

***Every Life Is a Plan of God*** by J. Oswald Sanders, Discovery House Publishers, 1992 (55 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

### **1. Our Lives Are Devised by God**

The circumstances surrounding our lives are not accidental, but devised by an all-wise and loving Father, who knows how best we can glorify Him and yet at the same time achieve our own highest good. (Page 13)

### **2. Divine Guidance is No Accident**

Divine guidance is neither mechanical nor automatic, for God does not treat us as robots but as intelligent beings. When He guides, He does it in such a way as to lead us into a wholesome maturity and a growing likeness to Christ. (Page 13)

### **3. The Lord Has a Plan for Us**

No detail of heredity, no peculiarity of temperament, no handicap in environment escapes His compassionate eye. With infinite wisdom and sympathetic understanding He plans for us in love: "This is what the Lord says: "*I know the plans I have for you*" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:10-11) Page 14)

### **4. Poem for Guidance**

I am not strong, I am not wise,  
And many a path before me lies  
Where I might go astray;  
So when I have to make a choice,  
Help me to listen for your voice,  
And then obey. (Page 17)

### **5. Secrets Are Gods Revealed Things Are Ours**

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law' (Deuteronomy 29:29).

This verse enshrines both encouragement and warning. Encouragement, because it assures us that our God has revealed in the Scriptures everything necessary to enable one to live a godly and joyous life. Warning, lest we become presumptuous and arrogantly intrude into areas that are peculiarly God's, and which He has not been pleased to reveal. (Page 17)

## **6. Omniscience holds no conference**

At a time when I was facing an important decision, I came across this pungent paragraph from the pen of Samuel Chadwick, the great Methodist preacher. It had a special message for me.

We are moved by the act of God;  
Omniscience holds no conference;  
Infinite authority leaves no room for compromise;  
Eternal love offers no explanations;  
The Lord disturbs us at will;  
Human arrangements are ignored;  
Business claims put aside.  
We are never asked if it is convenient.

So we can expect that sometimes we may have to be content to await the future explanation of the mystery of God's dealings. (Page 18)

## **7. Carey's Fire**

William Carey and his colleagues in Serampore, India, faced as devastating a mystery as anyone could imagine. A fire ravaged their buildings which housed their printing presses, destroying ten years of translation work on the Scriptures. Dictionaries, grammars and manuscripts in several languages which no money could buy, compiled laboriously and at great cost, went up in flames. How could (he sovereign Lord allow such a thing to happen? Mystery indeed!

What were the reactions of those affected by the tragedy? They experienced the blessedness of which Jesus spoke to the disciples of John the Baptist when He said, 'Blessed is he who takes no offence at me' (Matthew 11:6, RSV).

Carey's first sermon after the fire had as its text: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). It had two points:

1. It is God's right to dispose of us as He chooses.
2. It is man's duty to acquiesce in His will.

Marshman, his colleague, referred to the calamity as:

another leaf of the ways of Providence, calling for the exercise of faith in Him whose word, firm as the pillars of heaven, has decreed that 'All things work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28). Therefore be strong in the Lord.

The tragedy turned into triumph. Fuller, who was Carey's friend and representative in Britain, wrote to him:

The fire has given your undertaking a celebrity which nothing else, it seems, could, a celebrity that makes me tremble. . . . The **promptitude** with which you have been able to repair the loss of your types and renew your printing of the Scriptures is as extraordinary as if we had repaired your pecuniary loss in a week.<sup>2</sup>

All is of God that is, and is to be;  
And God is good! Let that suffice us still;  
Resting in childlike trust upon His will,  
Who moves to His great ends,  
Unthwarted by the ill.

(J. G. Whittier) (Page 19-20)

### **8. Our Wisdom is too Limited**

More than human wisdom is required if we are to reach correct decisions in the complex situations and relationships of today's world. Our own wisdom is too limited, and our long vision too defective." (Page 22)

### **9. God Speaks to Us**

When **Dr E. Stanley Jones**, eminent missionary to India, was asked the question, 'Does God really guide?' he replied: 'It would be strange if He didn't! He who made the tongue and gave us the power to communicate with one another, shall He not speak and communicate with us?'<sup>3</sup> (Page 25)

### **10. A.W. Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy***

In his classic, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer underlined the importance of a correct conception of God and the peril of false ideas of Him.

A right conception of God is basic, not only to systematic theology, but to practical living as well. . . . I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts of God.'<sup>4</sup> (Page 27)

### **11. God Opens Doors No-One Closes Them**

We must not interpret every delay or seemingly closed door as the end of the matter. What he opens, no-one can shut; and what he shuts no-one can open (Revelation 3:7). (Page 33-34)

### **12. The Cross is the Sufficient Answer**

'The cross assures us of God's intention. Creation assures us of the sufficiency of His wisdom and skill.' (Page 38)

### **13. We Must Be Willing to Do Anything For God**

A yieldedness to the will of God is not demonstrated by some one particular issue: it is rather having taken the will of God as the rule of one's life. To be in the will of God is simply being willing to do His will without reference to any particular thing He may choose. It is electing His will to be final, even before we know what He may wish us to do. It is therefore not a question of being willing to do some one thing; it is a question of being willing to do **anything**, when, where and how it may seem best in His heart of love. It is taking the normal and natural position of child-like trust which has already consented to the wish of the Father even before anything of the outworking of His wish is revealed.,<sup>12</sup> (Lewis Sperry Chafer) (Page 46)

### **14. God's Method of Preparing a Man For His Service**

Writing of God's method of preparing a man for His service, Brengle's biographer wrote:

When He wants a Moses, he allows him to obtain his training and develop his legal sense in a worldly court. When he wants a Paul, He directs his ambitions along paths that give him a background of education, culture, pharisaism even. And when He wants a Brengle, He fills his soul with aspirations which, though at first they point to a selfish and carnal end, drive him onward toward the development of those powers which, transformed will make of him what He desires.<sup>13</sup> (Page 51)

### **15. We Have a Supernatural Guide**

We have no supernatural cloud to guide us, nor do we need one, for we have a supernatural though invisible Guide who knows the way and goes before. 'The steps of a good man are from the Lord, and establishes him in whose way he delights,' said I, David (Psalm 37:23). And Jesus promised, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness' (John 8:12). (Page 55)

### **16. Moses Moved the Encampment by Silver Trumpet**

We may well wonder how Moses and his aides managed to synchronise the movements of such a vast encampment. The answer is, their movements were regulated by the blasts of silver trumpets: "The Lord said to Moses, "Make two trumpets of hammered silver and use them for calling the community together, and for having the camps set out'" (Numbers 10:1-2).

It was the responsibility of the sons of Aaron to monitor the movements of the cloud, and to order the people forward by blasts on the silver trumpets. If they failed to obey the summons, they forfeited the protection of the Lord. Not to move when

the trumpet sounded would be tantamount to rebellion against the Lord. What has this to say to us?

**There is a lesson here for those in leadership.** We set as watchmen to relay the will of God to our people, and to detect and foil the approach of the enemy. (Page 56)

### **17. Putting Out the Fleece**

It is true that many have put out their **fleece** (the K, author among them), and have received a positive response from a gracious God, and doubtless many more will do the same. But when all is taken into account, was that experience not God's compassionate response to an unfounded doubt, rather than a response to Gideon's faith? And 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Hebrews 11:6. (Page 59)

### **18. Gideon Didn't Need Guidance**

In reality, Gideon was not seeking guidance in the strict sense. *He already knew what God's will was.* The command was clear and unequivocal. He recognized this by his statements - 'as you said', and 'as you have promised' (Judges 6:36-37). When God gives a command, no further guidance is necessary. (Page 59)

### **19. Never Play With Temptation**

Parleying with temptation is always fraught with danger. The serpent should be killed, not stroked. (Page 61)

### **20. Don't Overlook Simple Duty**

In considering avenues along which guidance may come to us, we should not overlook the claims of simple duty. **Thomas Carlyle** gave a sage piece of advice in this context: 'Do the duty that lies nearest to you which you know to be your duty. Your second duty will already have become clearer. (Page 64)

### **21. Martin Luther Statement on Guidance**

Obedience to the claims of duty will do much to clarify the confusion of thought that often beclouds the guidance process. As **Martin Luther** said, 'We don't need to look beyond the obvious responsibilities of our vocation for guidance. We should assume that its details are a daily sermon.' *is our duty to do our duty. That simple fact takes care of a large area of life for which no further guidance need be sought.* (Page 65)

### **22. The Holy Spirit Never Leads Us To Disobey God's Word!**

**Dr R. A. Torrey** relates that a man came to him and said that God was leading him to marry a certain woman. He described her as a devoted Christian. They had

been greatly drawn to one another, and felt that God was leading them to be married.

'But you already have a wife,' said the evangelist. 'Yes,' was the reply, 'but we have never lived happily and we have not lived together "for years.'

'But that does not alter the case,' the evangelist replied. '*God in His Word has told us distinctly the duty of the husband to the wife*, and how wrong it is for a husband to divorce his wife and marry another, except in the case of adultery.'

'Yes,' responded the man, 'but the Holy Spirit is leading us to one another.'

'Whatever spirit is leading you to marry one another, it is certainly not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of the evil one. The Holy Spirit never leads anyone to disobey the Word of God. (Page 66)

### **23. Condition of Guidance**

The Scriptures prescribe no inflexible or set of rules to be followed in order to qualify for being admitted into the mystery of the will of God. But there is an attitude of heart and mind that is a prerequisite to guidance. 'He guides the **humble** in what is right and teaches them his way' (Psalm 25:9). The '**humble**' who thus qualify, are those who are distrustful of themselves, who desire to be taught, and are prepared to follow the divine leading whatever the cost. **The basic attitude is submissiveness**'. There is no divine guidance for those not willing to do God's will. (Page 67)

### **24. Divine Will Depends on Human Will**

Knowledge of the divine will is dependent on the attitude of the human will. (Page 67)

### **25. Advice Not Paid For By Scotsman**

The story is told of an old Scotsman who went to his lawyer to ask advice on a certain matter. After hearing the problem, the lawyer gave his opinion. The old Scot said, 'Thank you,' and was walking away.

'Wait a minute!' said the lawyer. 'You have not paid my fee!'

'Your fee?' queried the Scot.

'Yes, for my advice.'

'But I'm not taking it!' rejoined the client. (Page 68)

## **26. Guidance Received by The Holy Spirit**

**Prayer directed by the Holy Spirit is the principal means of obtaining guidance.** Through prayer we can check any guidance we may appear to have received. Where there is no true praying in the Spirit, there will be little experience of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Page 87)

## **27. John Wesley on Guidance**

The wise John Wesley said, 'God generally guides me *by presenting reasons to my mind for acting in a certain way.*' Notice that he did not say '*by presenting feelings to my heart.*' Emotion has its place, but should never be allowed to be a paramount factor in guidance. (Page 88)

## **28. The Exercise of Commonsense**

If we are 'walking in the spirit' and in communion with Christ, our commonsense decisions in the ordinary duties of life will most likely prove to be the will of God, unless there is a distinct inward check of the Holy Spirit, such as Paul and Barnabas experienced en route to Troas. If we saturate our minds in the Scriptures, our decisions will be the product of a Spirit-illumined and guided mind. (Page 89)

## **29. Beware of Passive & Blank Minds When Seeking Guidance**

We should beware of any teaching which advocates a passive and blank mind when seeking guidance. That smacks more of demonism and medium-ship than divine leading. (Page 89)

## **30. Every Decision Effects & Shapes Your Entire Life (Mott)**

In these days, a man cannot afford to make any mistakes. Every decision a man makes shapes his entire after life. As I look back over the few years I have been making decisions, I can see how true it has been in my case.

I have tried to give this question fair examination as well as much prayer that my decision may accord with God's will. That is all I want to be assured of- that I am acting in accordance with His unerring plans.

There are two things I desire to convince you of in my life. First, that I do not jump at a decision, but consider it from all sides, getting advice from every reliable source, and then reaching from the conflicting opinions my own decision.

Second, that I am not led by others, even by a large majority, unless they happen to be in harmony with my standards of decision:

- (a) The Holy Spirit, who guides by cooperation with
- (b) The Scriptures
- (c) Reason, not feeling

- (d) Conscience
- (e) Providential events.

I never regretted a decision I made by these guiding standards. If you have them on your side, what matters it if the whole world is against you for God is on your side? And if God be for you, who can be against you. (John R. Mott) (Page 90-91)

### **31. The Value of Counsel**

In my early years I had little hesitation in taking decisions unilaterally, but I soon learned the wisdom of Solomon's proverb: 'Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance' (Proverbs 20:18). I have learned the value of dialogue and consultation, for it stimulates thought, broadens vision and gives deeper insight into the issues at stake.

But advice is only as good as the one who gives it, so one should give careful thought to the question of whom to consult. (Page 99-100)

### **32. Commit to The Lord & He Will Guide Us in Line With His Plan**

When we trustfully commit our way to the Lord as we are urged to do (Psalm 37:5) we can confidently expect Him to order the circumstances, and to guide us to opportunities that are in line with His plan. (Page 103-104)

### **33. The Lord Doesn't Always Plan Problems but Sometimes Permits Them**

The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it.

Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord's permission and therefore all is well.

He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good. (Page 105)

### **34. Determining God's Will over Our Own Desires**

If we are deeply **involved emotionally** in the alternatives we are considering, it is not at all difficult to project our subconscious desires as the voice of God. How are we to distinguish between the two? Here are some suggested tests that might clarify the issue:

1. Discard the myth that if you desire something, God most likely does not.
2. Believe God's promise that He will give light to those who are willing and purpose to do His will, no matter what it is (John 7:17).
3. Ensure that the course you desire to pursue is biblically legitimate and according to the tenor of Scripture.

4. Does it run counter to your primary and obvious duty?
5. Does the counsel of competent counselors support your plan?
6. In making your decision, did you ask in faith for the wisdom promised in James 1:5?

If your desire passes these tests, then you have good grounds for believing it to be the will of God for you. (Page 106-107)

### **35. Test for Abuse of Spiritual Gifts**

Spiritual gifts can be abused. Their primary use is for the upbuilding of the church. The test of any such gift is: Is it resulting in the upbuilding, enrichment and unity of the church? (Page 108)

### **36. John Wesley Advised “Do Not Believe Every Spirit”**

**John Wesley** gives a word of advice concerning our attitude to such manifestations: 'Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions or revelations to be from God. They *may* be from Him, they *may* be from the devil. Therefore do not believe every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God.' (Page 116)

### **37. God's Method Is Not Mystical**

In our times, when so many are turning to the Eastern mystical religions for guidance, special care should be exercised. Mystical visions should not be sought. God's method is not mystical, but He communicates with us through **mind** and **spirit**. It is perilously easy to engage in self-hypnotism. (Page 116)

### **38. God Communicates to Us by Prayerful Study of Scripture**

We learn God's will mainly not by impulses and impressions, but by the prayerful study of the principles of Scripture, and by their intelligent application to the case in hand. (Page 123)

### **39. Paul's Missionary Ministry Planning**

Paul's missionary journeys evidenced two things -a combination of careful strategic planning, and sensitivity to the Spirit's leading or prohibition. (Page 129)

### **40. Experience & Redirection Experience of Many Missionaries**

Experiences of restraint and redirection have been the experience of many missionaries in succeeding centuries. **Dayid Livingstone** attempted to go to China, but God redirected him to Africa. **Adoniram Judson** had India in view as his sphere of service, but the Spirit had chosen Burma. **William Carey** wanted to serve in Polynesia, but God directed him to India.

When we are already in action and need to be directed to the next sphere of service, it is not unreasonable for us to expect somewhat similar (if less dramatic) redirection to the place of God's choice.. (Page 131)

#### **41. Mission-field Greater Need Than the Church**

Bishop Stephen Neill, who is one of the world's best informed missiologists, had this to say to a group of ordinands in this connection:

I place on record my conviction that the needs of the mission-field are always far greater than the needs of the church at home; that no human qualifications, however high, render a man or woman more than adequate for missionary work; that there is no other career which affords such scope for enterprise and creative work; and that in comparison with the slight sacrifice demanded, the reward is great beyond all measure. (Page 138)

#### **42. Facts are the Finger of God**

It has been said that 'facts are the finger of God', and these are indisputable facts. If so, it is a reasonable presumption that if a local community is reasonably served with the gospel, the claims of that area should be secondary to those of the area that is inadequately served. This was one of the lessons Jesus was emphasising in the parable of the one lost sheep, and the ninety-nine safe in the fold.

Paul made two strong statements in this connection: 'My constant ambition has been to preach the gospel *where the name of Christ was previously unknown*' (Romans 15:20, PHILLIPS, italics supplied).

I Feel myself under a sort of universal obligation. *I owe something to all men, from cultured Greek to ignorant savage*' (Romans 1:14, PHILLIPS, italics supplied).

I have only one candle to burn.  
I would rather burn it  
where people are in darkness  
than in a land flooded with light. (Page 139-140)

#### **43. Old Age Can Be a Positive Factor in Selecting Missionary Candidates**

Experience in recent years has proved that a certain chronological age is not always a disqualifying factor. **An older person** who is highly motivated may very well master another language and adapt to an alien culture more successfully than a younger person. Maturity counts, and capacity for growth does not cease at any particular age. (Page 141)

#### **44. What is a call?**

There have been many definitions of a **call**, but one which avoids the danger of over-subjectivity is this: 'A call is a conviction that steadily deepens when faced with the

facts of the case, so that sooner or later it becomes a matter of obedience or disobedience' (L. T. Lyall). (Page 142)

#### **45. Guidance from the Lord With My Willingness Was Received**

In the course of more than sixty-five years of Christian work in the homelands and overseas, I have had many opportunities to prove the Lord in the matter of guidance. I have not always been sensitive and obedient to the Lord's leading, I regret to say. **But I can say with truth that there has never been a time when I have sought guidance from the Lord with total willingness to do it when He revealed it, that I have not received clear and satisfying guidance from Him.** The problem often was to bring my will to accept God's will without reservation. But when I capitulated and said, 'Lord, I'm willing to be made willing,' He performed the miracle.

I am sure I would never have ventured to go to the mission field at the age of fifty-two to an important post had I not experienced a very clear and definite sense of call. (Page 144)

#### **46. Selwyn Hughes Message on Mary, Jesus' Mother**

An interesting case of a call to the home ministry was that of Selwyn Hughes, whose daily Bible reading notes have enriched people around the world.

Selwyn tells of a memorable sermon he heard just a matter of days prior to his call to the home ministry. He attended a missionary rally in the small town of Crosskeys in England. There he heard a missionary speak on 'the Call of God'. He based his message on the theme of Mary and the Incarnation, and pointed out that whenever God desires someone to do a special work, he does not leave them to infer it from circumstances alone, but breaks the news personally.

'God did not allow Mary to infer her high motherhood from the changes that went on in her body,' the preacher said, 'but broke the news to her beforehand.' I can see him to this day, leaning over the pulpit and shouting into the midst of the congregation. 'Before the Incarnation there was an Annunciation! Everyone has a work to do for God in this world, but if God wants you in the ministry or in missionary work, then He will not suffer you to guess, to speculate, to conjecture. He will come and tell you so Himself.'

Selwyn went to a night shift in the mine where he worked, and in the silence of the night:

I heard it. A voice . . . not audible, but speaking directly into my soul: '*I want you in the ministry.*' That was all, nothing more. It would be impossible for me to convey in words the effect those moments had on me. It is as real to me now as it was forty years ago.

Such was the power and impact on my heart that to have asked for a further sign would have been impertinent. God had spoken.<sup>33</sup> (Page 148-149)

#### **47. Missionary Call, A Conviction Not A Feeling**

**A missionary call is not a feeling but a conviction.** The feelings follow the call, and are not always pleasant. Willingness to do God's will anywhere and at any time is a condition precedent - and it is not always reached overnight. Matthew 28:19 is a **general** call and can be fulfilled at home or abroad. But the general must become particular. It need not be spectacular and is often a deepening conviction through prayer and study of the missionary situation, that God's plan for one is cross-cultural missionary work. (Page 151-152)

#### **48. Precious Experience, Act in Harmony with the Father's Plan**

Some of the most precious experiences of one's life may be the times when the Lord seems near, and His Spirit has guided one to act in harmony with the Father's plan. Note carefully that it is faith, the action of the heart in response to the Word, which establishes the requisite relationship to God; the 'feeling' of the Spirit's witness afterward is exceedingly precious, but not an essential prerequisite to that action . . . The impression of God's leading in a missionary call is very precious, but the 'feeling' of the call and the actuality of God's plan and guidance must not be equated.<sup>34</sup> E. Stanley Jones (Page 154)

#### **49. Leadership of Holy Spirit, Basis of All Moral Living**

The leadership and discipline of the Holy Spirit through the moral standards of the Word - this is the basis of all moral living. (Page 160)

#### **50. I'm In A Hurry, God Is Not** (Phillips Brooks)

A story is told of Phillips Brooks, the great Boston preacher. A friend who came to visit him was ushered into the preacher's study. On entering, he found his host pacing up and down his study, evidently in great agitation.

'What's the matter, Phillips?' his friend asked.

'Matter enough! I'm in a hurry and God's not!' (Page 165)

#### **51. Whenever There is Doubt, Wait**

Don't allow anyone to pressure you into action when you are not sure.

Of course the time will come when we must take action, but it is a safe maxim - whenever there is doubt, wait. (Page 166)

#### **52. Best-Made Plans, Made Without Him collapse**

In a recent letter a missionary executive wrote:

The temptation here is to think that if we make plans well enough, we are masters of our own fate. Soon enough God will show us that our best-made plans, made without Him, will crumble and collapse, or worse still, come to fruition without blessing. Often eager planners like myself have to wait. God's delays might have wonderful unseen factors that make the fulfillment all the more wonderful and complete. Often the very process of delay and disappointment helps us to sift our motives and turn our eyes to the Lord in a way they were not when we first formulated our plans. (Page 166)

### **53. Waiting for The Lord Is Hard**

Dr Henry W. Frost, then Canadian Director of the China Inland Mission, was facing an important and seemingly urgent decision. He was engaged in studying the Bible with this in mind.

‘As I meditated on the verses, it did not take me long to decide which was the harder. Waiting *on* the Lord is comparatively easy; waiting *for* the Lord is decidedly hard. Just now it was a case of waiting for Him, and I fear I did not make much of a success of it.’ (Page 166-167)

### **54. God Never Hurries, Never Late**

Although God is never in a hurry, He is never late. His timing is perfect, because He has control of all that happens. This is a difficult lesson for us impatient mortals to learn. However, it must be mastered if we are to keep in step with God. It is when we are under pressure to make a decision that we are most vulnerable and liable to make a serious mistake. We need the restraint of the Holy Spirit as well as His constraint, but we are less likely to be sensitive to His prohibitions. We must be as willing for our Guide to say 'no' to our plans as 'yes'. (Page 167)

### **55. Moving in God's Will Both Mind & Heart At Peace**

The enjoyment of the peace of Christ when taking the next step in acting on the decision, springs from our knowledge of God and communion with Him rather than from a correct formula of guidance. When we move in the will of God, both mind and heart will be at peace, even when we meet lions in the way. (Page 173)