



RECOVERING

DIVINE GUIDANCE

by

JOHN P. LATHROP





HAVE YOU FOUND YOURSELF LATELY GROWING INSENSITIVE TO **DIVINE GUIDANCE IN YOUR MINISTRY? JOHN LATHROP DRAWS SOME KEY PRINCIPLES** FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF THE EARLY CHURCH LEADERS WHOSE DISCERNMENT **BROUGHT THEM CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE**

DIVINE GUIDANCE When we hear these words, we typically think of God guiding us with reference to a decision that we need to make. This is certainly one aspect of what divine guidance is, but that is not what I am going to deal with in this article. In this article, I will be speaking about God directing us to a very specific ministry. The Book of Acts contains a number of examples of this type of guidance. Let us take a brief look at some of them.

PHILIP AND A LIFE-CHANGING CONVERSATION

In Acts 8, we find the account of the ministry of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8). Philip was one of the seven men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to help with the distribution to the widows (Acts 6:5). When persecution of the church erupted after the stoning of Stephen, Philip fled to Samaria and began to preach Christ (Acts 8:5). He had a very profitable ministry there: crowds listened to him, people were saved, and there were many healings, miracles, and deliverances (Acts 8:6-8). While he was in Samaria, an angel of the Lord spoke to him and gave him directions to go to a specific road (Acts 8:26). As he obeyed this direction, he met up with an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27). The

Holy Spirit then instructed him to go near the eunuch's chariot. Once near the chariot he started a conversation with the man. The man then invited Philip into his chariot. As a result of this divine guidance, Philip led the man to faith in Jesus and baptized him (Acts 8:30-38).

ANANIAS AND THE UNDESIRED VISION

In Acts 9, we read of a disciple by the name of Ananias. We don't know very much about this man. In Acts 22, as Paul is speaking, he says that Ananias was a devout observer of the law and was highly respected by the Jews in the city of Damascus (Acts 22:11-12). We do not know if this man had the ministry of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, or deacon. It is possible that he was not any one of them. All that we are told is that he was a disciple. What is significant, and commendable, about him is that he was one who could hear God when God spoke.

We do not know if he was in a time of prayer when the Lord spoke to him as we are not given any details. We are simply told that the Lord spoke to him in a vision. Ananias was open to the supernatural. The divine guidance that he was given was quite amazing in that it contained detailed directions to go to a specific place to minister to a specific person. While

many of us might be thrilled to have God speak to us with such clarity, Ananias, on this occasion, was not. He did not like the assignment that God gave him (and one can certainly understand why), but he did obey and went to minister to Saul of Tarsus as God had directed him to do. Because Ananias accepted the divine guidance and ministered to Saul, Saul was healed of his blindness and was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18).

PETER'S PREJUDICE AND THE TRANCE

In Acts 10, we find the apostle Peter receiving divine guidance. The centurion, Cornelius, had an encounter with an angel who told him to send to the city of Joppa for Peter (Acts 10:5). Cornelius obeyed

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Direction

this directive and sent two of his servants and a soldier to Joppa to bring Peter back (Acts 10:7- 8). As God was supernaturally working with Cornelius, we find that He was also dealing supernaturally with Peter. We are told that Peter fell into a trance (Acts 10:10) and that he had a vision (Acts 10:17, 19). In this vision, God was dealing with Peter about prejudice so that Peter would be responsive to the messengers sent from Cornelius when they arrived. In fact, shortly after the vision, the Holy Spirit specifically told Peter he was to go with the three men who were looking for him and that He, the Spirit, had sent them (Acts 10:19-20). Peter obeyed the divine

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PAUL'S TRIAL AND ERROR APPROACH

In Acts 16, we find God giving divine guidance to the apostle Paul. In fact, in this chapter Paul receives a number of specific leadings, two negative and one positive. Paul is on a missionary journey with some of

his companions. During the course of their journey, they attempt to go into the province of Asia, and the Holy Spirit keeps them from entering (Acts 16:6). They also tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them to go there either. God was closing doors. I take great comfort in this passage because it seems to show that even the great apostle Paul operated at times by trial and error. After receiving two experiences of negative guidance,



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the Lord then supplied Paul with some positive guidance. We are told that Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia asking him to come over and help them (Acts 16:9). The team discerned that this was where God wanted them to go. They obeyed the divine guidance, went to Macedonia, and it resulted in many people coming to faith in Christ in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16 and 17).

PICKING UP THE PIECES

As we think about these texts, there are a number of things worth noting. First, the people who received divine guidance and ministered were both apostles and non-apostles. This tells us that one need not be a person in a position of spiritual leadership in order to be supernaturally directed by God. Second, in all of these cases there is no evidence that the people that God guided asked for this guidance. God took the initiative. The people simply heard God when He spoke, whether through an

angel, vision, or by the Holy Spirit, and they responded to what He said. Third, in every case there was productive ministry that took place: people were blessed, some were saved, some were healed, and some were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The question that we need to ask ourselves is do we really expect this same kind of divine guidance today? Do we believe that God can direct us today by angels, visions, the prompting of the Spirit, dreams, and other means to just the right place at just the right time to minister to those in need?

Theologically, we would probably answer “yes” to these questions. God

is the living God (1 Tim. 3:15), and He is forever the same (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). But experientially, are we genuinely open to this kind of guidance? If we have consciously, or unconsciously, “written off” these types of divine guidance as things of the past or merely the thoughts of the spiritually unstable, let us repent. God has worked in these ways in the past, and He can do it again; therefore, let us listen for and anticipate such guidance as it produces very effective ministry.



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