

Introduction

The older I get, the more grateful I am for night-lights—small and minimal in their light distribution, but essential in their provision of illumination! Every time I see one, I want to hum, “This Little Light of Mine.”

Night-lights relieve us of the fear of darkness and provide a pathway of security for mobility.

Darkness creates chaos, confusion and cowardice. Light gives confidence, guidance and peace.

One of the biggest events in the Old Testament is the Exodus—exit signs, this way out or this way through.

In our series, *Facing the Heat*, we are learning that heat produces stress and fear. If there was a story where things heated up,

it was that of the nation Israel while under subjection to Pharaoh.

The Story: Exodus 12:50—following an event called, “Passover,” God led Israel under Moses’ leadership toward a new land of promise and blessing.

“Then Moses said to the people, ‘Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month’... When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.’ But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped

for battle. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people" (Exodus 13:3-5, 17-28, 21-22 ESV).

God used fire to serve as a night-light for Israel in the wilderness and through the sea.

While we do not know what this pillar looked like (since no one captured it on a cell phone or posted it on social media), we do know it was both functional and symbolic. It provided light in the night of the wilderness to protect, but it was an abiding reminder of God's faithful presence in the night.

When faced with the cold of darkness, we need the light and heat of God's presence and guidance.

... "and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands

over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night” (Numbers 14:14 ESV).

“You in Your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go” (Nehemiah 9:19 ESV).

Not much more to the story, but it is referenced in numerous places in Scripture as a real act of God and as a reassuring work of God for His people. He led them with fire.



The Pillar of Fire Assures Us of the...

Grace of God in Our Weakness

God took the initiative to reassure His people of His presence and guidance in the journey that was ahead of them.

By grace, God led the people toward the wilderness rather than war.

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Over and over God speaks nearness in our weakness.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10 ESV).

There are so many uncertainties in life, but the one unchanging reality is God—who He is, what He does, and how He loves and cares for His people.

Hebrews 3-4 is about the journey through the wilderness and the weakness of the people—their unbelief. God was leading them from bondage to rest.

“And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:13-16 ESV).

Presence of God in our Darkness

Life is full of shadows and many of the pathways of life cause us to doubt and despair.

God’s work in the wilderness tells us we are never to be lost or left alone.

The crucial matter for us is that of “following.” Just because you can’t see and don’t know where you are going does not mean God is not working or that He is not near.

To know God is to be assured of His presence.

Theophany: “A personal appearance or manifestation of God to a person. Customarily, God is not revealed to human sight, yet God at times, chose to reveal himself in theophanies.” —Charles Feinberg

All of this was prior to the incarnation of Christ. The image, appearance and presence of God is full and complete in Christ.

“I will not, never, ever, no way, no how, leave or forsake you.” —Hebrews 13:5b

Guidance of God Through Our Fears

When we face darkness, we need light. There is nothing like a little ember burning to guide us in the way.

Flashlights = “torches”

God became the “torch” of Israel. God will not leave you behind, and will make sure He guides you through. There are many promises in God’s word regarding guidance.

Three great truths affirmed in Scripture:

1. *God has led.* Think of the Exodus of Israel, Magi to manger, etc.

2. *God will lead.* Let’s rehearse some important promises:

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8 ESV).

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV).

“But now thus says the LORD, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you'” (Isaiah 43:1-3 ESV).

3. God is leading.

How? How can we know God’s guidance and how can we be sure we are in the will of God? This is among the most common questions and concerns in our lives as believers. The book and podcast markets are filled with information on how we can know and discern God’s will—signs, fleeces, etc.. The result is much consternation and confusion.

Funny, we make hundreds of decisions each day in a hapless, mindless fashion—what to wear, which roads to drive, where to eat, what kind of drink with my meal, how often to check emails, social media, when to post, etc. In most of these, we give little care or thought to “the will of God” and yet, when

it comes to life—real life direction—we live in fear of somehow missing God’s will and experiencing grave consequences.

Why? Being in the will of God matters for the Christian. We were made for God and for His glory, thus to miss His plan and intended purpose would be among the greatest missteps in life.

When it comes to life, what are the principles and practices that help us discern God’s guidance?

Affirmations of God’s guidance:

1. Always in Accordance With His Word

The will of God for you will never go against the Word of God. The Word of God reveals the character and nature of God. God will never be untrue to Himself.

2. Always Focuses on Our Relationship With God, Not Our Responsibilities For God

The end game, the end goal of the Christian life is Philippians 3:10—“that I may know

Him.” Thus the way of God’s will is in the walk with God day by day. Therefore what matters in life is the glory of God in the good, bad and ugly.

3. Always Requires the Practice of Faith

God’s will isn’t some program or design plan laid out on a chart for you to examine, evaluate and explore. To the contrary, much of the will of God in life has been proven through the journey of faith, not by observing and understanding the end before you begin.

Many times this has to do with surrender to the providence of life, even when it is not a preference for us. He guides us through what we call *the circumstances of life*. He opens and closes doors.

“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name” (Revelation 3:8 ESV).

He hedges up our way so that we cannot do the thing that we planned to do. He causes

our thoughts to change, to be in harmony with His own thoughts.

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3 ESV).

Hebrews 11 is a chapter filled with the names of people who lived in God’s will. But what was the ultimate path to the will of God? Faith! Faith pleases God!

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him” —Hebrews 11:6 ESV

4. Always Affirms His Design in You

God makes us distinct and different that He might shape and use us for His glory. So much time and energy is lost trying to live out the will of God in others rather than ourselves.

5. Always Unfolds in the Pathways of Daily Obedience

God's will is not a dot, but a sphere. It is a realm in which you live not by occupying one stepping stone at a time, but by living in a realm and arena of obedience to God. It starts where you are and as you are—seeking and honoring God's plan for your life. It is both particular and practical.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality... But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:8 ESV).

6. Always Proves to Be Good, Acceptable and Perfect

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2 ESV).

Example: Our family. Children. Childlessness and infertility. Where is God in this? How could God do this? Why God? Why would You not fix this?

“God allows us to travel pathways we would have never chosen to experience blessings we could have never comprehended.”

*The will of God will never take you,
Where the grace of God cannot keep you.
Where the arms of God cannot support you,
Where the riches of God cannot supply your needs,
Where the power of God cannot endow you.*

*The will of God will never take you,
Where the spirit of God cannot work through you,
Where the wisdom of God cannot teach you,
Where the army of God cannot protect you,
Where the hands of God cannot mold you.*

*The will of God will never take you,
Where the love of God cannot enfold you,
Where the mercies of God cannot sustain you,
Where the peace of God cannot calm your fears,
Where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.*

*The will of God will never take you,
Where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears,
Where the Word of God cannot feed you,
Where the miracles of God cannot be done for you,
Where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.*

—Author Unknown

Back to the pillar of fire... All of this was about God being their light. This is the future of every believer—a God who directs us to Himself and for His glory.

Jesus is the light and glory of God for His people. Jesus came to bear our weakness, to remove our fears, to give us guidance, and to reveal the glory of God in our lives.

The Revelation story is that of light overcoming darkness.

You cannot know and do the will of God apart from surrender and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord!

“This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:3-6 ESV).

The will of God begins with a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Light of the World and this light is what changes you from the inside out and directs your life toward the future glory of God.