

DECIDING WHAT'S NEXT IN LIFE

On December 12, 1899, a 25-year-old British cavalry officer made a daring nighttime escape from an enemy prison, but the frightful prospect of imminent recapture soon overwhelmed him.

He later confessed, "I realized with awful force that no exercise of my own feeble wit and strength could save me from my enemies, and that without the assistance of that High Power which interferes in the eternal sequence of causes and effects more often than we are always prone to admit, I could never succeed. I prayed long and earnestly for help and guidance. My prayer, as it seems to me, was swiftly and wonderfully answered."

After asking God's help, he then determined to seek refuge in a nearby house. Without knowing whether deliverance or destruction would answer, he anxiously knocked at the door. Winston Churchill thus discovered the only haven within 20 miles and lived to become a world powerhouse.

This story provides a wonderful illustration of Jesus' threefold admonition: "Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you." (Mat. 7:7).

And therein are keys to help us decide what's next in life, an issue I face daily.

ASK WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT GOD WILL ANSWER.

We should first ask God to meet our needs. And if answers aren't immediately forthcoming, we are to keep on asking. Unfortunately, many of us ask of God but don't really expect much to happen and soon give up. Nevertheless, we need to ask with the firm belief that Jesus meant what He said: those who ask will receive.

Realize, too, that we can ask wrongly. If needs are not met, we might consider that our asking could be amiss. (James 1:6, 4:3).

SEEK WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF FINDING WHAT YOU NEED.

Have you ever noticed that God sometimes answers prayers in ways we're not expecting? So we need wisdom to understand what's really going on. Wisdom must be sought: "If you seek her as silver, and search for her as hidden treasures, then you shall understand...." (Prov. 2:4-5). There's urgency in this sort of seeking.

Here's what I do. After asking God to meet my specific needs, I open my Bible and pray something like this: "Heavenly Father, I need for you to speak to me today in a way that I can understand. Is there anything you want to tell me?" Then I read. If I encounter a verse where I believe that He is speaking, I underline it, date it, and jot a short note about what I believe the message is to me. If doubts come later, I can look back and say, "On this day God said...." That brings confidence.

KNOCK WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS GOING TO GIVE DIRECTION AT THE RIGHT TIME.

But there's an additional step. After asking and seeking we will often encounter situations where a decision is required. Do I move forward, or wait? Do I do this or that? These decision points are "doors," doors that must be tested with a "knock." Churchill knocked at a physical door, but there are other kinds as well.

Believing they were led of God, the Apostle Paul and his companions endeavored to go into Bythenia, but that door closed to them. Shortly thereafter, however, an unexpected door of opportunity in Macedonia opened. (Acts 16:7-9). So whether a door opens or closes, direction is given in either case.

Deciding what's next in life is a process whereby an amalgam of perplexities, obscurities and conflicts is gradually refined into clarity we can act upon.