

Walking in God's Guidance

Kingham 18/10/2009

Genesis 24:10-28 & 49-51 & 66-67

1. INTRODUCTION

Our theme today is 'Walking in God's Guidance', following on from last week when we looked at finding God's guidance in the Bible from its trajectories.

When the Bible doesn't specifically address our situation.

So last week we looked at how Abraham worked out what God

wanted for his heir, Isaac.

God wanted Isaac to get married, but not to a local Canaanite woman, and not to return back to Abraham's family home in Ur, in southern Iraq.

In today's reading, God confirms all of this by going before and with Abraham's servant on his journey, wife-hunting!

But I wonder how many of us enjoy these great stories from the Bible but leave them there.

In the past.

Gathering dust.

Relevant to different people in a different era.

But somehow not what I experience in my own Christian life.

So I thought, for a complete change, I would tell you a little of the

story of God's very proactive guidance in my own life.

One of the privileges of my job is that I often get to know of the ways that God works in the lives of Christians here.

So I know that my and Lynn's experiences are not in the least out of the ordinary in our villages.

2. CONVERSION & FORMATION

I came from a completely Non-Christian home.

In fact the only person in our very large family and my parents' many friends who had any connection with church was one Godmother.

There was no-one else I knew even vaguely Christian!

That changed somewhat in the 6th form, where I started to know a number of Christians, in fact even going out with one for just over a year.

I became very argumentative against Christianity, which was astonishing really as I knew virtually nothing about it!

What was perhaps even more astonishing was that I and my mate Bill often won the arguments!

But through that girlfriend I eventually went along, grudgingly, to her little church youth group.

There I met the leader, a young GP who was much brighter and more knowledgeable than I was.

And who claimed to have a real relationship with Jesus.

A few months later I gave up and acknowledged I was wrong and so I asked Jesus to be my Lord and saviour - I became a Christian. Right from the start somebody, probably that leader, taught me to spend some quality time every day alone with God, letting him speak to me through the Bible and then speaking to him in prayer.

So I got used to expecting, at least to some extent, God to guide and direct my life.

3. BUSINESS LIFE

I trained as a Chartered Accountant in Guildford and tried to work out how to follow Jesus in the business world.

After qualifying, I spent some time in the Far East including in some Cambodian refugees camps.

I came home, got a job in south London, bought a flat, joined a church, became a partner in the firm and was asked to set up a new office in Guildford.

I loved the business; loved helping with the young people's work in the church; loved going to the gym; soon loved the gorgeous young deaconess who'd moved in opposite!

I did love the business, but I loved teaching the Bible more!

I sometimes felt like I was wasting life helping people make money who needed more to make peace with God.

Over those 5 or so years I had a number of things happen that, together, gave me good reason to think God would want me to teach the Bible full time as a minister. But I didn't know how or when.

4. MARRIAGE & ILLNESS

[Back to loving the deaconess!](#)

If I loved her with a passion and energy, and I did, she disliked me with equal passion and energy!

I'd never before met anyone I wanted to spend life with, so it seemed a shame that she so disliked me!

I tried everything I knew, and it only seemed to make things worse, so in the end I was forced to pray!

Serious prayer - I meant business!

[Encouraged by Jesus' parables about keeping asking God, I](#)

promised him that if he gave Lynnie to me as my wife, I would love & care for her no matter what it cost!

This boy was serious!

This boy had no idea what he was promising!

[It took 18 months for her to start to come round.](#)

But eventually the day came when I asked her to marry me; her response was 'I think I'm going to be sick'!

When she felt less nauseous, she asked for some time.

[The next night I panicked.](#)

I somehow convinced myself that I had really blown it.

I forgot all about trusting God and putting his will first.

But eventually I came back to my senses.

I had trusted God alone all that time, so why was I not trusting him now at the key moment?

So I reiterated my trust & my promise to God; fell asleep; was rudely awoken by my flatmate saying that Lynn wanted to see me over the road.

So I got dressed and got engaged!

[About a month later Lynn went down with a mystery virus.](#)

She was laid low right through to the wedding which was nearly cancelled the day before.

That mystery virus, which turned out to be a double dose of

Glandular Fever, left her largely bedbound for 18 years.

I caught it off her on our honeymoon and was ill for 5 years, including one year working part-time.

So I had to look after Lynn, run the business and run the home whilst ill myself!

Because of this we had no children, no social life and I had no idea why God allowed this or how it fitted with his apparent guidance about full-time ministry.

It was really tough, but I was very happy and never once regretted that promise I had made to God that night.

5. ALL CHANGE!

[Eight years into marriage, we were still waiting for Lynnie's recovery](#) so we could explore full-time ministry.

One day on holiday we had had our separate quiet times with

God and that evening admitted we had both sensed that God was saying now was the time.

It seemed madness, with Lynnie still so ill.

How could I take such a sick wife into such a life?

It was also the wrong time for the business, as my senior

manager was a good couple of years away from being ready to become a partner.

But that sense that God was guiding us both, separately, wouldn't leave us, so we took a deep breath and prayed a very bold prayer.

It seemed strange to us but at the same time we didn't want to disobey him.

So this is what we agreed to pray and then prayed.

'Lord, if you want us to go forward with this, please will you direct and guide us so clearly and undeniably that no matter how hard it might get, we will never doubt your direction and guidance.'

[The next day I had agreed I would make the single call home to](#)

make sure all was well in the business.

I spoke to one of my partners who told me he had some very bad news.

Andy, my manager and trainee partner, was leaving to get a couple of years bigger-firm experience.

So the biggest reason why I couldn't leave the business at that time was taken away just like that!

God can't resist bold prayers, Jesus taught!

Over the next few weeks we had around 25 separate, very clear ways in which God made it absolutely clear. He answered prayers and people came out of the woodwork to encourage us to go for it.

Even though no-one knew a thing about it from us. Even our rector, who had eventually stopped pestering me about ordination, announced at church the Sunday we got back that he was leaving to become the Diocesan Director of Ordinands, the person responsible for helping select and direct those considering ordination!

No matter how tough it has been for us both over the past 15 years, and it has, neither of us has ever once doubted this is what God wants us to do.

6. ONE FINAL TEST

I said that God can't resist bold prayers.

But the Bible is very clear that he will test us to see what we're made of, and to see if we mean what we say to him.

And he had one more very big test in store, which I alluded to last Sunday.

Part way through the selection process, I heard from a partner that one of our sister businesses, that I had no direct involvement in, had gone bust due to fraud.

That was like a punch in the chest!

Because, like the other 2 partners, I was liable for all of the debts of that business, which it turned out were now very substantial.

So we faced going into the church bankrupt, with nothing behind us and not even a home to retire to.

Logically, I had to keep working hard to pay off all the debt.

But what about God's guidance?

Nowhere in the Bible does it say Tony must be ordained!

But everything had pointed in that direction.

So much so that as we talked and prayed, we became convinced that not to go forward would be disobedience.

So we kept on going.

The details are long and complex, but suffice it to say that by the time I started my curacy, I was not bankrupt, we had kept our house, and we even had money behind us.

7. WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

I hope that helps you understand why Lynn and I really do believe in this God!

The God who called and guided and directed every detail of the lives of men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & Joseph.

The God who has done similar things in my and Lynn's lives as well as in the lives of many in our churches.

That God, the only one true God, is the same yesterday, today and forever, his word says.

May I simply close by asking you if there is anything in your life which you are holding back from your loving Heavenly Father's control and guidance?

Anything that you don't yet really trust him with?

Don't hold anything back from him.

Pray bold prayers.

Abraham and then his servant really trust God with their futures.

These men prayed bold prayers and stepped out in faith.

You and I can do the same with our lives.

When he saw that God really had gone before him and guided every step he had taken, Abraham's servant prayed: 'Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master.' Genesis 24:26f
Let us pray.