

Prayer and Guidance  
Part 2: Navigating the Maze  
Some thoughts on how God guides us  
(By Lyndall Bywater)

Maybe I'm showing my age, but one of the most exciting shows on TV when I was little was 'The Crystal Maze'. It had an incredible blend of being simultaneously gripping, heart-stopping and deeply frustrating! It should have been so easy to 'steer' your blindfolded team mate through the maze, making sure they stepped on all the right squares and none of the wrong ones, and piloting them safely to the prize at the end ... and yet they almost never could! Either the poor blindfolded adventurer would get confused because several of the team would shout different things all at once, or else said adventurer would prove incapable of following the simplest and clearest instructions, no matter how many people shouted them.

As I got older, the show proved less gripping, but the format did strike me more and more as a very good analogy of how we so often handle God's guidance. It's as though we see ourselves as intrepid adventurers, setting out for the prize of life fulfilment, yet somewhat hampered by being blindfolded so that we can't see where on earth we're going, and deafened by so many voices that we don't stand a chance of working out which is God's. Every life decision feels like stepping gingerly on to a new square, frantically hoping it's not the one that disqualifies us from the game. It's no wonder we get stressed about guidance!

'The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."' (Psalm 32:8,9, *New Living Translation*)

It would seem God isn't too keen on the 'remote control' approach to guidance either. He doesn't want us harnessed up like mules, waiting to be cajoled in the right direction. A read-through of Psalm 32 leaves you with the strong impression that what God wants first and foremost is relationship. He promises to guide us, but he won't do it by shouting instructions from afar, or by pushing buttons on a heavenly console. He will do it by walking right beside us.

Not achievement but identity

At times of decision, many of the questions we ask are about doing. What should we do next? What is the next task for us to complete in God's service. Yet, God seems far more preoccupied with being than doing. He puts our identity before our accomplishments.

It's not unusual to ask God a 'doing' question, and to get a 'being' reply. The question: 'What should I study at university?' receives the response: 'You are precious to me, and I have made you to be someone who brings light to others'.

(Great! Is that meant to point towards being an electrician then?)

God isn't just trying to be difficult. He is affirming that our first goal in life should be to know and love him, and our second should be to grow more and more into the person he created us to be. If we do that, then the details will fall into place.

If in doubt, be yourself. Use to the full the gifts he's given you, and spend time with him, so that his Spirit can fan into flames the potential which he's stored up in you. The being will then spark the doing.

Not recipe but possibility

I've often been known to comment to God that a recipe for life would be the simplest way forward. Why not pop a slip of paper in a baby's hand, just before his or her exit from the womb, with a step-by-step plan for the years ahead. The answer is, of course, that God is far more creative than I am. A step-by-step plan would imply that there's only one set of right choices; one pathway across the 'good' squares, with deviation landing you on a 'bad' square for instant disqualification.

The God who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) has created each of us with immense possibility. There are thousands of pathways our lives could take, and thousands of ways we could use the gifts he's given us. Since his presence is with us every moment of every day, even the impossible stands within our reach. He doesn't want to simply deliver a set of directions; he longs to journey with us into the vast potential of all that we could become.

How wide is your horizon? Are you just after a simple set of directions, or are you ready to begin some 'sanctified dreaming' – colluding with God's Spirit, to imagine and envision the possibilities of where your life could take you? It may leave you with more questions, but it will also leave you more deeply dependent on God, and more enthused and energised for the journey ahead.

'unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord' (Psalm 32:10b, *New Living Translation*)

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