

Our Source of Certainty in Uncertain Times (Part 3): The Lord Guides Us

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[0 : 00] Can you look back at your childhood, and I'm talking about as a kid or a teenager, and see how God used certain experiences to shape you into the person you are today.

Think back of some of the things you did, had to do, when you were growing up, that have greatly influenced the way you look at life today.

The way you do certain things. For example, maybe you took care of a younger brother or sister when you were a teenager. Maybe they were a lot younger than you, and it may be that you didn't really want to do all you did, but you were forced by your parents to help out.

Well, that has influenced you, maybe helped you, you would admit, to be a better parent today.

Maybe you played a sport, learned to play a musical instrument.

Or maybe you had parents who made you work around the house, do chores. And now, looking back, you think, through those experiences, I learned to be disciplined.

[1 : 13] I learned to complete a task. I learned that you just don't quit because something is difficult. And today, you can get things done.

You know, we can look at David's early life experience as a shepherd, a shepherd boy, probably a young teenager, taking care of his father's sheep, and how that prepared him to write the 23rd Psalm.

You think about it. David was the youngest. He probably hated taking care of those sheep. Being at home, taking care of sheep by himself, and his brothers out doing something important.

At least more important than what he was doing. But God used that experience to prepare David to write what was probably the most well-known chapter in all the Bible, and what may be the most loved one chapter in the Bible.

David wrote Psalm 23 from his experience as a boy, as a teenager, taking care of sheep. But he wrote from the perspective of one of those sheep.

[2 : 36] Look at it with me. I want us to read the first three verses this morning. The first verse is where we see David is writing from the perspective of a sheep.

The Lord is my shepherd. God is the shepherd. I'm the sheep. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Last week we looked at the first part of verse three.

He restores my soul. And we saw how the Lord restores us when we need it. The way that we need it. I pointed out that sometimes the Lord restores us after we have drifted away or maybe just rebelled.

We've walked away from God or we're ignoring him. And in those kind of situations, he restores us by rescuing us from our sin.

[3 : 39] He restores us by forgiving us. Now sometimes God restores us. It has nothing to do with sin or rebellion or anything like that.

Sometimes he restores us after we go through a difficult time. Maybe when we are just physically or emotionally exhausted. Life has just been stressful.

We've had some major responsibilities. We've had to put in a lot of time. We haven't got to sleep as much as we normally do. And God just seems to come at just the right time to refresh us.

And maybe he does something to make us rest. Maybe he helps us to see we need to slow down, rest. Or maybe he does something to put us in a position where all we can do is rest.

But at the same time, he's helping us. He's helping us to stop, slow down. He's refreshing us. Well, as we move on into the next part of verse 3, we see that once the Lord restores us, however it is that he does.

[4 : 53] Once the Lord restores us, he then guides us in the way that he wants us to go. Let's look at it. The Lord guides us in the right direction. He leads me in paths of righteousness.

First thing I want us to think about is why. Why does the Lord have to lead us in paths of righteousness? Well, he has to because we naturally go the wrong direction.

We are born into this world with a bent toward living life my way and not God's way. David, he lived that out.

David knew from experience that sheep need constant guidance. They easily wander off and get lost.

If you've read anything about sheep and shepherds, Philip Keller's book or others, sheep are notoriously dumb animals.

[5 : 51] Even in familiar surroundings, they'll wander off. One might wonder and others follow. They get lost. Some commentators point out that in the places where David would have tended sheep in the land of Israel throughout that time period, for many years afterwards, people walked wherever they went.

And if you walk the same path to the same place over and over again, you wear out the ground. And so what some commentators say is that in any given area, there were many well-worn paths that might entice the sheep to go down that trail, go down that path and get lost.

And so the point is a shepherd had to work. In David's day, he understood, I've got to work as a shepherd to keep these sheep together and to guide them from one grazing area to another, to the place to get good water.

I've got to work and stay at it. Then, David, he had that experience as a boy, but then he thought about his experience as a man.

David knew from his own experience of committing adultery and murder, that even as a man of God, and you know, he's called, he's the only person in the Bible called a man after God's own heart.

[7 : 19] But yet he sinned, he rebelled against God this way. Don't you? I was thinking about this, this week.

And I thought, there are times when my picture, and you, you're no different than me. There are times when your picture or mine could be used to illustrate this point from Scripture.

Look at this verse. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. We do that, don't we? We just have that natural tendency to want to do things my way.

To go off in that direction, regardless of the fact that God's called us to go in the other direction. Well, David describes God's way in verse 3 as paths of righteousness, or you may have a translation that says right paths.

That's the more literal translation. The paths of righteousness, or the right paths, simply mean right living. Or holy living.

[8 : 28] And the word holy means to be set apart. To live like a man or woman of God. But don't misunderstand what he's talking about.

He is not saying that living life God's way is just a matter of following a certain rule, a certain direction. Let's have a little review here.

When you put your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, God immediately declared, by virtue of your faith in Jesus, that you are right with him.

He declared that you are righteous. When you trusted Jesus in God's eyes, immediately, He considered you His holy child.

His righteous child. You were right with Him through faith in Jesus. You became one with Jesus. And as we've said before, when you became one with Jesus, His death on the cross became your death to sin.

[9 : 41] Penalties paid. He died, paid the penalty for your sin. That's credited to you. You are forgiven. Slate clean. Through faith in Jesus, you're one with Him.

His perfect, obedient life of fulfilling God's law, that is credited to you as well. It happens at the moment you trust Jesus. That's why you are declared, at that moment, righteous, right with God.

Another way to say it, sometimes you are justified. Now, from that moment, when God declares you to be righteous, He starts working in you to actually make you live righteously.

And one of the ways He does that, He puts His Spirit in us, and His Spirit gives us the desire and the ability to obey God. I want you to look at this very familiar verse of Scripture.

In fact, to be honest with you, I look for ways to put this in just about every sermon. It is this, it is so important. Every person who is a Christian, look at this, Philippians 2, 13, for God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

[11 : 03] If you don't have any desire to please God, you're not a Christian. The Spirit of God does not live in you.

If you have no desire to please God, no desire to put forth the effort and see some good results, you have no reason to think from a biblical description of a Christian that you are saved.

Paul explains how God works in us to make us live like Jesus, live righteously. He puts His Spirit in us, He gives us the desire and ability to please Him.

Now I want you to go, I want us to go on and look how Paul explains what it means to follow these right paths in a very straightforward and detailed way.

He does it in his letter to the Thessalonians. Look at this. God's will is for you to be holy. That's a general statement. He's telling those people, God's will is for you to be holy, for you to be set apart to live for Him.

[12 : 11] God's will is for you to be righteous, to live that kind of life. And now, in writing to these people, He's going to tell them one specific way that they need to start living a holy life.

God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. There was sexual sin taking place in the church at Thessalonica. He goes on to say, then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and His ways.

Look next in verses 7 and 8, that same chapter. God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching, but is rejecting God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Now remember, the Holy Spirit lives in us if we're Christians. He gives us the desire and the ability to live this holy life that Paul's describing here.

We don't make ourselves Christians. God makes us Christians through faith in Jesus. God enables us, then, to start living like Christians because we have the desire to and we have the ability to.

[13 : 40] Now, let's stop and think. We're talking about path, the right path. What paths have you been traveling lately? Think about it.

Be honest. Have you desired to live a holy life this past week? Have you desired to live a life that pleases God?

there at home, at work, in whatever you've been doing? Let's take it a step further. Have you put forth the effort to please God by following through on those desires?

Now, it's important to understand when we think about this, it's not just what we do, but it's our attitude. Living a holy life includes having the right kind of thoughts, attitudes.

It also applies to the words we speak. All of this is who we are. What path, what path has your mind been on this week?

[14 : 54] What path has your mouth been on this week? What path have you been on? Following the path of righteousness with God as your leader?

Or have you detoured or just exited and took off in another direction after someone or something else that appealed to you more?

You know, God will lead us in the right path of life if we will follow Him. He's going to lead us. It's our responsibility to follow Him.

I want us to look now at how He normally leads us. The Lord guides us in the right direction through His word, prayer, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. That's what I want to focus on.

But the truth is, God guides us in all kinds of ways and you know that. Some of you have been helped along the way of life by someone.

[16 : 00] Someone has taught you, helped you, explained things to you. Some people have imparted wisdom to you. You've learned some things the hard way. You've learned some things by experience.

Some things just through the circumstances of life. God is not limited in how He works. But sometimes we fail to look at and utilize these three that I want us to look at right now. Let's look at them individually. The Lord guides us through His word. The way God does this is by revealing Himself and His will through the pages of Scripture. The Bible's not a magic word, a magic book.

The way we get guidance from God by reading His word is as we read the Bible over a period of time, we come to understand better, more clearly who God is, what pleases Him, what does not please Him.

See, the effect of the Bible is really cumulative. The more we read and study the Bible, the better we understand who God is, how He is, the better we understand ourselves, who we are, our sin problem, our selfish problem.

[17 : 23] The more we read the Bible, the more we understand what God is concerned about that we develop in terms of character. Now, the more we read the Bible with the attitude that we do want to know God better, we do want to know His way better, the more clearly that way will stand out to us.

In Psalm 119, there's a verse of Scripture that points that out and I'm going to guess that a lot of people in this room, you're familiar with this verse, look at it. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Your word, it lights up the right way for me. God is much more concerned with our character than anything else about us.

Some people think about living life God's way, doing His will, and they think about big events, you know, like who should I marry, what kind of job should I have, should I live here, should I do this or that.

You know, God guides us for sure in all kinds of ways, but God is more concerned about who you are in the house you live in. God's much more concerned about the kind of person you are, where you work.

[18 : 41] God is concerned about our character. That's why God's leading will always be about becoming more like Jesus, developing Christ-like character than it will ever be about becoming wealthy or even healthy or popular or anything else that the world says we should make our priority.

So let's think about this. Are you putting yourself in a position to be led by God in the right paths by regularly reading His Word?

I'm not talking about reading a verse today. I encourage you to read through the Bible, read through the New Testament. Just start, read through a book of the Bible.

Read a few paragraphs a day, a chapter a day. Learn more about who God is, how to please Him by looking at all of it.

And over time, God will light the path of holy living that He wants you to take. Day in, day out.

[20 : 00] The Lord guides us through His Word. The Lord guides us through prayer. David is a good example of seeking God's guidance and prayer as you see there in Psalm 25. David prayed. He wrote about it.

Make me to know Your ways, O Lord. Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me. For You are the God of my salvation. For You I wait all the day long.

The New Testament book of James tells us, if you lack wisdom, ask God for it. He's talking about praying. Look at it. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to Him.

Are you regularly seeking God's guidance in prayer? Are you asking Him? Are you asking Him to help you to grow in developing holy character?

Are you asking Him to help you to break sinful habits? Do you ask Him to help you to resist the temptation that seems to come your way all too often?

[21 : 13] You know, James says that sometimes we don't have because we don't ask or we ask with wrong motives. Look at this. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.

How much do you ask God to guide you in the way He would have you to go? How often do you pray, God help me to develop more patience with my children?

God help me to not be such a reactionary and get mad and frustrated at the least little thing. God help me not to lust.

God help me to shut my mouth and not say everything that comes through my mind and not put down everybody that I think is not doing exactly the way I think they ought to. How often do you pray, God help me in these kinds of ways more than God help me to get over this ingrown toenail and junk like that?

[22 : 22] I think a lot of our prayers are truly a waste of a lot of breath in the way that we neglect praying about the more important things of life.

We neglect praying about things that the psalmist prayed about, that Paul prayed about, that Jesus prayed about, the glory of God, developing personal character, seeing someone we know and love come to faith in Jesus.

That should be some of the things that we are praying and asking God about. The Lord also guides us through his Holy Spirit. And we've talked about that a lot. We have talked about that today in terms of how he works in us to give us desire and ability to please God.

I want to point out something different today, something new, a little bit new. John Piper, he had what I think is a very helpful explanation of how God works both through his word and his spirit, outwardly and inwardly.

Look at what he says. We must not only have revelation from outside, namely the Bible. We must also have transformation from the inside by the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 40] The word of God, the spirit of God, together provide the leadership we need. The word and the spirit team up to transform the mind. And in that way, God leads us in paths of righteousness.

Notice this next sentence. He gradually shapes our thinking and molds our emotions. This happens over time. Nobody becomes holy overnight.

God declares us to be holy when he saves us and then it's a lifetime process of actually being that. And Piper, it's good that he points this out. He gradually shapes our thinking and molds our emotions so that when there is no explicit command in the Bible to guide us, we weigh all the considerations with the wisdom and the love of God and we are drawn to the path of righteousness. There's so many things that we got to make decisions about that the Bible does not really teach us. That's why it's important for us to understand the principles of the Bible.

That's why it's important for us to understand God's wisdom and then pray and ask God to help me take what I do know of God's ways and apply it to this situation where there is no word from Scripture.

[25 : 00] And through his spirit and his word, God will guide us even in those ways. Piper then describes how we should learn to cooperate with God as he works in all of these ways.

The word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Look at this. He says, so I have learned to do like David. Meditate on God's word day and night and pray continually for the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart and mind.

Do you want to be led by God in the right paths? What Piper's talking about is what we've got to do. That's a requirement to know God's ways so that we can follow them.

Now, let's look at why the Lord guides us in the right direction. The Lord guides us for the ultimate purpose. He leads us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Now, the Lord guides us in the right paths for a whole lot of reasons. Not just this one. We've looked at some and various other studies.

[26 : 16] He guides us for our good. Romans 8, 28. That's what that verse is talking about. Look at it. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him. God does works in our lives, guides us in the right way we ought to go because he loves us.

He wants what's right and good for us. God guides us for the good of other people. God works in our lives so that we can take what he does, what he gives us, and spread it around.

I want to give you one example from Paul's life, 2 Corinthians 1, verses 3 and 4. He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with a comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

God wants to use you to bless others. And we need to understand that it is some of our painful experiences where we really experience God's comfort that God most wants to use us to be a source of comfort for someone else.

There are some people in this church who have told me, not a secret, it's widely known, people in our church years ago lost a child to death as a little child.

[27 : 47] And they went through that awful experience and experienced the comfort of God. So today, when they hear about someone who has lost a child to death, they want to seek to be used by God as a source of comfort in that couple's life.

That's the kind of thing Paul's talking about. You've been, some of you, many people in this room, you have been through some very painful experiences in your life.

And if you did experience the comfort of God, you need to think, now I have a responsibility to share that, be a source of comfort to others.

God comforts us for all kinds of reasons, but the ultimate reason is this, He guides us for His name's sake. To say that God guides us for His name's sake means that He guides us for the glory and reputation of Himself, of His own name, of His honor.

You know, in David's day, it was important for a shepherd to have a reputation for being faithful, taking care of his sheep, not ignoring his sheep. It's always been important for God to have a reputation for being faithful and responsible in the way He cares for and guides His people.

[29 : 18] Now, I want you to think about this. If you claim to be a Christian, all of us in this room, if we claim to be Christians, the name of both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are on the line wherever we go, whatever we do.

The way we follow our good shepherd is a reflection on Him.

The way you act at work, the way you act in this community, because people know you're a Christian.

You are a reflection for good or bad on your Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

The name of the Lord is honored or dishonored by the way that we live. What do people who know you, know that you're a professing Christian, what do they think about the Lord by being around you, listening to you, observing you, do you think about in the way you do your business, the way you treat people, the way you act under stress, do you ever think about this is a reflection on God, on the Lord?

[30 : 50] When I was in high school, I did not live a faithful Christian life, but I didn't get into trouble either. There were two primary reasons why I didn't get in trouble. I didn't want to raise the wrath or face the wrath of my parents.

Throughout my high school time, my dad was the chief deputy in Anderson County Sheriff's Department, and I knew if I got in any kind of trouble, he would find out. My dad was not a mean man.

He was not a harsh man. But if I had crossed certain lines, I'd be afraid of what would happen. And so I didn't do some things because in some ways I was afraid of Clyde Stone.

And I was equally afraid of Dot because she'd wear me out in a heartbeat as well. I also stayed out of trouble because I didn't want to disappoint my parents and grandparents.

My grandparents were close like other parents to me, live close by. I can honestly say that I didn't do some things because I loved my parents and grandparents, and I respected them enough to not hurt them or embarrass them or disappoint them.

[32 : 10] I say that to say it is not unheard of for us to do or not do some things for the sake of somebody else.

It's not unheard of to behave yourself, to do the right thing out of respect for another person. There is no one more worthy of us honoring and respecting than our Heavenly Father, is there?

And our Lord Jesus Christ. Stephen Lawson makes a helpful point about how living for God's glory will affect our lives personally. Look at what he says. Whatever most glorifies God results in our greatest good.

These two realities, God's glory and our good, are never at odds or in competition with each other. They work in perfect harmony with each other. That which most glorifies Him is what works for our greatest good.

Following God along His chosen paths for us, that does bring glory and honor to Him. But it also benefits us.

[33 : 25] God's way is the best way for God's children. It makes sense, doesn't it? If you're a Christian, you can be confident.

God is constantly seeking to guide you in the right paths of life. The question is, are you following Him? Are you wanting to be led?

Are you regularly reading His Word and then obeying it? Do you, as a matter of routine, pray and ask Him to help you better follow Him?

To live His way and not your way? And are you really seeking to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence in your life? And then obey Him as He teaches you, prompts you, directs you?

You know, it could be that as we've gone through this message, God's convicted you. You're far from Him. It's not that you're not following Him this morning. You exited a long time ago.

[34 : 35] You took a detour. And it may be what God wants you to do this morning is just admit that, confess your sin, humble yourself and come back to Him and let Him restore you.

Let Him restore you to fellowship with Him. Let Him restore you by putting you on the right path and following Him. It could be that you just have to admit, I'm not a Christian. I've professed to be, but I'm not.

There's no desire within me to please God. And I certainly don't put forth any effort. But God's convicted you of that. And you don't want to leave here that way. Good. Admit it to God.

Humble yourself. Turn from your sin. Change your mind. Put your trust in Jesus truly. Call upon Him to save you. Call upon Him to become the Lord of your life.

And follow Him as your good shepherd. Know this as you leave. Our good shepherd desires to guide us through the paths of life for His glory and our good.

[35 : 43] And if we follow His leadership throughout our life on earth, when death comes, it's not going to be that big a deal.

We're just going to follow Him on into heaven. Where we'll enjoy Him and His good life forever and ever.

Let's pray together. Father, show us now how we should respond. What we need to do so that when we leave here, we leave here following your leadership.

As you guide us in the right direction. For your glory and our good. Let's just listen to the Lord and respond to Him. Let's pray together.