

A CLOUD BY DAY, A FIRE BY NIGHT



Finding and Following God's Will for You

A. W. TOZER

COMPILED AND EDITED BY JAMES L. SNYDER



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And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Exodus 13:21–22

Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

Exodus 23:20

Introduction

A very important theme in Dr. A.W. Tozer's ministry was the subject of God's will for each of our lives. He wrestled with it from the time he was a new Christian until the day he passed into eternity.

This book, drawn from a sermon series Dr. Tozer delivered just before leaving his successful church in Chicago, is not a manual on how to find God's will for your life in five easy steps. Tozer abhorred that sort of thing. There's no such thing as "easy steps" in discovering God's will for your life.

When Tozer preached these sermons, the people of Southside Alliance didn't know his plans, but certain developments were leading Tozer to end his thirty years at Southside and accept a call to pastor a church in Toronto. I'm sure he wrestled with the decision for a long time.

The series, titled "An Angel before Thee," also holds significance because Tozer shared a number of personal stories, including how God led him from Indianapolis, where he was

a successful pastor, to Southside Alliance, which was rather new at the time.

Central to Tozer's teaching is what he liked to call the deeper life. This is a life that is spiritually deeper than the average Christian's. He bemoans the downgrading of Christianity. The Christianity he was committed to is a progressive upgrading of our walk with Jesus Christ.

Tozer believed that living the Christian life is more than being saved by God and then waiting to go to heaven. Several times he would tell his Chicago congregation something like, "If everyone today were physically what they were spiritually, many of you would be wearing diapers and sucking your thumbs." It always got a laugh, but he had a point.

Throughout this book he discusses the battles Christians face almost every day. He frames these battles as taking place in Canaan, as he calls it—the land of promise where we are living today. There are some who dismiss the idea that a Christian will face battles or need spiritual warfare. Yet the reality is we all experience battles according to the level of our progress in Canaan. In chapter 15, Tozer shows the connection between battles and blessings. He points out that you can't have a blessing until you have experienced a battle. But the purpose of the battle is to get us to the blessing. Tozer explores another seeming dichotomy in chapter 22, where he talks about the benefits that can come from discouragement. Only Tozer could look at something so negative and find positives from a spiritual point of view.

Anybody who has ever listened to one of Dr. Tozer's sermons knows of his great love for hymns. Each chapter begins with a prayer by Tozer and concludes with a verse or two from a hymn that reflects that chapter's topic.

The primary thing I believe Tozer would want the reader to get out of this book is simply this: Never give up; never quit.

So much in life can bring us to that point of discouragement where all we want to do is quit, especially when God's will for us is unclear. For Tozer, quitting was not an option. You will read how, as a young man, Tozer felt God's leading to become a pastor. He lacked the typical qualifications an ordination committee would require, but he was determined and had faith that it was God's will. He learned years later that many of the committee members did indeed question his qualifications, but they also saw his heart for ministry and made ordination possible. I love that story.

This book is about more than finding God's will for your next step or decision in life—it is about following His will to the end. With only our human resources, following God would be impossible. But when we cross that line into the deeper life, we enter into the grace of God that enables us to do His will.

1

Seeking Direction



Heavenly Father, I come before Thee yearning to know and desiring to trust Thee. May my heart be open to whatever Thou hast for me so I can be where Thou wants me to be. May I yield to Thine Angel before me and come to the place Thou desirest for me. Keep me under the cloud by day and the fire by night. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thirty-two years ago, at a crucial and painful hour in my life, God began speaking to me about His will for me. I had been the pastor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Indianapolis for several years, and God was blessing and using me in wonderful ways. The church was growing and making an impact on the community, and I had no desire whatsoever to leave Indianapolis.

Then I began getting letters from the Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Chicago inviting me to candidate to be their next pastor. I had no interest in moving and threw the letters away. Yet God began speaking to me about Chicago, though I wasn't sure why. Finally, I decided I would go to preach there on a Sunday, but pastoring the church was out of the question. Like Calvin Coolidge once famously pronounced, I informed the good people there after preaching, "I do not choose to run."

But driving back to Indianapolis I found myself in an agony of heart-searching prayer. God was speaking to my heart, and I did not know what I was to do. I truly was in a spiritual dilemma.

When God speaks to us, He does so in a way that opens up to us His plan for our lives. I thought God's plan for me was to stay in Indianapolis. Everything was going great. The church was growing, and our influence was felt throughout the city.

That morning in Chicago I preached on Exodus 23:20: “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.” I understood the primary historical meaning of the passage. Certainly I could preach a sermon on the passage and then walk away.

God, however, would not allow it.

I saw and felt the Scripture’s direct meaning for me. God was speaking to me, a spiritual son of Abraham, from His covenant with Abraham. The spiritual laws were in effect and God was reaching out to me in this. It was applicable to me as an individual, but also to the church in their earthly pilgrimage.

I firmly believe that God is speaking today to the church at large and giving us commands based on His covenant with Abraham. God is directing His people in the way He wants them to go. Often it is not the way we want to go, but as we yield ourselves to God, He opens doors and leads us forward. And so the church’s responsibility is to hear that voice and then obey that voice.

After more heart-searching prayer, I finally decided to accept the pastorate in Chicago. It was a big change for me. The church was relatively new, with little heritage to speak of. I came in as a country boy and began my ministry in the big city.

I am here to testify that when God spoke to me about Chicago and I responded in the affirmative, He fulfilled His covenant with me in spite of my personal failures. I will be the first to acknowledge that I have had many failures. You cannot live very long and not accumulate them. But in His graciousness, God uses us, failures and all, in such a way that He receives glory.

God has been moving in our congregation and opening up opportunities for us to fulfill His will in our lives. Nearly twenty-five young people have gone out as missionaries, serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Another ten or so have become pastors and preachers, and our congregation has encouraged them to fulfill God's calling on their lives. In addition, we have a large number of musicians and music directors and home missionaries. I also rejoice in how God has been financially blessing our interest in foreign missions, stirring our hearts to give sacrificially unto Him.

***In His graciousness,
God uses us, failures
and all, in such a way
that He receives glory.***

When we allow God's Word to go beyond our ears and into our hearts, it stimulates us to do that which God is calling us to do.

Every one of us will face challenges in life, individually and in our churches. Our congregation is being affected by the steady trend of industry and people moving to the suburbs. The neighborhood has deteriorated around us, and crime is making it hard to have any kind of an evening service. The crippling of our public transportation system has also kept many people from coming to our church. None of these things could have been foreseen twenty years ago. Our focus was and is on obeying God and responding to His voice.

Travelers going through an unfamiliar land need to hear a clear word—a voice of wisdom—to guide them. Otherwise they will wander in a hopeless sense of lostness.

To avoid wrong turns, we need to base every decision on the authority and wisdom of God's Word. My aim for this book is to help us understand this clear word from God. What is God saying? Where can I hear this voice that's going to give me direction throughout my life?

It is the voice of God that will guide our way through our personal Jordan rivers and into the promised land. Without that voice of God, our Jordan will never open up, and we will never get across.



Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.

William Williams (1717–1791)