

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD

Texts: Psalm 31:3; Psalm 25:9; Psalm 48:14; John 16:13

Few truths in life challenge and motivate me more than this thought: God guides. I concur with the hymn-writer, Joseph Gilmore who wrote, "He leadeth me, oh blessed thought! Oh, words with heavenly comfort fraught! What-e'er I do, where-e'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me."

I would like to discuss three ways God guides.

1. GOD GUIDES BY DIRECT INTERPOSITION.

Psalm 37:23; Proverbs 16:9

The date was May 25, 1979, a very sad day in the history of the United States. I was 28 years old, a young professor/evangelist. I was scheduled to preach, Friday, May 25 through Sunday, May 27. My flight was booked; I had the ticket in hand. In those days all tickets were printed. Earlier in May, I had received a phone call from the secretary of our president and pastor of our church, requesting if at all possible I could re-arrange my travel plans and be available to help ordain the graduating ministers. It was unusual that I had a date available for a last minute change. The pastor in San Diego was most gracious and we re-scheduled the meeting for exactly one week ahead. I flew at approximately 3:00 PM on Friday, May 18, 1979. I was sitting just over the left wing. As we ascended, the plane was making a very unusual vibrating that I had not noticed in other takeoffs of DC 10's that I had previously flown. Sitting a few seats over was a young lady who said, "Pardon me, sir; is this plane making and strange vibration? My mother owns a travel agency, I fly often and I have never felt this before." I said, (by faith) "Oh, I'm sure we have nothing to worry about." Soon we leveled off and everything seemed fine. I flew back home to Chicago and in a couple of days I received a call by our president's secretary again saying, "Dr. Hyles wanted to tell you he was sorry for requesting you to change your plans; please feel free to proceed with your original plans." I told the secretary, Mrs. McKinney, "Please tell Dr. Hyles that I already kept my commitment the week before, so I am happy to come to the graduation service even though I will not be needed." As I was putting on my cap and gown at just after 3:00 PM, May 25, the soft music I was listening to from a Chicago radio station was interrupted to say, "American Airlines, Flight 191 scheduled from Chicago to Los Angeles has just crashed." I immediately turned on the television and saw the jet engulfed in flames, the jet I had flown the week before, the very jet I was booked to fly at 3:00 PM from Chicago. The number one engine on the left wing (near where I sat a week before) came off, the massive jet rolled over on its back and crashed violently into the ground, and everyone on the plane died, 273 in

total. So did our pastor and president make a mistake by asking me to re-schedule? He did not. God had more plans for me.

2. GOD GUIDES BY THE AUTHORITY HE PLACES IN OUR LIVES.

I Corinthians 11:3; Proverbs 6:20-23; Proverbs 2:17; I Timothy 5:14

How exciting it was to be moving into a new house! It just wasn't any house; it was the parsonage of First Baptist Church of District Heights, just outside Washington D.C. Dad and Mom moved to the nation's capitol in 1952 when I was only nine months old. The church started in a tent, then moved into a fire hall and finally a new church building was built on Landsdale Street. Situated right next to the church building was the parsonage. It was a beautiful locale carved out of the burgeoning neighborhoods in the dense woods of Maryland. We couldn't wait to move in from our humble abode on Gateway Blvd. As a matter of fact, we did not wait. We moved in before it was finished. One of the last portions of the house to be built was Dad's study. Mom insisted it have windows all the way around to provide dad with all the sunlight affordable, making it most contributive for reading, writing and typing. I remember on one bright, sunny day, I walked up the outside stairs to the unfinished study. There in the corner of the study on the concrete was the prettiest rope I'd had ever seen. I extended my hand to take it and play with it. I was going to jump with it or use it like a whip. I was only six years old and just before I picked it up, something (I now say it was Someone) inside me said, "Don't touch it; go get your dad!" I got my dad and I told him about the pretty rope that I wanted to play with and that I'd never seen anything like it. Dad was smiling, but as he followed me and looked at the "rope," his smile vanished as he said, "Johnny-boy, don't move." He grabbed a hoe and he struck it and I saw it come to life, although it did not stay alive long. Dad very quickly beheaded it saying, "Son, that was a coral snake!"

There is not a more poisonous snake in the entire North American Continent. I was getting ready to pick it up in a way that would have been perfect for the coral snake to bite me in the soft flesh between the thumb and forefinger. The coral has short fangs and almost needs a gnawing opportunity to lodge his fangs. A six-year boy with tender fleshed hands would have been perfect for him. Also, because the coral bites are more rare than most poisonous snakes there is not as much anti-venom ready. If I had been bitten, it most definitely could have been fatal. We never miss it when we honor the authority God places over our head. My word of exhortation to the youth is meditate on Ephesians 6:1-3 and Proverbs 30:17.

3. GOD GUIDES BY A STILL SMALL VOICE.

I Kings 19:9-13

I was in the need to change up my prayer time with a little variety last week. As I have done often in the past, I went to the bayou in Meyer Park to walk with God in prayer. Genesis 5:22, 24 and Genesis 6:9 teach us that Enoch and Noah walked with God. I have often thought those men are good role models. Anyway, as

I began to open my heart in prayer, this clear, precise thought came into my mind: “Stay in the open paths!” If these words had been spoken audibly, they would not have been more plainly understood. I was spending a good amount of time in prayer and the day was heating up and the clear open paths were sun drenched. After awhile, I glanced at a different trail just above me that was shady, but closed on either side by trees and brush. And I thought, well, it’s not an open path, but it is a well-travelled path. So, I climbed the slight hill and started down that shady closed-in path. An elderly couple passed me and then I descended a slight hill into a tiny valley that ascended on the other side. Upon descent a bird flew directly into my path and began walking in front of me, from time to time, it turned looking at me as if to see if I were still on the path. Then the bird stopped and looked directly at me. My first thought was that this was certainly a courageous bird. Then, while stopped it looked ahead on the path, then back to me. It actually looked as though the bird was using its beak as a pointer as if to say, “Look!” I then stopped and looked just beyond the bird and there glistening in a slender shaft of sunlight on the path I was taking was the unmistakable hue of copper. I was just steps away from a five foot, already coiling copperhead who had spotted me before I spotted it. This is the second most dangerous snake on the North American continent. I backed stepped until I was on the wide-open path and there I finished my prayer time. Immediately, I thought back to the still small voice within, “Stay on the open path.”

I am aware there are skeptics thinking this was all coincidence, but as far as I am concerned, I am convinced that God doesn’t always speak in dramatic ways as even Elijah appeared to be expecting to hear from God in strong wind, earthquake or fire (I Kings 19:11). I believe God’s default of communication to His people is the “...still small voice” (I Kings 19:12b). Joseph Scriven said it best when he wrote, “Oh what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!”

Fanny J. Crosby did not have the comfort of physical eyesight, but with her spiritual sight, she never missed one moment of God’s leading; she wrote, “All the way my Savior leads me; what have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my Guide? Heav’n-ly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell! For I know what-e’er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.