

# Guidance

## Part 1 – The Lord My Shepherd

By Todd Pruitt

The question of guidance is an important one for God's people. Over the years I have been asked more times than I can remember how one knows the will of God in a given circumstance. It is an important question for two reasons. First, it assumes correctly that God does indeed have a will. There are things that God desires for His people and the world He created and rules. Second, the question correctly presupposes that God has made at least portions of His will knowable. But how do we move from knowing that God has a discernable will to knowing how He guides us in making right decisions? In other words the question that simmers within so many of our minds is *How does God guide us?*

The world, of course, completely misses the point of Divine guidance. If the reality of God is accepted He is seen as a benevolent but rather irrelevant part of life to be consulted or blamed in only the most extreme of difficulties. This is the world that demands immediate answers and quick satisfaction. Man imagines himself to be the master of his own destiny; that his will is supreme over any sense of providence. It is little wonder that Jesus was crucified through the supposed wisdom of this world.

Misunderstandings about how God guides His people abound in the church as well. These misunderstandings have led many into error. The Christian TV airwaves are full of preachers who seem to have a direct line to God's secret plans. They continually announce the fresh revelations that they receive. "God told me..." is the heavenly trump card that they hold out to any doubters. Still other forms of less Pentecostal mysticism promise direct encounters with God through "moving deeper in" or "climbing the inner staircase." The assumption is that the more we meditate, the more we "center down", and the more candles we light the greater will be our experience of the voice of God guiding us into His hard to find will.

Sinclair Ferguson addresses the confusion in the church well when he writes, "[The church] may spread before us guidance by intuition, guidance by dreams, guidance by visions, guidance by prophecies, guidance by tongues, guidance by peer-groups, guidance by leaders – and so on, in an apparently never-ending stream of possibilities. We can take one emphasis seriously, and perhaps make shipwreck of our souls. Or, we can bounce from one to another until confusion brings us to a halt."

There are certain decisions we face that seem to set the pattern or at least heavily influence the pattern of our lives. The first is who or what will we worship. Christians understand that this decision rises above all others and influences not

only our lives in the here and now but determines the life hereafter. The second is more like a category of decisions – those that revolve around our patterns of behavior. What choices will we make regarding financial and sexual ethics? Will we work hard or be lazy? Will we determine early in life to be honest, gentle, forgiving, and patient? The third big decision we face is what vocation we will pursue. This influences where we go to school, where we live, and what kind of income we can anticipate. The fourth decision that influences the pattern of our lives is whom we marry or do not marry.

Often times we look to God for some sort of direct guidance about where we should attend church, what we should eat or drink, which college to attend, which job to take, and which spouse to choose. What I hope to accomplish in the months ahead is to explore what we can realistically expect from God in regard to these and many other decisions. The question is not *does* God guide us. The question is *how* God guides us. The place to begin is by acknowledging that our need to know God is always greater than our need to have certain questions answered. Job found this out in a profound but painful way (42:5) as indeed so many saints have.

Martin Luther said that true Christianity consists in personal pronouns. In other words God is more than a Shepherd, a Guide, a Leader. We must know God well enough to say with confidence:

The Lord is *my* Shepherd; 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.

In this series of articles my goal is not to answer every question we might raise regarding God's guidance. I am far too frail and foolish to do that adequately. However, I am confident that Scripture will give us answers we will find to be sufficient in those moments when our seeking can be assuaged by nothing less than the tender guidance of our good Shepherd.