He has given us that will equip us completely in every good work He calls us to do. Ask the Lord to teach you to how to study these Scriptures.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to recognize the leading of His Spirit in your daily life. Ask God to help you not to trust in your own wisdom but in His counsel and leading.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would help you to be willing to face afflictions and struggle in order to walk faithfully in His counsel.
- Pray for your church or the ministry that you have been associated with. Ask God to help them to walk faithfully in His counsel, through the written Word and also through the Spirit.

## Chapter 15 - Some Final Words

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In this study, we have examined the teaching of Scripture concerning the necessity of walking in the counsel of God. We have also examined the role of God's counsel in the lives of several individuals. Despite the clear teaching of Scripture, however, there are still those who continue to trust in their own wisdom and resources to do the work the Lord has called them to do.

Admittedly, God has given us gifts and talents to expand His kingdom. He certainly wants us to use those gifts and talents for His glory. The problem is not in the use of our gifts but in our understanding of how they are to be used. Let's take a moment to consider Moses in this regard. At the age of eighty, the Lord came to Moses and called him to return to his people to set them free from the bondage of Egypt. Moses objected to this and in Exodus 4:1 he said:

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me, and say, "The Lord did not appear to you."

In response to this question, the Lord asked Moses what he had in his hand. When Moses told God that he had a staff in his hand, God told him to throw it on the ground. When he did, it came to life and became a serpent. There is something very important in this illustration. God was telling Moses that He was giving him a spiritual gift in the form of a staff. What we need to see, however, is that it was only as Moses obeyed God and threw his staff to the

ground that it took on life. Moses understood that this staff would be a tool God would use for His glory, but he really did not know how God wanted to use that gift. Throughout Moses' life, God would teach him how to use that staff. He would tell Moses to raise it up over the Nile River and the river would turn to blood. He would ask him to raise it up over the Red Sea and the waters would part. On another occasion, Moses would hold it up over the battleground as Israel fought and God would give them victory. God would ask him, on another occasion, to strike a rock in the desert and when he did, water would come from that rock to quench the thirst of the entire nation and their cattle. God uses our gifts, but we must learn to use them as He leads and guides. Those who want to be effective in the use of their spiritual gifts and talents must learn to seek God's counsel in how and when to use them.

In our day many of us have access to books and Bible school education. We have church programmes and conferences available to us. All these tools equip us in the task of ministry. We can see how Moses would need to be guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit but do we still need this same counsel today with all that is available to us? Let me answer this by making a number of important points.

### *Scripture is for all Ages and Cultures*

It is my firm belief that Scripture, as we have it, has not changed, nor has its authority in our lives ever diminished. The truth of Scripture is applicable to all ages and cultures. God will hold us accountable to live by the truth revealed in His Word. The principles of scripture apply not only to the people who lived in Bible times but also to our modern age. It applies to those who live in the most primitive of conditions as well as to those who live in the most advanced and educated societies.

Over the course of this study, I have tried to stick as closely as possible to Scripture. I have used Biblical examples and quoted many verses. I do not want this study to be about what I think, but about what Scripture teaches. If we believe that the Word of God speaks to all ages and all cultures with authority, then we must let the Word reveal God's ways to us. What do these authoritative Scriptures say about our need to seek God's counsel and not trust in our own wisdom? Throughout Scripture, we have seen the call of God on the lives of Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Jesus, and Paul. Each of these examples has much to teach us about what it means to follow the counsel of the Lord. These commands and examples which were given so long ago continue to speak authoritatively to our lives today. When we turn our backs on the counsel of Scripture by seeking to live and minister in our own wisdom, we grieve the Holy Spirit.

### *Human Nature Remains the Same*

The second important point we need to make here is that while we have made great advances in education, technology, and science, human nature remains the same. Man is still sinful by nature. He may have a better understanding of his universe or be able to cure diseases once thought incurable, but his nature has not changed. We struggle with sin and rebellion against God. Our news is filled with shocking stories of the outworking of this sinful nature.

The sinful nature affects all we do and say. Who among us can say that he or she lives a perfectly pure life? Who among us can claim to have thoughts that are only godly and free from sin? Even believers struggle with the sin nature. Churches are filled with conflicts. David, the man after

God's own heart, fell into temptation and yielded to his sinful desires. God tells us that our hearts are wicked. The tongue, too, is affected by the sinful nature and needs to be tamed. Can I trust my sinful nature to lead me into the centre of God's will? Can I trust it to accomplish the purpose of God? We are called to die to the old sinful nature because, by following its desires, we will surely wander from God and His purpose.

If we are to do the work God calls us to do, we must learn to die to the old, not trusting in what human nature tells us, but instead, seeking God's counsel and wisdom, for this is the only way to victory. The old nature often raises its ugly head and causes us to fall. If we are to live the life God requires, we will need wisdom that does not come from ourselves. We need God's guidance.

### *God's Ways are Much Higher than Ours*

As the world advances in technology and understanding of the universe, so does pride. There are those who have come to believe that they can cure every disease and take hold of the destiny of this world. God laughs at this pride. With all the world's achievements, we are no closer to understanding the mind of God. He defies the laws of nature. He is not bound by a human understanding of the universe.

Sometimes God asks us to do things that don't make sense to us. Who would have ever expected that throwing a staff to the ground would turn it into a serpent, or that raising that staff would part the Red Sea? Who would have ever thought that a great fish with his mouth wide open would be Jonah's passage to safety? Who could have imagined that walking around the city of Jericho seven times and blowing trumpets would have collapsed their strong

walls of defence? Who could have ever imagined that a boy's small lunch of bread and fish could have fed so many people? Can we make sense of these things? Does our science explain what happened in these occurrences? God defies logic and at times works outside of the laws of nature.

God may lead us along paths that do not make sense to us. He may place us in circumstances that are far more than we can handle, then give us the grace to do in His strength and wisdom things we thought were impossible. If you want to do the work of God in God's way, you must be prepared to cast aside your own way of thinking. He does things in ways we could never imagine. He may lead those who are the most unqualified to accomplish things they could never have dared to do. Attempting to do God's work through trusting in human wisdom and understanding is to miss the fullness of what He has in store for us. If I accept that God's ways are higher than my ways, I will also see my need of seeking His counsel in all I do.

### *Our need for God's Spirit Remains the Same*

I have often seen education and experience replace dependence on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I have been guilty at times of trying to convince people in my own wisdom rather than relying on the Spirit of God to convince them of their need of Christ. We have been tempted to trust our teaching and church programmes more than the Spirit of God. Coming out of Bible School and Seminary, I found myself trusting in my education and training more than in the Spirit of God.

God will use my education and training, but my confidence and trust must be in His Spirit more than in my training and



gifts. There was a time when I prepared messages, reviewing them and trying to find the best and most impressive way of wording my sentences to gain the greatest impact. I began to realize, however, that the power was not in how I worded my sentences, but in the Spirit of God.

I cannot convert a soul. The miracle of salvation is a work of the Spirit of God. I cannot convince men and women of sin. The work of convincing and convicting is the work of the Holy Spirit. God has given me the privilege of partnering with Him in the work, but where there is fruit, I cannot take the credit. I am merely a vessel; the power for producing fruit is in the Spirit of God alone.

We can build large churches and impressive ministries, but even the unbeliever can do that. Unbelievers all around us are building great and profitable businesses. They know how to influence people and sell their product. God does not measure success by worldly standards. Jesus had very few followers at the end of His ministry, yet He was empowered and led of the Spirit every step of the way.

We can do all kinds of good things for God, but God is looking for people who will listen to Him and obey, regardless of the result. A work may not appear successful from a human point of view, but if it is empowered by God's Spirit, then He will bring blessing. If we want to do the work God requires, it must be done in the wisdom, timing, and anointing of His Spirit.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE TWO-FOLD NATURE OF GOD'S COUNSEL

Let me conclude with this final point. Speaking to the Samaritan women, Jesus said:

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23)

Notice that Jesus speaks about worshipping God in both Spirit and truth. It is all too easy for us to get off balance as we seek the counsel of God. In the course of this study, we have spoken of the counsel of Scriptures and the counsel of the Spirit. Some believers are more comfortable with the counsel of Scriptures but know very little about the counsel of the Spirit. Other believers emphasize the counsel of the Spirit but know very little about the counsel of God's written Word. The truth of God's Word and the counsel of the Spirit must walk hand in hand. Imagine trying to walk with only one foot, or trying to ride a bicycle with the back wheel missing. If we are to be effective, we must be guided not only by the Word of God but also by the Spirit of God.

I have met people who have an excellent knowledge of the Scriptures but who are not being transformed by the work of God's Spirit. I have seen how they use that Scripture to hurt, control and manipulate. They have become judgmental and critical of anyone who does not see things in the exact same way they do. I have also heard them preach. Their sermons are intellectual and scholarly but there is no sense of the power of God's Spirit in what they say or how they say it.

I have also met individuals who were so focused on the leading of the Spirit of God that they ignored the Scriptures, sensing no need to study Scripture or immerse themselves in the truth. They have sins in their lives that Scripture warns them against but they are unwilling to do anything about them. They are continually seeking the leading of the Spirit, but are not guided by the principles of God's Word. They do not know the truth of God's word as

they should and limit the work of God's Spirit by their lack of obedience and understanding of truth.

God gives us His Spirit to help us understand His Word, and He gives us His Word to help us understand the leading of His Spirit. He gives us His Word to show us the path we are to walk and His Spirit to enable us to walk along that path. He gives us His Word to teach us the message we need to bring and His Spirit to lead us to the people who need to hear that message. We can only find balance when we seek both the truth of Scripture and the leading of the Spirit. We can only be effective when we walk in both Spirit and truth.

To be effective in ministry and to live the life God requires, we must be people who understand our need of God's counsel. We must learn to balance the study and application of Scripture with the leading and empowering of the Spirit of God. To seek the counsel of God requires that we be in constant communion with Him. It means accepting that God's ways are not my ways. Walking in the counsel of God is not about being successful by worldly standards. In fact, God may lead us along paths that appear from a worldly point of view to make no sense. Seeking God's counsel in all things means submitting to His Lordship over every aspect of our lives. It means dying to my own ideas and goals in life and surrendering completely to God and His ways.

Will you commit yourself today to be a student of the Word of God? Will you study it and seek to apply it in every part of your life? Will you recognize also that God gave His Spirit to be your counsellor and guide? Will you allow His Spirit to open the Word of God to you? Will you allow Him to impress on your heart the direction you need to take. Will you learn to listen to the leading of God's Spirit as He

shows you how to apply the principles of God's Word in very particular ways?

God's accusation against His people in Psalm 106:13 was this:

But they soon forgot his works;  
They did not wait for his counsel.  
May this not be said of us today.

For Consideration:

- What does this book teach us about our need of the counsel of God? Do we still need God's counsel in our day? Why?
- Do the ways of God always make sense to the human mind? Do His ways always appear to be successful from a human point of view?
- Can we live the life God requires by Scripture alone? Why do we need the Spirit of God?
- How does Scripture help us understand the leading of the Spirit? Why is it important that we seek both the counsel of Scriptures and the counsel of the Spirit?
- How can you learn to be more sensitive to the leading of God's Holy Spirit? Have you been spending sufficient time in the Word of God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you more of your need for His counsel in Word and Spirit. Ask Him to teach you to walk more fully in His counsel.

- Thank the Lord for how His Spirit reveals Scripture to us and shows us how God would have us apply it.
- Thank the Lord that the Scriptures teach us God's will and how to understand the leading of His Spirit.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to be involved in all our decisions and plans. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have chosen to do things your own way, ignoring or not seeking His counsel.

## INTERNET RESOURCES ON THIS TOPIC

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I offer these internet resources for you to read and listen to. All of these resources are freely available on the internet. By including them here I am not saying that I agree with everything in them. They are, however, good resources by reputable men and women of God on the topic of waiting on God's counsel.

"How To Listen to the Lord" - a sermon by John MacArthur - <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/41-20/how-to-listen-to-the-lord>

"Are You Listening To God" – A Devotional by Oswald Chambers - <http://utmost.org/are-you-listening-to-god/>

"85 Bible Verses about Listening To Go" – A list of verses on the topic of listening to God - [http://www.openbible.info/topics/listening\\_to\\_god](http://www.openbible.info/topics/listening_to_god)

How can we learn to hear God's voice? – An article in Christianity Today by Chris Webb - <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/spirituallife/hear-gods-voice.html>

"How can I hear God's voice?" (Ask Dr. Stanley) – A  
YouTube video by Dr. Charles Stanley -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4ocm31RJ7g>

"How to hear God's voice" – A YouTube video clip by Dr.  
Grant Mullen - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rK-vhsTbY3w>

## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date, thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism, and encouragement of local believers in over forty countries. Books have now been translated into Korean, Swahili, Hindi, French, Urdu, Spanish and Haitian Creole. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at <http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca>