

God Our Guide through Trials

Discussion Questions:

1. Would you rather ask for help when you really don't need it or when you really do?
2. How does God speak to His creation today?

Our Trials

Many people who become Christians or claim to become Christians do so under a false understanding of what life as a Christian looks like. Either they have been told that the Christian life is incredibly hard and is all about suffering or even worse, that it is incredibly wonderful and all about a lack of suffering. There is some truth to these statements, but neither by themselves is fully true.

[People] are converted; they experience the new birth; and they advance into their new life joyfully certain that they have left all the old headaches and heartaches behind them. And then they find that it is not like that at all. (Packer p. 245)

This misinformation is a tragic, but it does come from good intentions.

The preacher wants to win his hearers to Christ; therefore he glamorizes the Christian life, making it sound as happy and carefree as he can, in order to allure them. But the absence of a bad motive and the presence of a good one do not in any way reduce the damage which his exaggerations do. (Packer p.245)

The Christian life is not about ease of life, in fact, becoming a Christian should make life harder.

There is nothing unnatural, therefore, in an increase of temptations, conflicts and pressure as the Christian goes on with God—indeed, something would be wrong if it did not happen. But the Christian who has been told that the normal Christian life is unshadowed and trouble-free can only conclude, as experiences of inadequacy and imperfection pile in upon him, that he must have lapses from normal. (Packer p. 246)

So the Christian is in a state of understanding their walk with God as abnormal and this often turns into thoughts and feelings that he must have done something wrong to displease God. Though this could be the case. Only a sober look at oneself can expose that and if that is the case the Christian should repent and be restored, but it is not always the case. Sometimes God uses tough circumstances in our life to grow us.

Sooner or later, the truth will be that God is now exercising his child in ways of adult godliness, by exposing them to strong attacks from the world, the flesh and the devil, so that their powers of resistance might grow greater and their character as people of God

become stronger. (Packer p.248)

Sooner or later, God's guidance, which brings us out of darkness into light, will also bring us out of light into darkness. It is part of the way of the cross. (Packer p. 241)

Trouble should always be treated as a call to consider one's ways. But trouble is not necessarily a sign of being off track at all. [The Bible teaches] that following God's guidance regularly leads to upsets and distresses which one would otherwise have escaped (Packer p. 239)

[False guilt] not only produces spiritual regression and unreality; it sets them at cross-purposes with their God, who has taken from them the carefree glow of spiritual boyhood, with his huge chuckles and contented passivity, precisely in order that he may lead them in to an experience that is more adult and mature. (Packer p.248)

If this is the case, feeling guilty and repenting are not proper responses to God's trial. In fact this response will have negative consequences. They will be looking for and sadly finding failure in all that they do when that might not be the case.

Our Response

We are to trust in God because He can guide us through the trials He is using to grow us or the trials we are putting ourselves into.

Christians are God's son; and if human parents have a responsibility to give their children guidance in matters where ignorance and incapacity would spell danger, we should not doubt that in the family of God the same applies. (Packer p. 232)

Doubt is in fact a problem.

Doubt as to the availability of guidance would be a slur on the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit to his ministry. (Packer p. 233)

We receive this guidance primarily through the Bible

The idea of a life in which the inward voice of the Spirit decides and directs everything sounds most attractive, for it seems to exalt the Spirit's ministry and to promise the closets intimacy with God; but in practice this quest for superspirituality leads only to frantic bewilderment or lunacy. (Packer p. 235)

The true way to honor the Holy Spirit as our guide is to honor the holy Scriptures through which he guides us. The fundamental guidance which God gives to shape our lives is not a

matter of inward promptings apart from the word but of the pressure on our consciences of the portrayal of God's character and will in the Word, which the Spirit enlightens us to understand and apply to ourselves. (Packer p. 236)

We don't receive this guidance through our inactivity. We must:

Think

[Unwillingness to think] is false piety, super-supernaturalism of an unhealthy and pernicious sort, that demands inward impressions that have no rational base, and declines to heed the constant biblical summons to "consider." (Packer p. 237)

Plan ahead

"Think ahead" is part of the divine rule of life no less than of the human rule of the road. Often we can see what is wise and right (and what is foolish and wrong) only as we dwell on its long-term issues. (Packer p. 237)

Ask for and take advice

[Unwillingness to take advice] is a sign of conceit and immaturity to dispense with taking advice in major decisions. There are always people who know the Bible, human nature and our own gifts and limitations better than we do, and even if we cannot finally accept their advice, nothing but good will come to us from carefully weighing what they say. (Packer p. 237)

Check ourselves

We dislike being realistic with ourselves, and we do not know ourselves at all well; we can recognize rationalizations in other and quite overlook them in ourselves. "Feelings" with an ego-boosting, or escapist, or self-indulging, or self-aggrandizing base must be detected and discredited, not mistaken for guidance... We need to ask ourselves why we "feel" a particular course to be right and make ourselves give reasons. (Packer p. 237-238)

Check those we respect and follow

Even when a gifted and magnetic person is aware of the danger [of gaining domination over the minds of others] and tries to avoid it, he is not always able to stop Christian people from treating him as an angel, or a prophet, construing his words as guidance for themselves and blindly following his lead... Outstanding people are not, indeed, necessarily wrong, but they are not necessarily right, either! They, and their views, must be respected, but may not be idolized. (Packer p. 238)

Most importantly, wait

"Wait on the Lord" is a constant refrain in the Psalms, and it is a necessary word, for God often keeps us waiting. He is not in such a hurry as we are, and it is not his way to give more light on the future than we need for action in the present, or to guide us more than one step at a time. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come.

(Packer p. 238-239)

Our Failure

When we fail these trials, there is hope.

Guidance like all God's acts of blessing under the covenant of grace is a sovereign act. Not merely does God will to guide us in the sense of showing us his way, that we may tread it; he wills also to guide us in the more fundamental sense of ensuring that, whatever happens, whatever mistakes we make, we shall come safely home. Slippings and strayings there will be, no doubt, but the everlasting arms are beneath us; we shall be caught, rescued, restored. This is God's promise; this is how good He is. (Packer p. 242)

Go back to God; his restoring grace waits for you. (Packer p. 251)