



GOD'S GUIDANCE

Reading: Proverbs 3: 1-8

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3: 5-6)*

When Fanny Crosby wrote, *Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine: O what a foretaste of glory divine!* she knew the assurance of trusting God at every stage of life's journey, and expressed her joy of knowing Jesus as her friend and Saviour. Most of all, she knew that God knew what was best for her. Devoid of God's wisdom we cannot see with understanding, for at best we can expect, beyond the limits of our horizon, a variety of complex and confusing turns in the road that will test our highest knowledge and deepest commitment. Wisdom delivers us from evil, and promises long life and peace, favour with God and man, guidance, health and refreshment, prosperity and a proper response to discipline, ***For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, even as a Father, the son in whom he delights*** (Prov. 3:12).

Our text teaches us that we can make it, successfully and victoriously if we trust God's guidance. ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight*** (Prov. 3:5-6). We are encouraged to get to know God personally, and to enter into fellowship with Him, whereupon He will clear the obstacles that we find in our path and enable us to move forward.

God can guide us in our everyday living, in every decision, every action, every development of our lives. All too often, when people are faced with some major decision, they fail to trust God completely, preferring to decide the course of action that they think is best for themselves and then, at best, asking God to bless their decision. In a way, it's something that most of us do from time to time when we seek advice from someone. No matter what advice we're given, so often we've already decided what course of action we're going to take. Rather than seeking advice, what we're really seeking is approval. Yet, in the sense that we travel on a road as we journey through life, God is the road builder and the One who ensures its maintenance. Scripture mentions roads or paths on many occasions. The Hebrew language contains several words for these, including words that refer to a



highway, a way, a narrow path, a broad path, a trodden path, and a customary path or road. In Proverbs 3:6 the word used is that which represents the usual path - the one we travel on every day. It's on this path that we need to ensure that God is our guide. God cuts the path straight and keeps it useful, which is what is meant by the term, ***He will direct your paths***. We can get where we ought to because God is available to us to prepare the way.

God not only builds and prepares the road on which we travel, He also goes with us, being personally involved with us every step of our journey. Listen to what Scripture teaches, ***I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you*** (Psalm 32:8). ***For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death*** (Psalm 48:14), ***The Lord will continually guide you*** (Isaiah 58:11). ***When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth*** (John 16:13).

God will guide us, but there are three conditions that determine His guidance. Firstly, we are told to acknowledge Him in all our ways; that is, in every steps of your journey, make certain that you acknowledge God as your guide. Sometimes when we pass someone on the street we can be so preoccupied with our thoughts that we fail to respond to their greeting and simply pass them by. No slight is intended — their acknowledgement was missed simply because we were too deeply engrossed in our thoughts to notice it. Just as this can happen to us in our dealings with friends and family, so it can happen in our dealings with God. We can be too preoccupied with our thoughts to notice His guidance, so we need to pay attention to Him with the sensitivity of a faith that is alive and expectant, and not just in special moments of devotion and prayer. We are told to acknowledge Him in all our ways, in the day and the night, at work and play, rest or worship, in relationships, and when we are alone.

Secondly we are told to trust Him with all of our hearts. Sometimes we are guilty of only trusting Him at times of special need, preferring at other times to trust our own judgment instead, but we need to learn to trust Him absolutely. How easy it is for us to pay lip service to trusting God, yet how hard it can be sometimes! Our human nature tends to get in the way as we try to tell God how we want him to



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guide us. What we often seek is not guidance but confirmation. We must desire to please Him totally in the ordinary every day experiences.

These first two conditions could be labeled positive conditions. However, there is a third that can be labeled a negative condition: ***Do not lean on your own understanding.*** The RSV translates this as ***Do not rely on your own insight.*** The *Living Bible* says, ***Don't trust yourself.*** This condition suggests the absolute inadequacy of living without God's guidance. We cannot make the journey without Him, and some people pay an unnecessarily high price to learn that self-management leads to endless defeat.

The Bible tells us about a family of faith who decided one day to try a bit of self-management. God promised a child to Abraham and Sarah, but none arrived, so after years of waiting, Sarah utilized a custom of the time and gave her servant Hagar, to Abraham. Sarah thought that she was helping God to fulfil His promise. From the union of Abraham and Hagar the boy Ishmael was born. Eventually however, in God's time, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Eventually such hostility arose between Sarah and Hagar that Ishmael and his mother were sent away. This personal hostility escalated into national hatred and religious persecution between Arabs and Jews — Moslems and Christians, and Satan has used this to promote violence and hatred throughout the ages. When we lean on our own understanding and go into the self-management business then we only defeat ourselves.

God wants to give us His guidance. He knows our need for it and He knows our failure without it. But likewise He knows our capacity to follow His direction. He has a unique plan for each of us, and He waits for us to pay attention to Him, to trust Him with our whole heart, to reject our own abilities to guide ourselves.

To Him be the Glory!

Amen.

(Sermon preached by Rev'd Colin Gordon-Farleigh, at St John's Presbyterian Church, Runcorn, August 10th 2008)

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