

God's Guidance

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of July 2000.

The preacher is Warwick Grant and his sermon is entitled God's Guidance. In the 80s there was a band called Talking Heads and the song they were most famous for I suppose was a song called We're on a Road to Nowhere.

Now I don't know what road you're on or where you're going in life or what you're aiming for. I don't know if you have any goals in your life or if I was to say what are your goals, how would you answer that, what would you say? Well Christians have got a pretty big goal and we're going to be talking a bit about that tonight.

Let me say though that there's only one way that Christians know we can have a relationship with God and that's a relationship to God only through Jesus.

It's only through Jesus that we can get to heaven. Now that's not a popular thing to say but it's what Jesus said. He made this exclusive claim in John's Gospel from John 14.6.

[1 : 15] Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Now that's not a popular thing to say in this day and age. People like to think that all roads lead to the mountaintop. You can be a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Hindu or a follower of another faith and we'll all end up in the same place, the same destination ultimately.

It's a popular thing, it's a nice thing, it makes you feel warm inside. But it's not true and even people of other faiths would not want you to claim that Christianity leads to the same place as what their faith leads to.

If we worship a God other than Jesus, we're not on the path to heaven. And heaven is the goal of the Christian. God's got a plan for us to get there.

God doesn't just sit around thinking, well, what shall I do today? He's got a goal and he's had it for years and years and years, right through eternity. And that's for people to have a relationship with him through Jesus Christ.

[2 : 31] That's his goal for the universe and he's guiding his people towards that goal. Just listen to these few verses from the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to get up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Just to recap three things from that little passage. In verse 4, we're chosen by God, if we follow Jesus, to be holy and blameless before him. And in verse 5, he destined us to be adopted as his children.

[3 : 58] We are known as God's kids. That's a wonderful privilege. And verse 10, God's ultimate purpose is described as to bring all things in heaven and on earth together, under one head, even Christ.

So ultimately, at the end, God is guiding for everything to be brought underneath Jesus. Where is God guiding us as Christians? For the Christian, it is to become under Christ.

And that's a process that we're sort of still going through. We know there are bits of our lives that don't follow Jesus and other bits that we're better at following God than others. But that's the ultimate goal, that we would be following him completely and totally.

And God sent Jesus to die for us so that we could be forgiven and made acceptable to God. And he wants us to work with him as we press forward towards this goal. Just listen to these two verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the price of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

[5 : 12] You might be thinking, hang on, Warwick hasn't talked much about guidance yet. This service is about guidance, isn't it? Well, it is about guidance, but I just want to let you know where we're being guided to.

And that is to be with Jesus, completely following him. And we need to respond to his invitation to follow him. We need to turn back to him if we've been rebelling against him and have faith in him. They're responses we need to constantly make to God. Jesus' best mate, a guy called John, wrote in the Bible and he said, look, don't fret, it's okay.

Jesus is like someone who will bring you to be fulfilling that destination. Someone described Jesus as being like a security guard who will make sure that we will reach that final goal.

Listen to these two verses from John's Gospel. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish.

[6 : 16] No one will snatch them out of my hand. If you trust in Jesus, you can be sure he will guide you and be with you to that final goal that we're aiming for. Well, then, how does God guide us to that ultimate goal that we're all aiming for if we seek to follow Jesus?

Well, in preparing for tonight, I found a little book called Guidance and the Voice of God quite helpful. And if you'd like to read more on this topic, it's available in Christian bookshops and I'd recommend it.

I think it's a good biblical approach to the topic of how does God guide us? And I agree with most of the things that the authors say. Let me just show you on the screen five things, five suggestions, five propositions that have been put about how God does guide us.

And we'll follow these through. Well, firstly, God in his sovereignty guides us behind the scenes. Sometimes we forget that God is actually sovereign.

God's actually in control of our world and of our universe. Nothing's too small for him. Nothing's too big. Nothing's too difficult for him. He's in charge and he can use anything and everything to achieve his plans for us.

[7 : 29] And those plans can't be thwarted. There are stories in the Bible of people who tried to disrupt God's plans. And in the end, God's plan was always fulfilled. God is in control.

We look out there, we read our newspapers, we think, is he really? But he is. And we can trust him with that. Second point is that God can speak to us in many and varied ways and guide them with their cooperation.

So he can work with us consciously to achieve his purposes. Right through the Bible, there are stories of God talking to people, giving them directions and knowledge.

And he's communicated in stacks and stacks of different ways. He is just a handful. He spoke to Moses out of a burning bush. He guided the people of Israel out of Egypt with a pillar of fire and a cloud of smoke.

He used a bunch of guys and women called prophets. And a prophet's job was to relate God's words, God's messages to the people. A lot of what these prophets said is recorded for us in the Bible.

[8 : 33] People like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and other guys. In Daniel, we actually read of God communicating by writing on a wall. He spoke to other people in dreams and visions.

He spoke through angels. As we saw in the Gideon story, he spoke to Gideon through an angel. God can do anything. There's even a story which I haven't included there. He used a donkey that spoke.

Now, is that silly or what? But God used it. God can do anything he wants to communicate if he needs to. But just because God has guided in these ways in the past, doesn't necessarily mean that he will do that again.

He might do, but it doesn't mean that he will. Well, then how does he guide us and how does he speak to us today? Well, we need to turn to the first couple of verses of the letter to the Hebrews to answer this question.

Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.

[9 : 45] So God has uniquely and finally revealed himself to us through his son, through Jesus. A verse from Colossians says that Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God.

The visible expression of the invisible God. So if you think, gosh, what's God like? Or if someone says to you, I don't know, what's God like? So, well, look at Jesus. He is the visible expression of the invisible God, the God we can't see.

As I said in a sermon once previously, when God came as Jesus, he was sort of saying, ta-da, this is what I'm like. When you see Jesus, you see God. And Jesus implements God's plan to save the world from sin.

Well, the fourth point is God speaks to us by his son through the Holy Spirit in the Bible, the scriptures. The words that we have in the Bible aren't just a bunch of dusty old documents that we blow off and read every Sunday.

They are living words. They are words that God can use to speak to us today. And in the Bible, God encourages us and advises us and directs us. What we're saying is that he guides us because as we read the Bible, his Holy Spirit helps us to apply those words to our hearts and our lives today.

[11 : 04] There's a great verse in Psalm 119 which says, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. God's word, the Bible, is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

It guides us. So if we are not reading the Bible or we neglect to read the Bible or we have a low view of the authority of the Bible or we don't come to church to hear the Bible explained, we're actually cutting ourselves off from the major source for us today of God's guidance to us.

Well, the last point of these five points is that apart from God's Holy Spirit working as we read the Bible, God hasn't actually made any other promises in the Bible about how he will speak to us.

And we shouldn't expect him to. So God has said, I will speak to you through the Bible, but he hasn't made any other promises about how he might speak to us. As it says in 2 Timothy,

Remember, don't forget that God can use all sorts of behind-the-scenes things to guide us to.

Things we're not aware of that might be happening now that God has put into place in our lives that is guiding us and helping us reach that final goal of being under Christ. Now, I'm not saying that God can't communicate to us in miraculous ways, like dreams or visions or a special sign of some sort.

[12 : 40] I'm just saying he hasn't promised to do that in the Bible. He can communicate however he wants, but he hasn't promised to communicate in those ways. I think a lot of Christians get hung up about this.

They look for a special sign. I'm just waiting for that special sign from God so I know how to proceed. I think all we need is in the Scriptures, and God will help us as we read those. I think also God can help us and guide us through his body, the church.

And I can think of decisions I've had to make, and people, my Christian friends, have helped me and advised me and encouraged me in those decisions. So I think if we cut ourselves off from his body, the church, and are a Christian in isolation, that's another way of cutting ourselves off from a great source of guidance, our Christian brothers and sisters.

But you might say, well, hang on, there's lots of stuff that's in the Bible, but there's lots of other things that the Bible doesn't even touch on. How can the Bible help you with these things? I mean, is he really interested in the little details of life?

Take, for example, those of us who are motorists. We drive a car. Now, does the Bible say anything about driving? It says stacks.

[13 : 53] Let me give you some examples. There's a verse that says we must love our neighbours as ourselves. The Bible tells us to be loving and kind, even if our neighbours treat us badly.

What if some bloke cuts in front of us, and we have to break suddenly to avoid him, and we get that shot of adrenaline and that temptation for a bit of road rage? And let's say a few kilometres down the road, we see that he's broken down or got a flat tyre.

Would you consider stopping and helping? Well, Jesus said we should love our enemies and do good to those who wrong us. Now, the Bible also says that we should obey those who are in authority over us.

That's the governments of the day. Now, I'm not saying if they're evil that we should support them in that sense, but if the laws are reasonable, we need to obey them.

So we need to obey the road rules. If there's a stop sign, we should stop. If we don't stop, it's ungodly, as well as stupid. Think of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22.

[14:55] Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Do we exercise these things when we drive? So we see the Bible, even though it doesn't address the whole issue of being a motorist, specifically, gives us a lot of guidance about how to be a godly motorist, doesn't it?

As someone once said, the Bible tells us what matters matter. It doesn't tell us everything about every situation we'll confront, but it tells us what things matter.

It gives us all the information we need to please God and live a godly life. Well, the Bible also speaks about a thing called wisdom. And simply speaking, wisdom is the ability to live successfully in God's world.

The wisdom of the world, there's a lot of knowledge and wisdom that the world has, but it is really inadequate for life because it excludes God. With God at the centre of one's life, godly wisdom is far better because it helps us live in the world that God, after all, has made.

Well, let me refer again to this book, Guidance and the Voice of God. It suggests that in the day-to-day of life, there are all manner of matters we need to make decisions about, and it divides those into three different areas.

[16:18] Matters of righteousness, matters of good judgment, and matters of triviality. The righteousness ones are simply this.

We need to make decisions that indicate we're obeying God. If we're feeling inclined to break into our next-door neighbour's house and pinch his video player and TV, well, we need to think again because there's a verse in the Bible that says, do not steal.

Well, clearly that would be a decision that would not be righteous. It's a silly example, but we need to make decisions that are of righteousness. We need to obey God.

Now, other matters could be to do with good judgment. That's when you have to make a decision and all the options seem to be okay. They seem to be righteous. So you think, well, how do I make my decision?

What should I do? I think the classic example of that is a single person trying to work out whether or not they should marry someone. Is it right to marry?

[17:19] Or is it right to be single and celibate? Well, they're both right. There's not a question of righteousness here. They're both good things that God would approve of.

And you can read 1 Corinthians 7 to see more of that. Remember Helen told us before that she and Andrew studied the passages in the scriptures about marriage and singleness before they made their decision to be married.

They had to make a judgment and they made it. If they had not married, that would not have been ungodly and marrying was not ungodly either. Now, that might sound ridiculously simplistic, but we don't have time to explore it further now.

Sometimes we've had a judgment to make and we've made a bad decision. And sometimes God will help us through that bad decision and protect us from the consequences. Other times he won't and we'll have to face the consequences.

But in all circumstances he will help us through those and we can trust him. Well, the final matter are trivial things. For example, you want to buy a new car and you go down to Toyota and you've decided on a certain model Corolla and it's a certain year and a certain make, a certain model and you've seen two and one's blue and one's white.

[18:36] You think, yes, it's one of these two. Identical cars, different colour though. Now, basically you could spend hours and hours wasting your time working out which one you'll buy. You've just got to make a decision and buy it and get on with it and get in it and drive it home.

You've got to make a decision. So decide. Just do it. It's not important. Don't allow unimportant things to clutter up your life and push out the important decisions that we do need to weigh up and reflect on before we make a final decision.

I think sometimes as Christians we realise that we just think, God, I wish you'd just give us a great big detailed Melways which has the route that our life takes and the way we should go and you just want to follow that diligently and carefully.

That's a desire to be godly and that's good. But God's guidance is more like a compass than a map. We're not given every fine detail of every single decision we'll have to make for the rest of our lives but he gives us like a compass.

Do you know what the compass is? The compass points in a certain direction. What would be the equivalent for us of a compass in a Christian life? Starts with a B. It's got an I and a B and an L and an E and it's pronounced Bible.

[19 : 59] It's the Bible. The Bible is like a... Sorry? Sound travel slowly, doesn't it? Yeah, it's the Bible. And that is like a big compass that is saying go this way.

This is the way that God wants for you and wants for all humanity. It's the way towards righteousness, towards holiness, towards becoming like Jesus.

Sometimes we go the opposite direction to the way the compass is pointing and we have to turn back. That's repentance, isn't it? But we have to keep following that compass. Wherever it takes us, God will lead us if we are open to his guidance through the Bible.

As Paul says in Colossians chapter 3, And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Choosing the right way, the correct way, is sometimes difficult. Life is complex and we're sinful and sometimes it's hard to know how do I apply God's words to my life.

[21 : 06] It can be tricky and we do make wrong decisions. But we can have joy and confidence that if we trust in Jesus and we seek to follow him, God is watching us and guiding us every step of the way.

But we need to keep our eyes fixed on that compass if we're going to go in the right direction. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thanks that you've given us a compass in life, the Bible.

We pray that we would read it and study it and ask you to help us as we do that. We really do want to be leading godly lives and righteous lives, lives that please you.

Help us, Lord, to make wise decisions, protect us from the consequences of bad decisions, help us to learn through those. But help us to keep our eyes fixed on you and following you until we come to that final destination of heaven and being with you forever.

In Jesus' name. Amen.