



CLASSIC WISDOM COLLECTION

Life's Purpose

WISDOM FROM

John Henry Newman



I

LEAD, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.
I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

At Sea
June 16, 1833

— “The Pillar of the Cloud”
from *Verses on Various Occasions*



II

For in truth we are not called once only, but many times; all through our life Christ is calling us. He called us first in Baptism; but afterward also; whether we obey His voice or not, He graciously calls us still. If we fall from our Baptism, He calls us to repent; if we are striving to fulfill our calling, He calls us on from grace to grace, and from holiness to holiness, while life is given us. Abraham was called from his home, Peter from his nets, Matthew from his office, Elisha from his farm, Nathanael from his retreat; we are all in course of calling, on and on, from one thing to another, having no resting-place, but mounting toward our eternal rest, and obeying one command only to have another put upon us. He calls us again and again,

in order to justify us again and again—and again and again, and more and more, to sanctify and glorify us.

It were well if we understood this; but we are slow to master the great truth, that Christ is, as it were, walking among us, and by His hand, or eye, or voice, bidding us follow Him. We do not understand that His call is a thing which takes place now. We think it took place in the apostles' days; but we do not believe in it, we do not look out for it in our own case. We have not eyes to see the Lord; far different from the beloved Apostle, who knew Christ even when the rest of the disciples knew Him not. When He stood on the shore after His resurrection, and bade them cast the net into the sea, "that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord" (Jn. 21:7).

Now what I mean is this: that they who are living religiously, have from time to time truths they did not know before, or had no need to consider, brought before them forcibly; truths which involve duties, which are in fact precepts, and claim obedience. In this and such-like ways Christ calls us now. There is nothing miraculous or extraordinary in His dealings with us. He works through our natural faculties and circumstances of life. Still what happens to us in providence is in all essential respects what His voice was to those whom He addressed when on earth: whether He commands by a visible presence, or by a voice, or by our consciences, it matters not, so that we feel it to

be a command. If it is a command, it may be obeyed or disobeyed; it may be accepted as Samuel or St. Paul accepted it, or put aside after the manner of the young man who had great possessions.

. . . Many persons will find it very striking on looking back on their past lives, to observe what different notions they entertained at different periods, of what Divine truth was, what was the way of pleasing God, and what things were allowable or not, what excellence was, and what happiness. I do not scruple to say, that these differences may be as great as that which may be supposed to have existed between St. Peter's state of mind when quietly fishing on the lake, or Elisha's when driving his oxen, and that new state of mind of each of them when called to be Apostle or Prophet. Elisha and St. Peter indeed were also called to a new mode of life; that I am not speaking of. I am not speaking of cases when persons change their condition, their place in society, their pursuit, and the like; I am supposing them to remain pretty much the same as before in outward circumstances; but I say that many a man is conscious to himself of having undergone inwardly great changes of view as to what truth is and what happiness. Nor, again, am I speaking of changes so great, that a man reverses his former opinions and conduct. He may be able to see that there is a connection between the two; that his former has led to his latter; and yet he may feel that after

all they differ in kind; that he has got into a new world of thought, and measures things and persons by a different rule.

. . . Only one is the truth and the perfect truth; and which that is, none know but those who are in possession of it, if even they. But God knows which it is; and toward that one and only truth He is leading us forward. He is leading forward His redeemed, He is training His elect, one and all, to the one perfect knowledge and obedience of Christ; not, however, without their cooperation, but by means of calls which they are to obey, and which if they do not obey, they lose place, and fall behind in their heavenly course. He leads them forward from strength to strength, and from glory to glory, up the steps of the ladder whose top reaches to heaven. We pass from one state of knowledge to another; we are introduced into a higher region from a lower, by listening to Christ's call and obeying it.

— Excerpt from: *Parochial and Plain Sermons*,
Book 8. Sermon 2. Divine Calls