

GUIDANCE AS INTERPERSONAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

Divine guidance takes place with people; hence, it includes choices, thinking, feelings, and other personal factors with both God and people. God does not make all our choices for us; he treats us like friends more than like slaves. Pushing the idea that God has a special plan for each person may be nothing more than (1) the old self-centeredness in religious garb; self-centeredness is not interpersonal. (2) It may be a kind of laziness, because people do not want to put out significant effort in deciding or taking responsibility for their decisions. Submitting to God does not mean being submissive. “Super-spirituality” is not interpersonal spirituality.

Interpersonalism applied to guidance means that we have a sense of assistance while taking responsibility. Scripture provides the primary content for guidance. The general will of God for all people establishes the beginning of his specific will for me; so we study to know it. God shapes our destiny indirectly through circumstance, other people, and sheet presence; so we pray to activate special intervention. We are aided by the mature judgment of other Christians; so we fellowship with the faithful to gain encouragement and advice. Our direct relationship with God itself has a directing and motivating effect on our life choices; so we practice the spiritual exercises to keep God-consciousness at a functional level. Thomas Chisholm, in “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” aptly wrote, “*Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide.*”

God’s will to guide includes prescription and permission. Inasmuch as both guide, they are interpersonal because guidance is an interpersonal thing. “Prescriptive” refers to what begins with God; “permissive” refers to what begins elsewhere. In narrowing reference, nature, providence, scripture, and miracle provide prescriptive guidance. Providence is interpersonal because God intervenes to assist persons. Permissive begins with people and proceeds with the attitude “*if the Lord will*” (James 4:13-15; Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7). Either way it is God’s will, hence, his guidance. God “passes on” any choice a person makes, and his allowing means choosing to allow.