



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

June 23, 2019

# **Psalm 23: Your Way and God's Leadership**

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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: June 24, 2019

## Psalm 23: Your Way and God's Leadership

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*Philippians 3:7-11*  
*Psalm 23:2-3*

Today, as we continue this series on Psalm 23, I want you to consider 'your way and God's leadership'.

You have heard the old saying that comes across as an affirmation of faith: "God is my co-pilot."

Well, Psalm 23 tells us that if you think God is your co-pilot, you need to change seats!

Just look at verse 2 and verse 3 in our psalm, particularly that little phrase, "he leads me, he guides me".

Now I suppose it is obvious that we all need guidance at different times and at different places in our lives, but the fact is we lean toward wanting to make our own way.

Yes, like little children, but unlike just wanting to pull our shirt over our heads, "I can do it myself"; this is for all of life, no matter how old we are, "I've got this. I can do my life my way!"

I remember an infomercial by a vacation tour operator explaining why you and I would benefit from taking their guided tour of Europe instead of going it alone.

They show a happy couple going on vacation to Europe. They get off the plane in London. They rent their car and immediately they get lost.

They have no clue where they are going, and what starts out as a happy vacation changes pretty quickly, so that soon they are talking to each other in a not-so-happy vacation language!

The conclusion is: “You need a guide, you need us to take you on this trip around Europe.”

And if it is true in the secular sense as tourists, then it is surely also true in the spiritual sense for our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

After all, we have only one life to live, and when our life is over, it is over. There is no going back.

It may cost you a lot of money if you blow it as a tourist in Paris or Rome or London or wherever else, but you can go back, and you can try it again.

But with our lives, well, you just have one shot, one time to do it. How important it is to have a guide for this “one life to live”, for the way we are going.

God knows full well that if our lives are not to be wasted, if our lives are not to be squandered, we need to ask ourselves constantly if our lives are guided lives or if we are really on our own tour with no guide but ourselves.

Like the old hymn says, ‘it’s a blessed thought that he leadeth me’, and we can sing “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” because we know we need his tender care, but it gives rise to the questions: “How does God lead us? What does God’s leadership have to do with the way you go?”

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Let me make it easy for you. You can follow Fox News or CNN, but I will tell you that you will receive the best guidance from the BBC.

No, not that BBC. The BBC I want you to remember is: The Bible, Believers, and your Conscience.

First, God guides us through the Bible.

For many of us, we have a story, a passage, a verse of scripture that we hold on to and is precious to us.

That was the subject in a recent staff Bible study, and we all shared the piece of Scripture that has been a guiding light for our faith journey.

But we have to be careful in how we use the Bible.

There is what I call the 'flip and dip' method of finding God's will from the Bible, that is, you flip open the Bible and dip your finger onto the page, and wherever it lands, you believe God is speaking to you.

An executive was having financial trouble and so he just opened the Bible at a place and put his finger on a particular page in the Bible; but his finger was not on a passage, he had flipped and dipped onto a chapter title.

In fact, it was chapter 11, which in the financial world refers to bankruptcy. So, he took that to be a 'word from God,' guiding him to immediately declare bankruptcy!

The Bible is not a magic book. God asks us to be diligent, disciplined, to allow the Bible, all of it, to inform our lives, so that we are not led down paths of self-righteousness.

In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 17, we are given direction for how God's word can guide us.

It's a word to the King of Israel, to all future kings, and a word for us today. The first thing God commands a king to do when he sits on the throne is to "write for himself...a copy of the law."

Not to use a secretary, not to assign the task to summer interns, but he is to take out his pen and paper and copy down God's laws for himself.

And he should then return to that copy over and over again, reading it "all the days" of his life.

Joshua DuBois in his book of devotions writes about this passage, *"We must know God's word, for ourselves. We must read it, for ourselves. We must keep it close to us...God's words upon our hearts, where no circumstance can remove it. And it brings us into alignment with his kings."*

I believe that is how God wants to use the Bible within our lives, not just bit by bit, not just as a collection of proof texts or lines that fit on a bumper sticker but absorbing the fullness of scripture in its depth and breadth in our lives, molding and shaping our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A few weeks ago, one of our youth came to me after worship and suggested that he thought it would be good if we had an app on our phone, maybe put on our website, where we could share our favorite Bible verses.

What a wonderful idea where we can share with one another how God's word speaks to us in our lives!

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Which leads directly to the second way of God's leadership, that is, through fellow believers.

That is, if God is going to guide me through the Bible, then I need to have the faith to believe that God is also at work in other people, and through them is able to guide me, to help me check, check and double check my sense of God's will.

God uses other believers, our coming together with others, to show us what God wants us to do.

You see, we get so caught up in going the way of 'what's in it for me?' that we take the path of least resistance.

We've forgotten to ask, 'where am I in it for God and for good' and follow the paths of righteousness.

The question for us as a church is how are we to do this in a pluralistic society? How are we to do this in a society in which we cannot always agree about the form of righteousness in the world?

In this regard, Alistair McIntyre, one of the great ethicists of our generation says this, "*The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterances is that so much of it is used to express disagreements, and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed, is their interminable character.*"

You see, we can no longer exist as a nation or as a church if all that we have going for us is living by the lowest common denominator of "me, myself, and I" and not living up to the highest ideals of morality and integrity and respect for all people.



The problems that beset us are not economical, not even political; they are spiritual in nature.

This is where the promise we make as a congregation in the Sacrament of Baptism is crucial.

On behalf of the body of Christ, all believers, you promise to be a guide to help others follow Jesus Christ.

What we're saying is that all of us as baptized children of God need someone who has been on the way of faith and hope and love and says, "Pssst! Come on and follow me. I'll show you what to do. I can lead you from where you are to where you want to go."

A guide, that's the church:

- People who have 'been there, done that,' as God's people...caring, helping, serving, teaching, reaching down and helping us up, giving us a shoulder to lean on, arms to wrap around us when we hurt so bad.
- Guided by people who know us, and know the way ahead, faithful people who see the big picture of God and the little picture of our spot in the world and can put all of the picture together with us at a vital place within the picture.
- A church guided by a God who very clearly in scripture is portrayed as a God who loves, who is waiting, who is itching to guide his people, guiding human lives all the way from the beginning through baptism to the end.

The church leads us, guides us to discovering afresh the guidance of God to give meaning and purpose to our lives and to guide us when otherwise we might find ourselves in dead ends again and again and again.

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God leads us through the Bible, Believers, and our Consciences!

You have heard it said, 'let your conscience be your guide.' But for so many of us, our conscience has a very bad sense of direction!

We must never forget that our consciences can be easily corrupted, and we can easily misread our consciences.

So how do we connect God's still small voice to the way we are to go?

The short answer is prayer, that conversation we have with God about our lives, our world, our seeking his will, where we listen for God's voice.

And those prayers need to be informed by the Biblical story of God's way with the world and be in conversations with other believers who know the Biblical story, again and again and again.

And none other than Jesus is our model. If the incarnation is true, if in Jesus we know God and have seen God and have heard God, then of course God speaks to us through our thoughts.

When accusers called Joan of Arc the victim of her own imagination, she is reported to have responded most eloquently, "How else would God speak to me?"

The insightful pastoral theologian, Henri Nouwen describes it in terms of discernment.

He says, *“Christian discernment is not the same as decision making. Reaching a decision...maybe we list the pros and cons of each possible choice; and then we choose the action that meets our goal most effectively.”*

*“Discernment, on the other hand, he continues, is about listening and responding to that place within us where our deepest desires align with God’s desire. As discerning people, we sift through our impulses, motives, and options to discover which ones lead us closer to divine love and compassion for ourselves and other people and which ones lead us further away.”*

And he concludes, *“We come to realize that what previously seemed so important for our lives loses its power over us. We move closer to God’s heart”.*

Closer to God’s heart, isn’t that the way we want to go?

As we pray more each day, as we engage with and involve ourselves with other believers, and as we study the signposts of God’s way in the Bible... then God’s will, that is, God’s powerful, particular, personal ways of leading us shows us the way closer to God’s heart.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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