"I Will If You Will" I Will Direct You October 23, 2016

PRELUDE - Trust in You

Worship Songs – Trust in You / Called Me Higher Announcements – Video

Feature - "This" / Offering

Gosh, I love that song, especially the part where it says "sitting here right now it all makes perfect sense."

(Of course, I'm not too crazy about the "dying momma became an angel" part. Good country music; terrible theology).

In any case ...

- Wouldn't it be great if you could look back over the events and circumstances and the people in your life - good and bad - and know for certain that God has led you here to "this" - whatever "this" is for you right now?
- Wouldn't it be great to know that, as you encounter various situations and challenges; as you consider possibilities and opportunities and then try to make decisions as best you can ... wouldn't it be great to have the confidence that not only is God looking out for you, He is also leading and guiding you as you make those decisions.

You can have that confidence and you can know that God has led you and is leading you. This morning, that's what I want to talk to you about.

But before we get into that, let me give a bit of context as I know some of you are joining us for the very first time or the first time in a long time. We're in the middle of a series that we're calling, "I Will If You Will" and we're learning about some of the big things God promises to do for us *if* we meet certain conditions.

And the reason we're doing this series is because even though a lot of Christians celebrate and rejoice that God's grace is unconditional, what we don't realize is that many of His blessings are not. They're conditional. In other words, while grace has

no strings attached – there is nothing you can do to earn it; it just "is" and it is freely offered by God – at the same time, some of God's greatest blessings are dependent on our obedience.

"I will do this," God says, "if you will do that."

And in the first two weeks we've looked at two of God's conditional promises.

The first being: "I will rescue you – I will save you from the curse of sin and death," He says, "if you will call on Me to do so."

I felt like that was a good way to begin the series because it really gets to the heart of the issue about grace. Even though God's love and forgiveness and acceptance is totally free and totally unable to be earned, there is still a condition on salvation: that you and I come to the point in our lives where we turn to Jesus as our savior and ask Him to save us.

 The second promise we looked at last week. "I will relieve your stress and anxiety," God says, "if you will come to Me and take My yoke upon you."

If you were not present last Sunday and you want to know what that means and how to do that, I encourage you to go online to our website or our app and watch, listen to or read the message. And, if you missed the first message, that one is out there, too.

So, point is, there are certain things God promises to do for us *if* we meet certain conditions. And if we don't understand that, we won't strive to meet those conditions and therefore, we're going miss out on the kind of life that God desires for us. Instead of being filled with joy and peace and contentment, we're going to be stressed and worried and wondering "where is God in all of this?"

... which brings us back to the issue for today: how we can know that God is leading and guiding us?

And that is what God wants to do. In fact, all through the Old Testament we see numerous examples of God leading and guiding not just the nation of Israel and its

leaders but individuals.

And we read that it's part of His character and nature to do so.

"I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go." Isaiah 48:17 (NIV)

This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end. Psalm 48:14 (NIV)

In the New Testament, that pattern continues as we see even more examples of God leading and guiding Jesus' disciples, as well as the leaders of the early church.

In fact, all who believe in Jesus and who call on Him to be their savior are actually promised a Guide who will live inside of them; a guide we call the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said:

"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." John 16:7 (NIV)

The Apostle Paul said:

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." Romans 8:14 (NIV)

God is in the leadership business, friends. And if you are one of his children – if you have received Jesus as your savior and Lord – He wants to guide you. And you will experience his guidance if you meet certain conditions.

The Promise

What are those conditions?

Well, let me begin by telling you what they are *not* because a lot of people think this is something that only the super-spiritual get to experience. But that's not true.

1. So, first of all, you do *not* need to be "spiritually sensitive" to be guided by God.

Now, there *are* some followers of Jesus who *are* super-sensitive spiritually. That's because they have the spiritual gift of discernment. They have the ability to tell if there is a spirit of deception and confusion at work in people and in situations. They can tell when the Holy Spirit is at work and is not ... but ... you do not have to be one of those people in order to know God's

guidance in your life.

2. Second, you do not need to engage in "mystical practices" to be guided by God.

What's a mystical practice?

Well, I think pretty much every Christian has heard at some point the story of Gideon, an Old Testament saint, and how he asked God to guide him through a fleece. And there are a handful of stories in the Bible where people cast lots to determine God's will. Those are mystical practices and they are very limited in the scripture.

Now, in our day, the most common "mystical practice" is what might be called "Bible Roulette." I'm sure you've heard of it and maybe even tried it. It's where you pick

a Bible verse at random and whatever that verse says, supposedly that's God speaking to you.

And I'm sure you've heard the story about the guy who really wanted to know God's direction on a certain issue, so he tried this method. He prayed for the Lord to show him what to do, then he opened his Bible, and stuck his finger on a random passage ...

... which happened to be Matthew 27:5 which reads:

Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Matthew 27:5 (NIV)

Slightly startled and unsure how this verse applied to his situation, the man flipped to another passage ...

... and the Bible fell open to Luke 10:37 which reads ...

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:37 (NIV)

At this, the man was quite upset, so he decided to turn to one more place. Again he opened the Bible at random and this time ...

His finger fell upon John 13:27:

Then Jesus said, 'What you are about to do, do quickly." John 13:27 (NIV)

I'm not sure that really happened (in fact, I'm pretty sure it didn't) but it does illustrate the problem: sometimes mystical practices can be very misleading if not downright dangerous.

But the good news is that God's promise of guidance is not dependent on practices which are the equivalent of a Magic Eight Ball. Nor are they dependent on our degree of spiritual sensitivity.

Instead, His conditions are much more basic than that *and yet*, as we'll see, there is a weightiness to them that reaches into the deepest level of our hearts.ⁱⁱ

So what are those conditions? They are found in the third chapter of the biblical book of Proverbs ...

... in the fifth and sixth verses:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge
Him,
And He will direct your paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

And you can see on the screen that I'm using the New King James Translation of this passage. I'm doing so because that's the version that I learned many, many years ago as a teenager and it's the version that is still embedded deep in my mind whenever I think of it.

I'm curious how many of you have memorized these verses at some point in your life?

If you're going to have a passage of scripture memorized this is certainly a good one. In fact, I'd like for us to work on

that together for a bit this morning. So, here's what we're going to do. I'm going to say a line of the passage and you all say it back to me, OK?

Here we go:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
<echo>
And lean not on your own understanding;
<echo>
In all your ways acknowledge
Him,
<echo>
And He will direct your paths.
<echo>
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKIV)

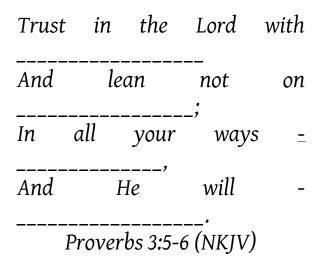
Great! Ok, now this time, let's do it without the screen.

I'll say a line, you echo it back. Here we go:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
<echo>
And lean not on your own understanding;
<echo>
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
<echo>
And He will direct your paths.
<echo>
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

Ok, this time, it's going to be a little bit more challenging. I'm going to leave off the second half of each sentence and you guys fill it in. Ok?

Let's put it on the screen. And here we go.



Ok, let's try it one more time and let's get rid of the slide and do the whole thing from memory.

Are you ready? Here goes:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct your paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

As I said, I learned these verses as a teenager many years ago. I don't remember who taught it to me or why but I do know that it's been a huge, huge help to me through the years whenever I faced major decisions - like which girls to date and who to marry; which job to take, where to live and, also, whenever I struggled with hard situations ... such girls who didn't want to date me or who broke up with me and the jobs I didn't get. There is just so much wisdom and encouragement in these few sentences.

In fact, back in the beginning of August when we took a Sunday to honor and bless the next generation and those who teach and lead them (many of you were here for that service), Shannon asked me if I would say something at the end to our high school seniors who had graduated and who were about to move on to the next phase of their lives.

I said, "Sure. How long do I have?"

She said, "Sixty seconds."

So, when we got to the end of the service and all those young people and their parents were standing up here at the front, I said to them, "As you embark on whatever is next in your life, the single most important piece of advice I can think of to give to you in the brief time I have is this:"

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding;

In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

And I gave a short one sentence explanation of each of those lines but, later, I thought, "I really need to teach on this passage because it is so meaningful and important especially to young people, but not just to young people." This is important for all of us – anyone who wants to be able to look back over their life and know that God has led them here to "this"; anyone who wants to have the confidence that God is leading and guiding as they make decisions.

And, apparently, a lot of people want to have that confidence. As I was preparing for this message, I discovered that this particular passage – Proverbs 3:5-6 – is number eight on the list of the 100 most read and searched for scriptures on www.biblegateway.com.

Interestingly, number two on that list is Jeremiah 29:11 which reads "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" ... which also deals with the idea of God being involved in our lives and guiding our lives.

By the way, number one on the list (and I'm sure some of you are wondering) is John 3:16.ⁱⁱⁱ

Principles of Guidance

But, we're talking this morning about

Proverbs 3:5-6 and God's promise to direct our paths. And we're going to talk about the three conditions of that promise that are spelled out in that passage.

Before we do, however, I think it might be worth talking about what we mean by God's direction and guidance in our lives. One of the things I've seen over my years as a pastor is that there is a lot of confusion on this issue which often leads to unrealistic expectations and then disappointment and discouragement.

So, what I'm going to do in the next few minutes is to lay out a few biblical principles that help us to get a clearer picture of what guidance is (and is not). And then we'll talk about those conditions specified in our passage.

Guardrail Principles

Now, these first two principles are sort of like guardrails. A guardrail doesn't really do anything to guide your car down the road. It just keeps you from going off into the ditch and hurting yourself or worse.

These principles do the same thing, spiritually speaking.

Principle 1. God's *guidance* is always consistent with His ultimate *purposes*.

In other words, if God leads you to do something, it's going to be in line with what He himself is trying to do. Remember, He is at the center of all reality. We are not. He's already got a plan working and we are joining it, not the other way around.

So, when you sense what you think might be God's leading in your life, you can test it very simply. Is it consistent with His ultimate purposes?

... which of course means that you need to be aware of what God's ultimate purposes are; two of them, specifically.

 First, as we've talked about on many occasions, God's ultimate purpose in the world is for the establishment of His Kingdom and His righteousness.

Remember what Jesus said to pray? "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

God wants all people everywhere to

know Him and to experience his great love for them; and He wants all people everywhere to live the kind of life He intends for them which, as we learned last week comes down to "love God and love all people."

That's what God is trying to accomplish in this world. It's the most important thing on His agenda.

 Second, God's ultimate purpose in our lives is always that we come to Jesus and then, over time, become more and more like Him and less and less like ourselves.

In other words, God is not concerned with merely getting you from point "A" to point "B" in your life. He wants

to see you accept Jesus as your savior and then He wants to see your character develop and mature. He wants you to grow in faith and understanding.^{iv}

So, in whatever way God leads you, it will be consistent with those two *ultimate* purposes: what God is doing in the world and what God is doing in you as a person.

Now, it may not be obvious at the time how that's happening but, if God is leading you, you'll be able to look back and see it.

Principle 2. God's *private direction* is always consistent with His *revealed directives*.

In other words, God is not going to tell you to do something that contradicts what He

has already said long before you ever came on the scene. He won't tell you to do something that violates, for example, the Ten Commandments. He's not going to lead you to live a life that is inconsistent with the kind of life that Jesus talked about and modeled.

So, again, if you're wondering if God might be leading you to do something, a very simple question is "does this line up with the kind of life God has called followers of Jesus to live?"

Again, these are the guardrail principles. God won't tell you to rob a bank or to leave your spouse and run off with someone else. God probably won't tell you what color dress to wear or where there is an empty

parking space as those kinds of things have nothing to do with His ultimate purposes in the world ... or in you.

Proactive Principles

Now, let's talk about the more proactive aspect of guidance – the yellow line down the middle of the road that shows where the road is heading. There are two principles that I think go a long way towards clearing up what is probably the most common confusion about God's guidance and direction, which has to do with how his leading actually comes to us.

Specifically, God's guidance comes in one of two ways:

Principle 3. Sometimes, God's direction in our lives is *supernatural*.

Something dramatic happens and we are told in a direct manner that this is where we're to go and what we're to do.

- Sometimes, God does something in the sky.
 Angels appear to shepherds on the night Jesus is born and proclaim "Go to Bethlehem and see!" And the shepherds do.
- Sometimes, God sends a dream. The Magi have seen the Christ-child and are ready to return home. But one them has a dream in which they are warned not to go back through Jerusalem. And so they go another way.
- Sometimes, God speaks directly. Paul is traveling the road to Damascus on his

way to terrorize believers in Jesus and Jesus appears to him. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And Paul repents – he changes his mind about Jesus - and becomes the greatest evangelist for Christ who ever lived.

• Sometimes, He sends someone to speak for Him. The Roman soldier Cornelius respects God and wants to know God and so God prompts the Apostle Peter (in a dream!) to go to him and tell him about Christ. And Cornelius and his entire family believe and become followers of Jesus.

Sometimes, God's direction in our lives is supernatural and dramatic.

But. Not. Very. Often. In fact, it's very rare.

And this is where it gets a little confusing because when you read the Bible, it seems like it's *full* of people who constantly see signs and hear voices.

And there *are* a lot of biblical characters who experienced God's direction in that way but, for most of those people – the greatest heroes of our faith – it was an extremely rare event. And whenever it happened, it didn't have anything to do with personal matters but with issues that involved His ultimate purposes.

In my own life, I can only think of three times where I was sure that God was supernaturally giving me direction. On two occasions, I had a vivid dream and on one occasion, I was trying to discern if God

wanted me to stay in KC and start North Heartland or move to a church in Illinois that had offered me a job.

I was praying about it one night when there was a huge thunderstorm. At one point, I said, "Lord, if you want me to stay here, I wish you would write the answer in the sky."

Just then, as I looked out the window, I saw something very unusual in the pattern of the lightning. It would make the story much more interesting if I could say I saw two letters – "K C" – but, I didn't. What I did see, however, was a very "script-like" string of lightning which I had never seen before or since. It actually stunned me when I saw it.

So I took it as God's guidance to stay and that's partly why we're all here this morning instead of somewhere else.

But, again, this kind of direction – supernatural direction – is very rare. For me, it's happened three, maybe four, times in 40-some years of being a Christian.

Principle 4. Instead, most of the time, God's direction is *providential*.

And "providential" means that God works through what seems to be the ordinary circumstances of life to lead people to accomplish His purposes.

A great biblical example of this is Esther, a young Jewish girl who, through an odd set of circumstances, just happened to be exalted to the position of Queen of Persia,

just at the moment when her people were about to be exterminated by a secret plot.

When she discovered what was happening and asked her uncle what she should do, he said, "Esther, who knows? Maybe you are at this place in this situation for such a time as this."

And she was. God's providential guidance had led her to a position where, through her actions, many thousands were saved from certain death.

The Apostle Paul is another example:

He was in prison when he wrote to the Christians at Philippi:

I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that

everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. Philippian s 1:12 (NLT)

Now, to the casual observer, it seemed like Paul was in prison simply because the civil authorities put him there. But God used that situation to direct Paul for His ultimate purposes both in Paul's life and in the world.

So, did God really want Paul to suffer in prison? Maybe, maybe not. But was He guiding and directing Paul's life at that point? *Absolutely*. That's what we mean by providential.

 Providential means that God puts you where you need to be without you even knowing that's what He is doing.

- Providential means that God allows certain circumstances to happen and then makes use of those circumstances for His glory and for your good.
- Providential means God allows you to make choices and He then makes use of that.

Another of the proverbs puts it like this:

A person plans his course, but the Lord directs his steps. Proverbs 16:9 (NET)

God's primary strategy for guiding us is "You make your plans. You take responsibility. You put forth some creative

effort, which is what I've made you to do."

See, you and I are not puppets. And God is not some "Grand Puppet Master of The Universe" pulling all the strings behind the scenes. You and I are free moral agents who have the ability to think and decide and plan and strategize and choose.

And God says, "Do that to the best of your ability. Ask Me for wisdom when you need it but, in the end, it's your call. You decide. And I will use that. I will providentially direct your steps and you can be confident that whatever is going on in your life right now is a result of My guidance ... if ... you meet the conditions" ...

... which are spelled out for us in Proverbs 3:5-6.

The Conditions

And just to make sure it's firmly in our minds, let's review it one more time. Let's see if we can all say it together from memory, OK? Here we go.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct your paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

By the way, that last phrase where it says "and he will direct your paths" can also be translated (and some scholars think it's better translated) as "he will make your paths straight" (or level). It means God will

remove whatever obstacles are in the way so that we can go down the path that He intends for us^{vi} which is great news because even if we start off down the wrong path, if we follow these conditions, we will be brought back on track. God will straighten our path.^{vii}

Ok, so let's look at the three conditions one by one.

First of all, God says "I will guide and direct you if you trust Me with all your heart."

Well, what does that mean?

It means to constantly strive to believe the best about God and to root your life in that belief.

• It means to believe and keep on

- believing that God is good;
- To believe and keep on believing that God loves you enough to die for you;
- That God is for you and not against you.
- It means to believe and keep on believing that God knows what He is doing even when it's not obvious to you.
- It means to believe and keep on believing that you are not at the mercy of your limited human vision and wisdom because God will guide you.

And it means to go all-in on God – to fully embrace God and depend on God – because you believe those things are true of Him.

Actually, the Hebrew word that's translated "trust" carries the idea of stretching yourself out upon a bed or laying down on a hard surface. It means to put your full weight on something. To trust in the Lord is to lay your whole weight upon him.

Obviously (or maybe it's not so obvious), the very first step in this kind of trust is to believe in Jesus and accept Him as our savior; to call on Him to save us as we talked about two weeks ago. And if you've not yet come to that point in your life, that's where it all begins so, I encourage you to listen to that message or, at the end of the service today, come down front and Kitti or I will talk with you about that.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Constantly strive to believe the best about God and to root

your life in that belief.

That's the first condition.

Here's the second. God says, "I will direct you if you lean not on your own understanding."

What does that mean?

Well, it *doesn't* mean that you check your brains at the door because you're a Christian. And it doesn't mean that you don't process through things or use common sense or that you shouldn't get the advice of wise and godly people. As we saw earlier, the providential guidance of God actually *requires* that we do those things.

As someone has said, "God can't direct a parked car. It's got to be moving."

So, you make your plans, you start moving but "lean not on your own understanding" of the situation as it unfolds. Beware of thinking you are smarter than God for, as he has said through the prophet Isaiah:

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)

"Oh, come on, Rick, who actually thinks they are smarter than God?"

Well, when you put it in those terms, no one really. But those are not the terms in

which we typically put it.

Typically, what we do (and we'll talk about this more in a couple of weeks) – and this is one of the great temptations as humans – what we do is to look at our situation as it currently stands and say (usually in an accusing tone), "where is God? Is this really his plan? I can't see how he is expressing His love and care for me. If God really loved me and cared for me, He would <fill in the blank.>"

What we typically do is to set ourselves and our wisdom above God's. And we sit in the judgement seat.

So, what "lean not on your own understanding" means, at least in this context of being guided and directed by

God is to ...

Constantly strive to avoid judging God and/or His plan prematurely.

- It means that, as things unfold in our lives, we continually strive to release control and expectations of how things ought to go because we trust God's goodness.
- It means we continually strive to surrender our vision and our judgements.
- It means we don't jump to conclusions until, well, the conclusion of the matter.

As a wise sage once put it: "the surrendered life comes before the guided life."

Lean not on your own understanding. Do

not judge God and/or his plan prematurely. That's the second condition.

The third and final is "in all your ways acknowledge Him."

What does that mean?

Well, it doesn't mean you sort of tip your hat to Him. It doesn't simply mean you pray "hey, God, here's what I'm doing. I'm acknowledging that I need your blessing."

Although that's not a bad thing to do, to acknowledge God in all your ways means much more.

It means that you constantly strive to do what God has *already revealed* in every area of your life. You acknowledge that He has already given direction and you are trying to follow.

For example, if God has already given direction in the scripture on ...

- How we're to handle money
- How we're to handle conflict with people
- How, if we're married, we're to love our wives and respect our husbands
- How we're to deal with loss and grief
- How we're to treat our body as His temple
- How we're to respect authority
- How we're to value every human (whether we like them or not, whether they are born or unborn) as a being created in His image

- How we're to be good stewards of the planet
- How we're to be part of a fellowship of believers who shine the light in their community.

And he has given that direction by the way.

And if God has already given direction to us on where we're supposed to live and what we're supposed to do and who we're supposed to do it with, acknowledging Him means we continually try to do those things.

Once, Jesus was talking about this very issue – what you do with what God has already revealed to you – and He said:

"Consider carefully what you

hear. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more." Mark 4:24 (NIV)

In other words, if you use what God has already revealed – if you put it into practice, He will reveal even more.

If you want for God to guide and direct all of your life, in all your ways follow the guidance and direction He has already given.

Conclusion

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)

"I will direct you," God says, "if you will ..."

- Constantly strive to believe the best about Me and to root your life in that belief;
- If you will strive to avoid judging Me and/or My plan prematurely – before I have finished the job;
- And if you will strive to put into practice what I have already revealed to you.

Now at this point, I know that some of you are thinking, "Wow, Rick, thank you so much for sharing this. I had no idea that this is how it works." And you're ready to go out today and put this into practice as

you use your God-given brain to make choices and decisions in your life.

But I know that some others are thinking, "Well, Rick, so much for me. I've already messed up on all of these so badly that there is no hope."

Fortunately, that's not true because God can straighten the crooked path. God can begin guiding and directing us right where we are, today. In Jesus, he has already straightened the worst path of all – a world destined for destruction – so removing whatever obstacles you've created through your foolishness and is not too hard for Him. Just confess it to Him and then begin to follow these three principles in your life.

And you, too, can have the confidence that

God is leading and guiding you for your good and for His glory.

Let's pray to that end.

Feature - Make A Way

CLOSING COMMENTS

- 1. Baptism
- Final Shine Magnets (Goodness) & series magnet

Endnotes

ⁱ Good examples from

https://www.calvaryabq.org/teachings_view.asp?ServiceID=2204&transcript=1&AcceptsCookies=yes#transcript

 $^{^{\}rm ii}$ Concept from http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2016/01/top-bible-verses-explained-proverbs-35-6-conditions-for-guidance/

iii https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2015/12/the-top-ten-bible-verses-of-2015and-more-bible-gateways-year-in-review-is-here/

iv https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/MessageViewer.aspx?date=2014-08-27 v http://www.titusinstitute.com/knowinggodandwill/spoke.php

vi Calvary ABQ

vii http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2016/01/top-bible-verses-explained-proverbs-35-6-conditions-for-guidance/

http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1993-11-07-How-to-Make-a-Tough-Decision/