



Christian Mentoring

JOHN MALLISON MINISTRIES

GOD'S GUIDANCE IN A CRISIS

Gordon Dicker: *Why it's sometimes difficult to know God's guidance*

From my days in theological college I had entertained the hope that one day I might undertake postgraduate study in theology. That inevitably meant study overseas. Some of my friends and mentors had urged me to undertake that study immediately after ordination, but Helen, my wife-to-be, and I both felt that we had been taking in as students for a long time. It was time for us to give out to others for a while. So after a short pastoral ministry in Australia we responded to a call to work with a church in Indonesia. After six challenging years there, I was called back to a university chaplaincy in Australia, a ministry that was equally challenging but in quite different ways. Then at last, after ten years of ministry the doors opened quite remarkably for me to begin postgraduate studies in the United States.

With a family of three young children we set out for America. Wisely we had planned a stop-over with missionary friends in Fiji to catch our breath before plunging into a totally new situation. While undertaking doctoral studies I was to minister part-time to a small church in New Jersey.

There in Fiji we encountered the greatest crisis we had ever faced. Helen became quite ill and needed to be hospitalised for some days. The forward journey needed to be delayed. Her doctor advised us to cancel our plans to go on to the U.S.A. and return to Australia. He was sure Helen would need further hospital treatment which, he said, would be beyond our means in the United States. Within a couple of days at most we had to decide what we should do.

Going back to Australia had some advantages. Medical costs would be manageable and there would be known friends to support us. On the other hand we no longer had work, house, furniture or car to return to. The fares we had paid would be wasted along with the opportunity that had opened. On the other hand going ahead had its clear dangers. We had almost no one we knew to look to for support in America. Medical costs could be considerable and caring for three young children with a sick mother could be difficult for me while meeting obligations to ministry and study.

However, the more important question for me was what was God saying to me in this situation. Had I misread the open door to postgraduate study as God's confirmation on what I was doing? Had God quite different plans for me back in Australia? During the period of chaplaincy at the university I had done some part-time lecturing in the Indonesian Department and had been offered a full-time job as lecturer. I had quite recently turned it down because it would have taken me away from full-time ministry to which I was sure I had been called, but did God now have a different call for me? How could I know how God was guiding me right now at this critical moment?

I turned first of all to Scripture and prayer, but no clarity seemed to emerge. I examined myself to see what might be standing between me and God, preventing me from hearing any word of guidance. I found a great deal. I realised that although outwardly everything had been going on as usual, in fact I had been drifting away from a really lively fellowship with Christ and a living faith in God. I recognised that, like the church at Ephesus, I had lost the love I had at first (Revelation 2:4). I needed to repent and turn again to God for a spiritual revival. I realised too that I had been neglecting my wife and family as I attended to the many activities of ministry and teaching in which I had been engaged. I needed to set right my relationship with them.

Of course, I also turned to the missionary family with whom we were staying and other missionary friends close by for counsel and prayer support. We were blessed in having such good Christian friends to turn to in our moment of desperation. How fortunate we were not to have just booked into the airport hotel for a few days! They did not say, "This is what you should



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do,” or “If I were you I would do such and such,” but the support they gave us provided the calm in which we could hear God’s guidance.

Strangely it came through words I myself had spoken not long previously. I had preached on the Miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11). Now my mind turned back to the things I had said in that sermon. Amongst other things, I had said that this miracle is a parable of the human predicament. The water is the water of human impotence, symbol of the utmost that people can do and provide, but Jesus changes it into the wine of God’s fulfillment. I said that like the hosts in that story, we often find ourselves at the end of our resources, not just in extreme situations, as in some examples I gave, but even in situations of ordinary, every day life. We all know what it is like to be at the end of our tether, to have exhausted all our ideas, our techniques and even the wisdom and patience of our friends. And then Jesus points us beyond all human resources to the God who is ever seeking us and never fails us in our time of need. I had said that we needed to accept our predicament and acknowledge our need. “We need to let go of the things we regard as securities and obediently follow Jesus, and in all the uncertainty and insecurity of following him we will find our ultimate security, peace and fulfillment.”

I asked myself what it would mean if I really took those words seriously myself at that time. When I pondered on that I knew we had to go on and I was confident that whatever troubles and difficulties lay ahead of us Christ would sustain us and God’s grace would be sufficient.

Difficulties there were aplenty, but also a wonderful provision for our needs. It was a time of renewal for us, and a time of great enrichment. There has never been the slightest doubt that by the grace of God we had made the right decision.

REFLECTION:

- 1) *Read Revelation 2:1-7. Is it possible for us to be like the church at Ephesus, doing many praiseworthy things while having abandoned the love we had at first? How can we discern whether this has happened to us?*
- 2) *Consider your relationship with your spouse and family. To what extent is that a barometer of your spiritual state?*
- 3) *Pick at random a sermon you have preached recently and look at the notes you made for it. How far are you yourself living out the word you offered to others? Ask yourself what it would mean for you to take your own words with utter seriousness.*
- 4) *Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and reflect upon Paul’s words. What can we do to insure that after proclaiming to others we ourselves are not disqualified?*

(Gordon Dicker spent six years in mission work in Indonesia. After further study in the USA he ministered in two Australian parishes before taking up an appointment to teach in a theological college. He ministers at present through preaching, pastoral counseling and writing. He is the author of Faith With Understanding. Gordon is married to Helen Ruth and they have three sons.)

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