

As we continue our series under the title 'you are being built' we think today about 'finding God's will'. Every day we make many decisions coffee or tea or hot water, what TV programme to watch, what car to buy, where to live and so on. I wonder which of those you feel you need God's guidance on?

If we would grow in our faith it may well help us if we think about God, his will for our lives and how he leads us.

The Psalm we have had read has the Psalmist asking God "Show me your ways O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth" (Ps 25:4-5) and then asserting that "Good and upright is the Lord therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." (Ps 25:8-9)

I'm sure all of us at times have echoed the prayer of the Psalmist, "Show me your ways O Lord" and what we are going to look at this morning is what is God's plan for our lives and how God guides us. But I have to warn you the answers may not be what you expect or want.

### **1. Why does God guide us?**

The question we ask to start with is why should we look to God for guidance? What right has he to guide? The answer is clear from the Psalm it is because he is God he is sovereign. The Psalmist refers to him as "Lord". But more than that our Sovereign God is "Good and upright" (v8). "All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful". God is good and he deals with us in love. As such we can as the Psalmist says in v2 trust him to lead us only in ways that are for our good.

Do you use a satnav? Even the mention of the word can bring a smile to the lips because we have all heard of disasters with people blindly following their satnavs.

Like the story of a driver, from London, who was on her way to a friend's Christening party when the satnav sent her down a winding country track usually only used by farmers in their 4X4 vehicles.

The track, which was signposted as 'unsuitable for motor vehicles' led to a ford at the village of Sheepy Magna, Warwickshire.

But after days of heavy rain the watercourse was too swollen to cross and the sports car was quickly swept 600 yards downstream, bouncing from one bank of the River Sense to the other 'like a pinball' as the driver frantically tried to escape.

You can't fully trust your satnav but we can fully trust our God. But he is God and he is Lord over us because he has made us and we are his and therefore we not only trust him but we submit to his will for our lives. But this leads to the big question many have what is God's will for my life?

### **2. Where is God leading us?**

I have often heard people say God has a plan for your life. I agree but not in the way that many people think of it and that many people wish it. There are a number of cities in this country with trams. As you know a tram needs a track and it can only go on the track. It can't roam freely. I get the impression that many Christians see their lives under God the same. God has a plan which takes me from cradle to grave, from here to there and there is no deviation. Our problem is that we don't know what the plan is. We hear people quote Jeremiah "I know the plans I have for you" (29:11) and we wish God would let us in on the plan because we worry about getting a decision wrong and not following God's will for our lives.

God has a plan for our lives and v5 here opens that up for us, "guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour and my hope is in you all day long."

God is Sovereign and God is Saviour and his plan for us is ..... Our salvation.

God's plan for humanity is that we should be saved as we read in 1 Tim 2:4 "This is good and pleases God our Saviour who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." What is God's will? It is that people might be saved. What is God's plan for humanity? Well it is written large in Scripture his plan is to restore people to himself in Jesus and then bring them to heaven.

When God called Abraham he made him a promise of a people, a place and a blessing. This runs through the whole of the Bible as God acts to restore to himself a people in his place under his rule. In Exodus we see God's people saved from slavery and guided by God back to the promised land where they could live as God's people. That misused verse from Jeremiah "I know the plans I have for you" (29:11) is sent to God's people in exile to reassure them God would return them to the promised land – God's people in God's place under God's blessing.

So for us God's plan for your life and mine is salvation. First that we who are lost, who are cut off from God, who are, as it were in exile, should return to God our Sovereign and Saviour. God who has made you wants you as his child. In v7 the Psalmist asks for mercy "remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways". We have each of us gone our own way. We have rejected God's way. That was what God's people had done in the Old Testament and led to them being in exile in Babylon. But in mercy he has acted in Jesus to rescue us but that is only part of the story because having saved us he is then leading us home that is to heaven. This is his plan and this is where he is leading and guiding us.

God has a plan for your life and that is to bring you to be with him in heaven and he will lead you there so that we might be God's people in God's place under God's rule.

### **3. How does God guide?**

The Bible tells us God guides like a Shepherd. That sounds nice doesn't it except in the world of the Bible the Shepherd had his staff and it wasn't for leaning on but for whacking the sheep when they

went astray. The shepherd went ahead and the sheep followed as the shepherd led them as best he could to green pastures and quiet waters and then led them to the fold the place of rest. The whole is an image of God leading his people in paths of righteousness where we can flourish as his people and ultimately leading us to the place of rest, which is heaven.

How does he do that?

Phillip Jensen, who is a gifted Australian preacher and was Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, wrote a very helpful book 'The last word on Guidance'.

He gives some helpful thoughts on how God guides.

**a. As sovereign, God uses everything to guide us behind the scenes.** That is God is at work in all the events and factors of life to guide us towards the goal he has for us, our final salvation. However, it is often only as we look backwards that we see just what has happened. I remember one Sunday in July 1972 going to the Baptist church in Kettering. I was met at the door by a deacon whose son I'd been at school with. He asked me what I was doing and I explained that I was due to start teaching in September in Ealing. He asked if I had accommodation sorted out and when I said no he told me that his son was looking after some bedsits in Ealing and might have one free. By the end of the afternoon I had a bedsit sorted. Not much of a story about guidance until I add that on the first Sunday living there I was invited to a church service and a month later came to faith. He guides my ways in righteousness but I could only see it looking back. I was not conscious of it at the time.

**b. In many and various ways God can guide us with our conscious co-operation.** As we look through the Bible we see how God has communicated his will. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush, to Belshazzar by writing on a wall, through dreams, visions, fleeces and so on. But the crucial thing here is that while this is how God has guided people and presumably, because he is God, still can guide people, there is nowhere where he promises to guide in this way. However, the tendency today is not only to expect God to do it but almost to demand it. Books on guidance talk about putting out a fleece though I notice never looking for writing on the wall! I'm not saying God cannot guide in these ways just that he has not promised to guide us in these ways. What we need to know is not how God can guide but how he has promised to guide.

**c. God promises to guide us by his Spirit and his word.** The Psalmist in 25:5 prayed "guide me in your truth". We are fortunate because God the Father has sent God the Holy Spirit who God the Son promised will "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13) How does he do that? He does it as he opens God's word to us, that word which Paul reminds us about in 2 Tim 3:16, "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness".

God as shepherd guides us by his Spirit through his word and that is the only way he has promised to guide us.

That I realise causes problems because the Bible doesn't touch on many things in life on which we might like guidance such as who should I marry, where should I live, what job should I do?

I would humbly suggest that some of our frustrations with guidance with finding God's will may well be that we are asking God the wrong questions.

Very often I am asking should I live in this house or that and while God wants me to enjoy abundant life the house I live in is not his greatest concern for my life. It is not where I live but how I live that is the supreme concern for God and I might add should be the supreme concern for me. Similarly if I am faced with the possibility of two jobs it is not wrong to pray for guidance but ultimately God's supreme concern is not where I work but how I work and hopefully later in the series Tim Hedgecock will say something about that.

God does promise to guide us through his word by his spirit but his guidance is so that we might walk in ways of righteousness towards the goal to which he is leading us which is heaven. That is God's plan for our lives.

But what about all those decisions we find difficult to make what does the Bible have to say about them? Well the Bible will not tell you who to marry but will tell you, if you are a person of faith, that it should be someone who shares that faith, who will in love sacrifice themselves for you. The Bible will not tell you where to live but it does encourage us as followers of Christ not to give up meeting together (Heb 10:25) and so living near a good church might be a good idea which will help us on in those paths of righteousness.

Now I recognise this may raise more questions than it answers but what I want to leave with us as a clear message is that God the father has a plan for our lives which is to lead us to Christ and then, in him, to bring us into eternity. He will by his spirit and his word guide us on that path. We like sheep will often go astray but he, as the good shepherd, will bring us back and he will bring us to heaven. So, as the Psalmist puts it, "my hope is in you all day long".

As we walk this path guided by God he asks us firstly to trust him "in you I trust my God". To trust that God is better than your satnav and that he is leading us in the right ways. He asks us to trust him even when things get a bit tough and others don't share our faith or, as we saw with Richard Turnbull last week, there are trials and temptations. In trust we persevere and we continue to go God's way, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1.6)

Then alongside that trust he asks us to walk with him. We do that as in all our decisions we ask the question, "does this choice move me closer to the goal God has for me or further away?" In my life and the choices I make am I walking with or away from Jesus? In that sense we will again see many

of the things that exercise our minds such as coffee or tea, daddy or chips, this house or that, this job or that are not questions to which there is in God's plan a right or wrong answer.

God's plan is general to see God's people in God's place under God's rule but his plan is also very specific to see you and I walking his ways as pilgrim's here on earth and then to be with him in heaven for all eternity. We are called to trust him to work out his plan and to walk with him that pilgrim way.