

THE SHEPHERD'S TRAIL MARKERS

How the Shepherd guides His own (Part 2)

Last month we considered two **trail markers** that God uses to give us guidance in the decision making process: **(1) His Written Word**, and **(2) Prayer**. This month we will consider three additional ones.

(3) God may use the *trail marker* of godly counsel to give us guidance.

There are two types of counsel available;

(a) Worldly counsel from your flesh as described in Isaiah 30:1-2: ***“Ah, stubborn children,” declares the Lord, “who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction”*** and Romans 7:18-19, ***“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want”*** or from unbelievers as described in Psalm 1:1a, ***“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked”*** and Proverbs 4:14, ***“Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil men.”***

(b) Godly counsel from wise, trustworthy, mature, and seasoned individual believers as described in Proverbs 15:22: ***“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”***

Select individuals who will listen carefully, think objectively, and answer slowly wanting only what God wants for you. It is usually a good sign if they want to take time to think and pray before giving you guidance.

(4) God may use the *trail marker* of circumstances to give us guidance.

God is sovereign and He controls all our circumstances. He sometimes uses circumstances as a **trail marker** to reveal his will. One **trail marker** He may use is an open door (1 Corinthians 16:8-9) or He may use a closed door (Acts 16:6-8). At other times He may use unexpected or unlikely circumstances at just the right time to give us guidance. Use caution with these **trail markers** because sometimes what appears to be an open door may not be the open door He has for you. Likewise, a closed door may not really be closed, but a marker to test or strengthen your faith for what lies behind the door. Another **trail marker** may be the practice of putting out a fleece and asking God to give you guidance directly through an event agreed upon before it happens (Judges 6:36-40).

(5) God may use the *trail marker* of supernatural revelations through angels, dreams, or visions to give us guidance.

God has always used dreams and visions to communicate with His people. He used visions in the Old Testament to reveal His plan, further His plan, and put His people in places of influence: Abraham (Genesis 15:1), Jacob (Genesis 28:10), Joseph (Genesis 37:1), Samuel (1 Samuel 3), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5) and Daniel (Daniel 2:4).

In the New Testament, He used visions to provide information that was unavailable elsewhere. He used visions and dreams to identify Jesus and establish His church: Zacharias (Luke 1), Joseph (Matthew 1), Ananias (Acts 9), Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10), Paul (Acts 16, 18; 2 Corinthians 12) and John (Revelation).

With the completion of the Bible and it being readily available to us, we here in the United States seldom experience God using dreams and visions to communicate His guidance to us. However, He certainly can communicate this way should he choose to do so. In foreign countries, where the Bible is seldom available and never read, God is using dreams and visions to call people to Himself. More than one million Iranian Muslims have become Christians in the last three decades through dreams and visions.

However, when we have a decision to make, knowing **God's Word**, having a strong **prayer life**, seeking **godly counsel**, and considering our **circumstances** are the **trail markers** we should normally follow.

What If God Doesn't Seem To Provide Clear Direction?

If you have a pure heart with the lines of communication open, and you have considered the **trail markers** along the way, but still haven't received clear direction, God may be telling you “No” or “Not now.” God's timing is always going to be better than ours. Don't seek shortcuts. They may seem attractive, but short-circuit God's best for you. In addition, don't depend on circumstances alone as the **trail marker** God is using to guide you. You may feel pressure from people, pride, politics or finances to take the path of least resistance. However, if you rush the process you may miss God's best.

What If all The Choices Are Good Ones?

There may be situations where you have several trails you could take and they all seem to be good, godly, and would be pleasing to the Lord. It may be a time when God is showing you His confidence in your decision making ability and He just wants you to use the common sense, wisdom, and experience He has already provided. You may want to ask yourself if one trail will draw you closer to the Lord than another, or will it lead you away? He created us with common sense and He expects us to use it.

Remember, God rarely provides us a Google road map customized to our individual lives, but He does provide **trail markers** to guide us. Two special verses to memorize if you haven't already done so and to repeat to yourself during the decision making process are:

Joshua 1:9 – ***“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”***

Proverbs 3:5-6 – ***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”***

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