

Guide and Seek

Experiencing God's Explanation

June 2, 2024

Today we're seeking the *faith* to hear **God's guidance in our experience**. Cuz when trying to *teach* us self-centered know-it-alls, *explanations* don't work nearly as well as *experiences*. So, if we want to *know* His heart, the big question is: **Do you recognize God's guidance in your life?**



Cuz, *in the* beginning God gave guidance as an *explanation*:

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must *not* eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." – Genesis 2:16-17 NIV



But after a quick *chat* with a sneaky *snake*, it was clear that it didn't take, cuz in spite of the *warning*, we wanted the *experience*:

[Eve] took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ... *Then* the eyes of both of them were opened, and they *realized* they were *naked*; – Genesis 3:6-7 NIV



And *boom* – the awful *experience* still taught the *same* lesson that God had *tried* to *explain* *without* *pain*. Cuz whether it's *Adam*, *Eve*, *you* or *me* – every *human* has to *live* with *this* truth: **there's no escaping God's guidance!** It's built *into* life! The best we can ever do is *ignore* it! But even that takes active *effort* to go *against* our aggressive *instinct* to make *things* make *sense*! Because in *all* of our lives, every **experience is begging for an explanation**. "My car died. *What happened?*" "My taxes went up! *Who's responsible?!*" "That was the *best* sandwich! *What did you put on it?*" And because God *wants* us to chase down and understand *His* truth, **every life experience ultimately entices us toward an explanation only God can give.**



Now, as we *saw*, God would *prefer* we learn from *His* explanations *first* – to keep our *experiences* pain-free. The problem is, **listening requires a "Him-first" approach and self-centered humans prefer the "me-first" method of personal experience!** But only fools only want their *own* input!

[Cuz] The way of *fools* seems right to *them*, but the wise listen to advice. – Proverbs 12:15 NIV

And if you want a quick way to separate *fools* from the *wise*, *that's it!* **The wise seek guidance while fools only want to give it.** Just look around; the wisest people who ever lived *all* asked the most questions and *listened* for the most *answers*. So no wonder that was *Jesus' way* from the start:

[Like when His parents lost Him *at 12:*] After *three* days they found Him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. – Luke 2:46 NIV

Now, apart from the *prophecies, ministry, and miracles*, this has got to be one of the biggest *proofs* of Jesus' *supernatural Spirit* – cuz this was during *Passover* and no 12-year-old I've known would ever *choose* to go to school *during* a holiday break! *Seriously*, sitting and listening may be *hard* for us, but it's torture for kids! Cuz we're *all* born *without* the wisdom to *want* the input of others:



Foolishness is *bound up* in the heart of a child; – Proverbs 22:15 NKJ



It's just part of our *DNA!* We *all* started off thinking we were self-sufficient because **foolishness is a birth defect we all share!** And it's why every parent has heard their *helpless* toddlers foolishly *assert*, "I can do it myself!" "I already knew that!" and "I don't need your help!" They just *don't know* that they don't know! And it's only after we start *experiencing* our *inadequacy* that we *wise up* and ask for *explanations*.



Cuz the bottom line is **listening is a form of submission**; it's admitting we *need* the input of *others*. And as we have discussed in the last few weeks, **it goes against our instinct to see any submission as a sign of strength**, not weakness. But because God loves His little *prideful* fools, He designed *each life* to teach *those lessons* we *won't* listen to.



My people would not listen to Me; Israel would not submit to Me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. **[To experience His truth through His creation]** – Psalms 81:11-12 NIV



[Cuz down here, truth surfaces; so] Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. – Jeremiah 2:19 NKJ

Just the experience of living life guides us to the truth behind reality! And the first big *correction* foolish kids learn from *experience* is how wise we *aren't!* Like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable:

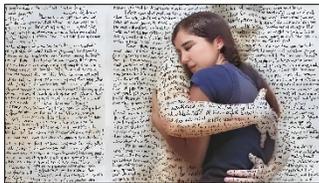
[The younger of two sons] said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them... **[and the young son]** set off for a distant country and *there squandered his wealth in wild living* ... and **[as a result of that experience]** he began to *be in need*. So he went and hired himself ... to feed pigs. **[and as his experience got painful]** He *longed* to fill his stomach with the pods that the *pigs* were eating... **[which drove him to seek an explanation! And eventually]** "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am *starving* to death! I will set out and go *back* to my father and say to him **[the explanation I've learned from this experience]**: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' – Luke 15:11-15, 17-18 NIV

Sound familiar? I can't speak for you, but that pretty much *sums up* how I *grew up!* The grass was *greener* cuz I knew *better!* But **when we won't listen to reason, reality hurts**. And it takes that pain to push us *back* toward the truth God *originally* wanted to give. Cuz we've *all* had our chance to take the easy way – but every one of us was born too *foolish* to follow it! **God gave us His Word as His explanation**, but our *stubborn* and *self-centered* hearts just couldn't sit still and *submit* enough to learn by *listening* alone. So after His *written law* *proved that point*, He changed things.

The Word became *flesh* and made His dwelling among us. – John 1:14 NIV

Out of *His* love for *us* kids God **turned His explanation into an experience**. And called it *Jesus*. And suddenly, we could fully *experience* God *without* fully listening to His *explanation*. **Jesus became the way to know God before we understand Him**. Cuz *that's* the only way to teach *foolish* humans!

It's the *same* way every human learns about gravity way before we *understand* it. If we throw a ball in the air, we *know* it'll come back to earth cuz experience *alone* teaches *what goes up, must come down*. And only *after* we intimately *know* that truth by *experience* will we seek to *understand* it by *explanation*. And **trusting what we know, regardless of what we understand is called faith**.



I still don't *understand* exactly *how* gravity is a function of mass and distance, but I know by *faith* it'll bring a ball back to earth. And I still don't understand exactly *how* God's *love* functions in *my life*, but I know by *faith* Jesus will bring *me* back to His arms. Because I've *experienced* life with Him *in it* and just like *Paul*:



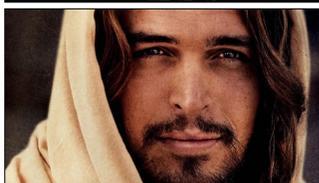
I am *convinced* that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be *able* to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus – Romans 8:38-39 NIV



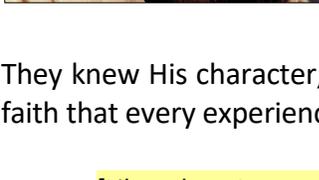
So now I *know* **we're given life as an act of love so we could experience love and be saved by love**. Because once we *know* life with Jesus



We *know* and *rely* on the love God has for us. **[As His guiding force in our lives because:]** God *is* love. – 1 John 4:16 NIV



Now, does that mean everything clicks and we get to waltz through life without any more *pain, frustration, or confusion*? No! It just means we have *faith* that **love will somehow explain all our experiences**. Take the disciples; the *third* time Jesus plainly *explains* how He's going to die:

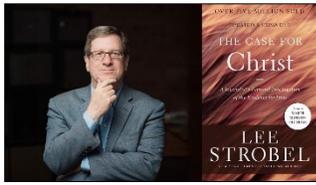


The disciples *did not understand* any of this. Its *meaning* was hidden from them, and *they did not know* what He was *talking* about. **[But by their experience, they did know Who was talking.]**– Luke 18:34 NIV

They knew His character, His power, and His wisdom were all a function of His love, so they had faith that every experience *had* loving reasons – even if they *didn't* fully understand them:

[Like when Jesus washed their feet and hinted at a much *bigger* meaning], "You do *not* realize *now* what I am *doing*, but later you will understand." – John 13:7 NIV

And *that's* a *huge* lesson for us *foolish* children: **later you will understand**. That's *God's* faith in *us*. It's the reassurance that **if we trust His love is leading our life, we'll grow the wisdom to see how**. And in the *meantime*, it's the reassurance that **we can trust our struggles will serve a purpose if we know He's in control**. And that means the *experiencing* Jesus is humanity's top priority.



I just heard one of the most successful Christian “*explainers*”, **Lee Strobel** give an *interview* that really *drove* this point home. He was talking about how he used to *engage* non-Christians by asking them what *they* would ask *God* to explain, if given the chance. And ultimately, *most* said they’d ask some form of “**Why does God allow suffering.**” And then Lee would then offer his big 5-point sermon to *explain* pain. But, over time, he said he *shifted* his approach and *started* asking *why that was their* question. Cuz when he *did*, people just started *sharing* the *personal pain* they wanted explained, such as a spouse’s *cancer* diagnosis or the *loss* of a child – and he *realized* at *that* moment, they *weren’t* seeking a *theological* understanding of *how* God loves; rather, they *needed* someone to put their arm around them and *show* them *that* God loves. They didn’t need an *explanation* of Jesus, they needed an experience of Jesus. Cuz **that’s where faith begins.**

And as *important* as it is for us to *bring* those experiences of Jesus to *others* – the question *today* was, **Do you recognize God’s guidance in your life?** Cuz the truth is, *you’re* hurting. *You’re* in need. And *you’re* frustrated. And in this moment, *you* need an experience of Jesus. And it’s critical for *you* to *remember*: **there’s no escaping God’s guidance** – cuz there’s no escaping **His LOVE**. And our whole life changes when we start *recognizing* it. So, **how do you know you’re loved?** Is it because of how much people *tell* you? Do you *begin* believing on the fifth *I love you*? *No!* Because **love isn’t something you say, it’s something you do.**

Love is an experience! And the experience of *God’s* love is stitched into *every* inch of *every* life because He understands **for us to know His love, we need God to show His love.** So He did:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. – 1 John 3:16 NIV

And with that *one* example, He forged a way for *our* experience of His love to *stay*; cuz:

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. ... This is how love is made complete among us... : In this world we are like Jesus ... [to others! Meaning] We love because He first loved us. – 1 John 4:12, 17, 19 NIV

So now, when we *give* the love of Jesus, we also give the *guidance* of Jesus. But – hear this loud and clear: that also means **when we receive the love of Jesus, we also receive His guidance.** And that means it comes from every other brother and sister in *God’s* family, in *our* life.

In fact, I got that guidance *yesterday*. I was here, trying to finish *this* sermon, when one of *you* came to clean the church and stopped to tell *me* they knew about a personal pain *I’d* been experiencing. So, they shared their *sympathy* and *insight*, gave me a *hug* and a *pep talk*, and promised to *pray* for me. And in *that* moment, I felt the *courage* and *clarity* I knew I needed to push *past* my pain. And it *wasn’t* until I sat down to write *this*, that I *recognized* the experience of *God’s* love and *guidance* that I’d been writing about *all week!* And *this foolish* kid grew a little faith! So, go love others but **don’t you forget to let them love you;** cuz *that’s* the experience where we’ll find *God’s* explanation!

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.