

## 96 Your place within the plan

On the eve of the Battle of Trafalgar, the captains of the ships in the British fleet were summoned to Nelson's flagship "Victory", to be told of the battle plan for the following day, a plan now known as "the Nelson touch"; it was different, bold and risky! Nelson finished with words to the effect - "In the heat of battle you won't go far wrong if you put your ship alongside an enemy vessel and get on with it!".

So the captains all knew the grand plan; but they also knew they had the freedom, and the obligation, to use their own initiative within the grand plan as the battle unfolded.

From that eve-of-battle meeting there are lessons for us when it comes to our seeking the Lord's guidance in our own decision-making. One extreme is for us to sit and do nothing at all! - while we wait for specific guidance from the Lord over a possible course of action. That is like a captain holding his ship well clear of the battle, while waiting for a specific flag of instruction, to him alone, from the Victory. The battle will pass him by, and he and his crew will have been a proverbial "waste of space".

The other extreme is for us to ignore the Lord completely! - to dash ahead without a moment of thought or prayer, out of keenness to be "up and at 'em" in the Lord's service! That describes the captain who is totally "gung-ho", giving not a thought for the overall plan, ignoring everyone else, and perhaps causing a lot of trouble as a result.

In terms of the Lord's guidance of His people, occasionally He does give very specific instructions. We can think of Samuel being sent to anoint Saul as king (I Samuel 9.15-16); of Elijah being sent by the Lord to the brook Cherith, and then on to Zarephath (I Kings 17); or of Paul at Troas, responding to the vision of "a man of Macedonia" (Acts 16.9-10). In each case, the Lord gave a specific instruction, the recipient heard it, and acted on it, by faith - that is, the faith that believed that this instruction was truly from the Lord. Each then demonstrated that faith by stepping out in obedience.

But the Lord rarely does give such specific instruction, and we must not be surprised or disappointed over this. Far more common - like Nelson's closing words to his captains - is for the Lord to expect us to use our own gumption and gifts, in His service, within His overall plan. The Lord Jesus in His Gospel ministry would not wake up each morning and do nothing until His Father had told Him

which village He was to visit that day! Jesus knew the overall plan, and His very specific role within it; He spent hours indeed communing with His Father, but He also "got on with it" on His own initiative, acting in obedience to the Father.

Just so with us. May we be sufficiently "abiding in the Lord" that if and when He does speak to us specifically, we have the ears to hear, and the faith to respond. But otherwise, we work cheerfully within His overall plan, putting into practice in our own lives and situations a deep love for the Lord and for our neighbours.

In our decision-making the Lord delights in our being "spiritual grown-ups" taking some initiatives - competent captains of our own little ships, playing our part within His great fleet. So when we are faced with a significant decision, we ask the Lord to enable us to "get it right" under Him; we then do our homework, as thoroughly and prayerfully as we can; we make our decision, and take responsibility for it before the Lord.

In such ways the Lord's people will be found faithful, His battle plan will be fulfilled, the victory will be the Lord's, and the glory will be given to God's holy name!

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