

**‘How does the Lord lead those who are willing to be led?’  
Exodus 13:17 -22**

A new product came on the market last year called the Substitute Phone. Designed by Austrian Klemen Schillinger, it is intended to help smartphone addicts cope with their compulsion. Schillinger has designed five phones, each made of black plastic with stone beads embedded in the surface. The beads let the user swipe, scroll, and pinch. The idea is that they can be used to help us reduce the use of and check our phones less.

According to psychologists, "nomophobia"—the fear of being without your smartphone (I joke you not) —afflicts 40 percent of the population. The reason is simple: we fear being out of touch with the world. We, or at least our grand/children, use our phones to tell us what is happening in the news, to link us to social media, to connect us to people we care about, and even to guide us as we drive. I use Google maps regularly to know where I am going in Auckland and for the best route to take re time and traffic.

In a world that grows more complex every day, we need more guidance every day, but you are not always going to have time to Google, or do an internet search, to work out what it is you need do in a particular situation.

A young Malian, Mamoudou Gassama, who immigrated to France and was out with a group of friends one day recently looked up and saw a toddler dangling from an apartment block balcony. There was no need to ask his friends, let alone Google what to do in this situation. He immediately climbed up four floors of the apartment building in seconds and rescued the child. He has been called a "real-life Spiderman" and will be made a French citizen after being called in to a meeting with the French President, and has even been offered a job by the Paris fire brigade. This is after he decided on the spot to save a child dangling from a balcony.

Where do you need leadership from God today? What challenges, decisions, or dilemmas need wisdom beyond yours? You may not have to decide whether to scale the outside of a building but we can ask ourselves,

**‘How does the Lord lead those who are willing to be led?’**

How about divine wisdom. We learn from the bible that God speaks to us rationally, practically, and intuitively. Or as Jewish theologians put it, he leads through the head (intellect), the hand (activism), and the heart (the inner life).

How can he do so in your life today?

### 1. **God leads us rationally**

Just as there were many highly educated people in Jesus' time from Rabbi's, Scribes and teachers of the law, we know that the Magi were among the most learned people at that time in their society—scholars in philosophy, medicine, and science, just as there are in the world today. And this fact leads us to the first way God leads us: through our minds. There are many Christian academics and scientists today such as Prof Jeff Tallon who visited here a couple of years ago who are lead by God through the intellect of their mind.

It was Jesus who taught us to love the Lord your God "with all your heart...soul and with all your... mind" (Matthew 22:37). For it is Yahweh, the LORD who invites us to "Come now, let us **reason together**" (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord gives us rational capacity and uses it to lead us in his word and will... in our daily living as we follow Christ.

### 2. **God leads us practically Exodus 13: 17-18**

God speaks to us rationally, but he also speaks to us practically. He speaks through people and circumstances and the events of our lives, as Mamoudou Gassama recently experienced. He knew just what he had to do to save that child. So God uses the events and people of our lives to lead us in his will. But we must be willing to be led -To do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. The Israelites were willingly led by God out of Egypt through the Red Sea, but then on a longer route that specifically avoided the Philistines so that they would not face war, even though they were armed for battle. Because God knew that they did not yet have the stomach for a fight at this stage.

### [3. **God leads us intuitively] vv20-22**

God leads his people through reason and through practical events. Third, he leads us intuitively as well. Our recent celebration of Pentecost has served to remind us what happened when the Holy Spirit came upon his disciples and birthed Christ's church.

When we worship God, the Spirit speaks to our spirit. When we pray, he speaks to us. When we are silent before him, God speaks to us. In dreams, visions, and intuitive leading, he speaks to us. In all the ways, he leads us. But we must be willing to be led just as the Israelites intuitively coming to the understanding that they should follow the LORD who went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud by day to guide them and a pillar of fire at night which gave them light to do so. Which was Yahweh's tangible-noticeable presence among his people, something that they could hold on to and learn to trust, but this began with the intuitive leading of the Spirit. The same is to be said of us today, but we must be willing to be led and what's more, to **pay the price of obedience.**

When we make the decision to follow Christ, receiving Jesus as our LORD and Saviour, and knowing that this has happened because we are born again by the Holy Spirit, our assurance of eternal life. From that moment or period of time, we are to invest ourselves in the kingdom of God praying, believing and living... 'Thy Kingdom come – Thy will be done!'

When we do this with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, we invest each day of our lives, all our human physical and spiritual resources that God has blessed and gifted us with, we put these at His disposal to be guided and lead daily to live for Christ according to God's will.

Now I don't know about you but sometimes when I am seeking to find God's will, I can suffer from the "paralysis of analysis." Even on a daily basis in seeking to work out what to do there are times when the Lord simply wants me to obey the maxim, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

In his *Morning and Evening devotions*, the great British 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher Charles Spurgeon made some observations on this verse that encourage me and I hope you too, as we consider 'How does the Lord lead those who are willing to be led?'

**One:** We are called to do what is *possible*. There are many schemes which our *heart* finds to do that we will never do. We must do what our *hand* finds available.

**Two:** We are called to do what is *present*. The text is in the present tense. Spurgeon noted that "the past is gone; the future has not arrived; we shall never have any time but time *present*."

Then do not wait until your experience has ripened into maturity before you attempt to serve God. Endeavor now to bring forth fruit."

**Three:** We are called to work *promptly*. Spurgeon: "Do not fritter away your life in thinking of what you intend to do tomorrow as if that could recompense for the idleness of today. No man ever served God by doing things tomorrow. If we honour Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do *today*."

The "Prince of Preachers" closes by noting that our "might" is not in ourselves but in God. So, "let us seek His help; let us proceed with prayer and faith, and when we have done what our 'hand findeth to do,' let us wait upon the Lord for His blessing. What we do thus will be well done, and will not fail in its effect."

**Remember:** God measures success by obedience – and that is how the Lord leads those who are willing to be led!

In 1745 a Welsh lay preacher William Williams, who had left the church of England to join the Methodists was led and inspired to write one of the church's more famous hymns of the last 300 years [Guess?] *Guide me O Thou great Jehovah*. Jehovah is a distortion of God's true name Yahweh. The great 'I am' who revealed himself to Moses, the self-existent and eternal God of the Jewish people.

The words of this hymn have been much admired for their plain yet majestic dignity. Commentators have written that it is 'The grandest re-enactment in modern hymnody of the Israelite journey through the barren wilderness to the Promised Land, which is the type of all spiritual pilgrimage'. Now we only sing 3 out of the original 6 verses and have added an extra verse at the end to incorporate Christ as saviour. And the tune that we sing it to was composed in 1905 just after the Welsh revival broke out, since when it was sung in the coal mines by workers, the trenches of World War I by soldiers as well as at numberless Welsh rugby matches.

And of course in more recent times this hymn was sung at the Princess of Wales's Dianna's funeral in 1997 then at her son William and Kate's Wedding in 2011 and of course also just two weeks ago at Harry and Meaghan's wedding too, in honour of his Mother's favourite hymn.

It has until today remained a favoured hymn [RH 462] of many I believe because of William Williams wonderful way in which he interweaves imagery from the Old Testament book of Exodus to evoke a sense of God's guidance through strife. One of the reasons this hymn has influenced such a broad range of church folk is the universal subject of struggle. Every Christian, and indeed everyone, encounters difficulties. "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" affirms the reality that God provides for us and redeems all wrong in the world. This God who provided for the Hebrew people wandering through "barren lands" with "Bread of Heaven" is still and ever will be a God of provisional grace.

The Lord leads those who are willing to be led by the "fiery, cloudy pillar" that the Israelites followed by night and by day respectively. There is also a reference to a "crystal fountain" from "whence the healing stream doth flow." This alludes to the water flowing from the rock for the Hebrew people in Exodus 17:6 which those in the Wednesday study group now know well because this is the passage we meditated on this week. In singing this hymn in a moment we will engage with our Lord who provides sustenance for the hungry, guides his followers by day and by night, & quenches the thirst of those longing for water, just as in Communion.

The original hymn, bar the addition of the final verse, ends in climactic fashion with the Hebrew people finally reaching their destination after forty years of wandering in the desert guided by Yahweh. The book of Joshua is referred to with the crossing of the river "Jordan" and the arrival at Canaan. The final lines conclude with high spirits, as the "people of Israel" sing of victory to their great Guide, Redeemer and Provider.

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" has brought, and will continue to bring, comfort to thousands upon thousands of Christians with its excellent reminder of a God who not only guides us but provides for those according to their need on a daily basis.

Let us now respond to God's word in singing this hymn as our prayer this morning as obedient and dedicated followers of Christ who are willing to be led by the LORD everyday, in order to see God's kingdom come and his will be done, bringing glory to God in worship and life through our Christian witness in word and deed... all because we choose to follow God's guidance, his leading every day!