

Spiritual Disciplines: Guidance

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome to our service for Palm Sunday, March 21st, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Well, welcome to you this morning if you're joining us live on Facebook today, or if you're tuning in later via audio on our website, or check out the videos of our previous sermons on Facebook.

So welcome, however you're joining us. Just a few brief announcements. We'll be holding our Good Friday service live on Facebook this coming Friday, April 2nd at 11 a.m.

I'll be here for praise and prayer and worship singing, and then we're pleased to welcome Rob Ogilvie. Rob is the executive minister of our denomination, and Rob will be bringing our Good Friday message, our reflection on Friday.

Then I'd welcome you back on Facebook on Easter Sunday for our service, Sunday, April 4th, also at 11 a.m.

[1 : 05] So welcome. I hope you can join us for these Easter services together. And for our Easter Sunday service, we're going to be concluding our sermon series on spiritual disciplines.

And we're also going to be celebrating communion together as we reflect on the resurrection of Jesus. What exactly is Palm Sunday?

You may be asking yourself that. Palm Sunday is recognized by Christians around the world and throughout history as the beginning of the week that leads up to Good Friday and Easter, also known as Holy Week.

It marks the recognition, Palm Sunday does, marks the recognition of Jesus Christ in a very public way. And that week began with today with a celebration.

And we recognize that it ended in His crucifixion. Palm Sunday is reflected in the words of Matthew chapter 21, verses 1 to 11, and I'll read that for us this morning.

[2 : 11] As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to two disciples, Jesus sent two disciples, pardon me, saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt, by her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them, and He will send them right away. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Say to the daughter of Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a colt, on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road.

The crowds went ahead of Him, and those who followed shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

[3 : 23] Hosanna in the highest! When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, Who is this? When Jesus entered Jerusalem, pardon me, the crowds answered, This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

My friends, this passage of scripture is one of the few places where the gospels record that Jesus' glory was recognized on earth. Jesus boldly declared Himself as King, and the crowds gladly joined Him.

But we also know how this story ultimately plays out. Those same people who celebrated Him would ultimately desert Him, condemn Him, crucify Him, just a few days later.

My friends, Palm Sunday, this public earthly declaration and recognition of who Jesus was, is what we recognize on Palm Sunday.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for sending your Son and for paving the way for our lives to be set free through Jesus' death on the cross.

[4 : 45] Thank you for what this day, Palm Sunday, stands for. The beginning of Holy Week, the start of the journey towards the power of the cross, the victory of the resurrection, and the rich truth that Jesus truly is our King of Kings.

Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Father, we give you praise and honor for your ways are righteous and true.

We give you worship for you are holy and just. We will declare that your love stands firm forever for your loving kindness endures forever.

Thank you that your ways are far greater than our ways, that your thoughts are far deeper than our thoughts. Thank you that you had a plan to redeem, Lord.

Thank you that you have made and will make all things new. Thank you that your face is towards the righteous. Lord, help us to be righteous people.

[5 : 59] Hear our prayers and know our hearts. Help us to stay strong and true to you, Lord. Help us to not follow after the voices of the crowd, but to press in close to you, to hear your whispers and seek after you alone.

We praise you, Lord. We bless you. Thank you that you reign supreme and that we are more than conquerors through the gift of Jesus Christ.

And Lord, it's in the power of Jesus' precious holy name we pray. Amen. Let's join together in worship singing this morning, and we're going to sing three songs.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, what a friend we have in Jesus, and victory in Jesus. You may sense a theme there. You'll be able to follow the lyrics on the screen as always, and the worship leader will lead us in these songs as we sing together.

So let's sing our praises to our awesome God this morning, to our Lord and Savior Jesus, and may you be blessed as you sing now. O soul, are you weary and troubled?

[7 : 38] No light in the darkness you see. There's a light for a look at the Savior, a life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful faith, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory and grace.

Through death into life everlasting He passed and we follow Him there O'er us and no more half the man For more than conquerors we are Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful faith, And the things of earth Will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory and grace.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful faith, And the things of earth Will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory and grace.

What a friend we have in Jesus All our sins and griefs to bear What a privilege you carry Everything to God in prayer Oh, a peace we often forfeit Oh, a needless pain we bear Oh, because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer

[10 : 56] Are we weak and needless pain we bear Are we weak and any laden Come but with a load of care Precious Savior, take it to the Lord in prayer Take it to the Lord in prayer Do thy friends despise Do thy friends despise forsake thee Take it to the Lord in prayer In His arms, He'll take it to the Lord in prayer And I EL■

The privilege you carry, everything to God in prayer. I heard an old, old story, how a Savior came from glory.

How He gave His life on Calvary to save a wretch like me. And I heard about His groaning of His precious bloods atoning.

Then I repented of my sins and won the victory. Oh, victory in Jesus, my Savior forever.

He saw me and bought me with His redeeming blood. And even the air I knew Him and all my love is true.

[13 : 37] He plunged me to clean deep beneath the cleansing floor. Now I heard about His healing of His cleansing power revealing.

How He made the lame to walk again and caused the blind to see. And I cried, dear Jesus, come heal my broken spirit.

And somehow Jesus came and brought me to the victory. Oh, victory in Jesus, my Savior forever.

He saw me and bought me with His redeeming blood. He loved me and loved me. He loved me and loved me. He loved me and loved me. I knew Him and all my love is due Him.

He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing floor. I heard an old, old story.

[15 : 05] How a Savior came from glory. How He gave His life from Calvary. To save a wretch like me.

How a Savior.

How a Savior. How a Savior. How a Savior. We're continuing in our sermon series called, Spiritual Disciplines Exercise Your Faith. We've been recognizing through this series that, as followers of Jesus, as His disciples, we can benefit from some tools and skills that will help us on our journey.

And these disciplines or skills are known as, Spiritual Disciplines. Spiritual Disciplines are intended to help us put ourselves before God, put ourselves in a state of heart and a state of mind where we can best interact with him. And we've talked about that over the past weeks. Today, we're going to continue to look at the corporate spiritual disciplines as we focus on the discipline of guidance.

Human beings are curious creatures, aren't we? Maybe that seems like an obvious statement to you. And I believe that we're created with a hunger for knowledge. We have a tendency to have questions that we want answered. We want answers and we want them now. One of the things I miss most when we're meeting online versus in person is that direct sense of immediate interaction that I can have with you as your pastor and the congregation. But I'm going to ask this question anyway, knowing that I have a pretty good idea of what your response may be. How do I know that humans generally hunger for knowledge? Well, what's the first word that a very young child may ask as they begin to learn? Why? Is that familiar? And when adults don't have an answer handy, what might our response be? Because it's our response. Or an annoyed parent who's been asked why a thousand times, or has had their request of their child questioned, or their directions questioned, may respond by saying, because I said so. Is that familiar? Have you maybe even said those words?

[18 : 12] In 1995, a young man named Larry Page was considering becoming a graduate student at Stanford University in the U.S. And he decided to tour the campus as part of his research. Well, an existing Stanford student named Sergi Brin was assigned to tour Page around the campus. While the degree of their agreement or disagreement on different things varies depending on which account you read, Brin and Page worked together and struck up an informal partnership. Working from their dorm rooms, the two students developed a tool that would use links to determine the importance of pages and information on the World Wide Web.

Well, this tool was originally called, believe it or not, BackRub, and I think we're all quite happy that didn't stick. It came to be known as, you've maybe guessed already by now, the online search engine Google.

That initial recognition of the need to make a vast amount of knowledge available on the internet more easily accessible, Google, the search engine, has grown exponentially.

Today, Google as a company makes hundreds of products made by, used by billions of people across the globe. From YouTube, yes, that's them, and Android, the phone system, yes, that's them, to Gmail, which many of us use.

And of course, Google search still. For many people, that contemporary response to the question, why, has become, I don't know, Google it.

[20 : 04] Right? Maybe you've even said that. Maybe you're a regular Google search user. I am. I definitely am. But just how much is it used? Have you ever wondered?

Well, you could Google it, but I'm going to tell you now. According to a 2019 study, Google processes more than, hear this, 3.5 billion searches per day, and this is 2019.

If you break that data down, that means that more than 40,000 searches are processed by Google per second.

In 1998, Google was processing more than 10,000 search queries per day. And then in comparison, by the end of 2006, that same amount of searches would be processed by Google in one single second.

So in less than a decade, Google went from becoming barely known to becoming an integral part of the everyday life of searchers and consumers all around the world.

[21 : 14] We recognize that our human desire for knowledge, we recognize it. But intimately linked to that, I think we can recognize there's also an inherent sense of a need for direction.

And even more than that, for guidance. Apart from God, and sometimes even Christians still consult these things, we can see people consulting tarot cards.

They're horoscopes, mediums, fortune tellers. People want to know their future. They want to know what decisions they should make, how to order and plan their lives.

As human beings, we want answers, and we want them, as I said a moment ago, now. I want it now. Friends, we crave guidance.

We seek guidance from others. We often offer it ourselves. And maybe we water that down, that sense of guidance, to simply being advice, whether it's solicited, asked for, or not.

[22 : 25] But as we consider this human hunger for knowledge and guidance this morning, it's important that we recognize a few things. And I want to read from Deuteronomy 29, verse 29.

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, so that we may follow all the words of this law.

So what is this saying to us? Well, God has chosen not to reveal some secrets to us. And that may be for a few possible reasons.

First, perhaps our finite minds may not be able to grasp infinite concepts. Some things are not important for us to know until sometime in the future, when we're more mature, if we're meant to know them at all.

This passage in Deuteronomy reminds us that we need to know what we need to know. God is not somehow keeping critical information from us out of a desire to make our lives more difficult or somehow to trick us.

[23 : 34] That's not how God works. Perhaps the greatest truth that has been revealed to us are the characters and qualities of God himself and the truth of Jesus Christ.

We can trust God for our future because he created us. He knows us intimately and deeply. And he knows what lies ahead.

Not just for us, but for all of creation. So in recognizing this tendency in us, this desire for us to know things, a desire for direction, desire for guidance, what does the pursuit of guidance look like as a spiritual discipline?

I'm going to identify three things for us. First, we must recognize that in our casual pursuit for knowledge and truth, for wisdom and guidance, God is our best source, our ultimate source for those things.

Whether you seek God's guidance through prayer or through studying scripture or seeking spiritual mentorship through a Christian who may be more mature than you in some areas, only God's guidance is true and trustworthy.

[25 : 00] Seeking guidance from any other source, even one with the best of intentions, will ultimately lead us in the wrong direction.

There's a genre of writing in scripture that's known as wisdom literature. I've talked about it before. And that is a great source for knowledge and guidance as we seek guidance in our lives.

One example of wisdom literature in scripture is the book of Proverbs. And it's in Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6, where we read, and this may be familiar to you, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

And what? Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, submit to him. Some translations say acknowledge him.

And he will make your paths straight. We must seek God's guidance to ensure that we're on the right path.

[26 : 06] Second, we need to acknowledge where our desire for guidance, our hunger for knowledge, is coming from. When we're looking for answers or direction, is it coming from a desire to hear from God and for him to use us in an intentional way, does it come from a place of patience and trust or impatience and selfishness?

Seeking guidance from God isn't just about asking him to solve our problems and point us in what we perceive to somehow be the right direction.

It's about asking God for guidance and then patiently listening. During my seminary education, I was seeking guidance from God and others as to where God wanted to use me for his purposes.

And I recognized without a doubt that he had called me into ministry, but I didn't want to really presume a direction. So I asked, I asked God, and I waited and waited and waited.

But God didn't seem to be guiding me. I confided to a mentor of mine that many people had suggested or affirmed pastoral gifting in me, but I didn't want to falsely accept the praise or affirmation of others and presume that was guidance from God.

[27 : 42] Do you know what he said to me? He said, be careful not to discount the affirmation of others in your life, especially when you know them to be godly people who seek God's will in their own lives.

People who want God's best for you. Because friends, their voices may be the voice of direction from God that you seek.

That was a lightning bolt moment for me. In my sincere desire to hear God's voice and receive his guidance and expecting that to come in a specific way, I was missing the very message that I was waiting for.

This is the way in which guidance is a corporate discipline. Because remember, we are the body of Christ and we function best together.

God guides us as individuals in our lives as we seek to follow him. But he also guides us as a body, as a family, as a church.

[28 : 56] And as members of a body, God may use other people to bring guidance and direction in our lives.

Third, we need to be open and willing to consider that God's direction, God's instruction, sometimes God's correction, or his guidance for us may very well be the last thing that we want to hear or want to do.

We've considered many times over the last few years since I've been the pastor that as humans, we want what we want, don't we?

We want what we want and we want it yesterday. But I want you to consider something. When you ask God for guidance, are you able to come to him without preconceptions, without expectations?

Can you truly submit to God's will in and for your life? Or do you tend to come to him with your own plan in mind, mainly looking for his endorsement?

[30 : 13] Well, can you seek God's will for your life and then leave the details up to him? Can you do that?

I have a challenge for you this week. I want you to try being brave and bold as you approach God this week.

Yes, we need guidance in our lives, but it's God's guidance that we need to seek, to return to, and to trust when it comes.

Here's the boldness challenge now. I want you to repeat a simple prayer every morning when you wake up. Are you ready? Pray these words each morning when you wake up.

Lord, use me today. Guide my steps and open my eyes to the opportunities that you bring.

[31 : 16] I want to do your will. Amen. Here's the prayer again. Lord, use me today.

Guide my steps and open my eyes to the opportunities that you bring. I want to do your will. Amen.

My friends, ask God to guide your life. Ask Him to use you and trust that His leading will take you on the journey of a lifetime.

Amen. My friends, our benediction this morning comes from, and many of you who know me know this is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture.

Benediction comes from Numbers chapter 6 verses 24 to 26 where we read, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

[32 : 23] The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace. My brothers and sisters, as we enter into this holy week, let's keep our eyes, let's turn our eyes on Jesus and He will show us where we need to go.

I hope you'll join us on Good Friday at 11 and Easter Sunday at 11 as well. Again, on Facebook here live or later when you have the opportunity.

But be blessed this week, my friends. Go in peace and have a great week. God bless you. God bless you.