

## Daily Devotional Guide

**Monday** – As you begin your quiet time with God today, take your left hand and beginning with your thumb say, “The Lord is my shepherd.” You should have repeated “my” on your ring finger for that is the fourth word. The ring finger is considered to be closest to the heart. It is the finger of commitment. This is why we place wedding rings on them. Whenever you feel afraid or discouraged, grab your ring finger and remember that you have a shepherd.

**Tuesday** – Last Sunday I was battling a cold. It is not easy preaching a sermon with a bad cold. At the 11 o'clock service I must have looked run down before I got up to preach because Sidney said to me, “Remember, you have a shepherd too.” Sidney had preached a great sermon to me before I gave the sermon to you. It was a good reminder. I allowed the shepherd to carry me, and he did. Each of us has a shepherd. He is there to help us if we will let him. What do you need the shepherd to help you with today?

**Wednesday** – This week's focus is the ability of the shepherd to lead us on the right path. Sheep must have someone to lead them. If they don't, most likely they will wander off on the wrong path and die. Like sheep, we always need a shepherd. Are you facing an important decision in your life right now? Are you at a cross-road and not sure which path to take? Take comfort. The shepherd will guide you. Just take the time to ask and listen.

**Thursday** – Like many of you, I rely heavily on my phone's GPS application. I am directionally challenged and would not be able to get anywhere without it. Personal GPS systems have only been around for about 10-15 years. But we have had a spiritual GPS system for a long time. It is the Bible. One of the ways we can find guidance from the shepherd is by reading the Bible. Find a daily reading program and you will be amazed how much guidance you will receive.

**Friday** – What is implied in the idea of the shepherd leading us on the right path is obedience. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm assumes obedience to the shepherd. To rebel against the guidance of the shepherd is to put ourselves in great danger. The good shepherd always has the best interest of his sheep at heart. Are you obedient to the shepherd?



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## ~ The Good Shepherd ~

### *The Shepherd Keeps Us on the Right Path*

Sunday, June 12, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 23

Norman Vincent Peale once told the story of a man coming up to him after a speech to the Rotary club and saying, “Dr. Peale, you changed my life.” When Peale inquired about what happened, the transformed man told Peale the whole story. Two years prior the man's business was failing and his life was a wreck. He was sitting in his office contemplating suicide when he saw on his desk an article written by Peale. In the article Peale said that the wisest thing anybody could do was “take God as a partner in life.”

The man reflected on the idea of God as a partner and then got on his knees behind his desk and prayed, “Lord, I know I don't come to you often, but I need help. My business and life are failing and I need you to be my partner and help me back up. I don't know how this is supposed to work, but I need you.” The man said within a few weeks of that prayer he was overflowing with new ideas for his business and he was finding more joy in his life. He told Peale that he no longer goes to God for emergencies; he goes to him every day for help. God is his partner.

I want to tell you something today that is so powerfully simple that many people miss it. God wants to be your partner and guide your life. This is what David was seeking to get across when he wrote, “He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.” Whether we realize it or not, God tries to guide our lives every day. Sometimes the guidance is a whisper and sometimes it is a siren. But make no mistake God gives us signs all the time about what path he would like us to take. We can choose it or ignore it.

The good shepherd wants to guide every aspect of our lives. The problem is that many people don't want God to get that involved in their lives. In fact, many people just want God “on retainer.” They just want to be sure God is there in an emergency, but until then they can take care of themselves. Then people wonder why they are always getting into trouble. Most of us find trouble more than trouble finds us. In fact, someone once said that “If you could kick the person responsible for most of your troubles in the backside, you wouldn't be able to sit down for weeks.” This is truer than most of us would like to admit.

We could avoid a lot of trouble in our lives and find more joy and peace if we would allow the good shepherd to be our partner and guide us. So, how do we do it? Well, if we can remember a few important truths we will be ready to yield to the shepherd and allow him to lead us.

#### Speed Kills

A good friend of mine in Orlando, who happened to be a golf pro, had a big sign on his desk that read, “Speed Kills.” I asked him about it one day and he said, “Well, the average golfer needs to know that rapid movement kills the golf swing. You must swing easy for distance and consistency. And, well, the same is true in life. When we go too fast in life, we can destroy ourselves spiritually.” My friend was wise and very right! Speed does kill.

I remember performing a wedding ceremony at the Fox theatre in Atlanta. If you have ever been there you know what a magnificent place it is. The ceremony was in the Egyptian room, which is a glorious reception room next to the theatre. There are gold columns and magnificent art adorning the walls. The place is beautiful, and it has all the makings for a grand wedding. The bride had scripted everything out. She hired a wedding coordinator that was too good at her job. She told us when to stand, when to sit, when to talk and when to be quiet.

We began the ceremony and everything was just perfect. The room was decorated beautifully with flowers. The bride looked stunning in her gown. The groom looked sharp. However, as I lead the service I noticed that the bride looked distracted. Soon she caught my eye, and right in the middle of ceremony she looked up at me and asked, “Is it almost over?” Here was this bride in the midst of the profound ceremony, in the midst of this sacred moment of commitment of her life, and she was concerned about it being over as soon as possible. I would find out later that she was in a hurry because she did not want anything to go wrong. She missed the point of the ceremony.

Many of us are just like that bride in the way we approach life. We are in such a hurry that we miss the most important things in life. In fact, our culture is so quick and

fast-passed that we have developed a new measurement of time. It is called the “honka-second” (I believe Jon Ortberg coined this phrase). It is the time between the light turning green and the person behind you laying on his horn! I was at a light in Lakeland one time and I was probing the depths of eternity. I was thinking about the existential eschatological expectation of Christ. I was in another world. The light turned green, and a honka - second later the man behind me began to lay on his horn. The horn brought me back to reality and I went forward. A few seconds later he passed me and I noticed that he had a bumper sticker on the back of his car that read, “Honk if you love Jesus.” I remember thinking that man must be the most pious man in Lakeland, the way he was honking his horn! It made me think of another bumper sticker that read, “Tithe if you love Jesus. Anybody can honk.”

We are all in a rush these days. We have faster food, faster internet, faster cars, and faster service. We have all these things because we think we are saving time. However, the question is: Do we have more time? NO! We have less time and more stress! In fact, sociologists have done studies that show that e-mail and cell phones have not us saved us time but taken more time away from us.

Why are we in a hurry? Many of us are in a hurry because we think that any place is better than where we are now. The grass is always greener. The other side is always better. Retirement is better than working. Adulthood is better than childhood. Tomorrow is better than today. But you know what I have learned? The most important things we miss in life are usually those things that we rush by.

Speed kills because it circumvents God. If you want to get to know God better, slow down. God will not compete with our fast paced lives and until we slow down we will not be able to discern God’s desire for our lives. You see, God has something to give us in every stage of our lives. God has something to bless us with in every stage of our lives. God has something to teach us in every stage of our lives. God has something to help us grow in every stage of our lives. Have we been open to these things? If not, we may need to slow down and stay where we are for a little while. If we don’t, we may be going mach 3 to nowhere because we have not matured enough to handle the next stage of our lives. We can’t run a marathon unless we have learned how to run a mile.

Don’t a make a bad decision you may regret later. You may be in a job that seems hopeless. You may be in a bad relationship. You may want to end a friendship. You may want to shut someone out of your life. You may want to get a new job, move to a different city. Kids, you may want to get different parents (I am sorry kids - you are stuck with them.) But we all need to get to a place in our lives where we trust the Lord enough to pray, “Lord, this situation I am in is difficult, but I know you will set the right pace for me if I just trust in you.”

A curious man once approached the desert Father Abba Anthony. He asked, “Father, what must one do to please God.” He said three things. The first two were expected. He said, “Always be aware of God’s presence and always obey God’s word.” But the third thing was

surprising. He said, “Wherever you find yourself, do not easily leave.” Trust God enough to stay where you are and let God work.

### **God Knows Best**

Most of us would not disagree with this truth. We are here in worship today because we believe God knows best. However, many people live their lives from Monday to Saturday as if they know best.

When we think we have all the right answers and that we know what is best, we do some pretty foolish things. At times, we are like the man who died and went to heaven. He approached St. Peter and St. Peter asked him, “Have you ever done anything worthy or important?” The man said, “Yeah, I can think of one thing. Once I came across this rough motorcycle gang and they were threatening this woman and so I told them to stop. When they did not stop I found the biggest, heaviest and most tattooed biker, I smacked him on the head, I threw down his bike, I plucked out his nose ring and threw it on the ground and said, “You better stop it or you will answer to me!” St. Peter was impressed and asked, “Gosh, when did this happen?” The man replied, “A couple of minutes ago.”

When we take matters into our hands, bad things happen. When we rely on our own insight, our own understanding, and our own intellect we get into trouble. However, our culture does not like to accept this. Our society bows down to the god of rugged individualism. Go to the bookstore and you will find a slew of books written on “taking control.” Many of our movies and television programs appeal to desire to take control. We like to be in control.

Being in control is fine, if you are not a Christian. However, if you are a Christian, your life is not your own. When you decided to be a Christian, you surrendered your life to Christ. When you decided to be a Christian, you said with all your being, “Christ is in me both to will and to do for his good pleasure.” If you are a Christian, Christ is in control of your life. And thank God for that, for if Christ was not leading us and guiding us many of us would be in deep yogurt.

Bishop McConnel used to love to be on the land, and when he retired he lived on a farm in Ohio. He had a chicken house and raised chickens. Everything was just as he imagined it except that every night the rooster would crow around 2am and wake everybody up. This frustrated the Bishop so much that he decided to stay up all night and watch this rooster. It didn’t take him long to discover the problem. There was a train that would come around a curve at 2am and flash it’s lights on the chicken house, and the rooster, thinking it was the sun, would begin to crow.

Roosters are not the only ones who mistake headlights for dawns. This whole world is filled with people who have mistaken headlights for dawns. There are people in prison who have mistaken headlights for dawns. There are people addicted to drugs who have mistaken headlights for dawns. There are people buried in cemeteries who have mistaken headlights for dawns. There are people with ruined lives who have mistaken headlights for dawns. There are gravely disappointed people all over this world who thought

they had all the answers, who thought they knew what was best for them.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. And do not rely on your own insight. In all of your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.”

### **God Is Bigger Than You Think**

Sometimes our view of God is too small. One of the most tragic things we do without even realizing it is put God in a box. Some people project onto God limited human stereotypes. Some see God as this divine policeman watching every move we make. Others see God as a divine CEO micro-managing everything we do. Still, others see God as a divine Santa Claus who grants our every wish. Yet, trying to confine God to a particular role or function is like trying to pour the ocean into a thimble. It cannot be done! There is nothing beautiful enough, big enough, deep enough, or profound enough to capture God. God is way too big for our little boxes.

We still try. Christians are often the worst about putting God in a box. We argue over different preaching styles as if we have the monopoly on how to talk about God. Churches got to war on certain styles of worship thinking there is only one way to praise God. Theologians weave complex webs of theology thinking they have pinned down the nature of God. We need to understand that God is bigger, stronger, wider, and deeper than any practice, ideal, or theology.

When we limit God, we limit our understanding of God, and, most of all, we limit our ability to be open to the different ways in which God moves in and around us. Some of us are stuck in life because we have these pre-conceived notions as to how God is supposed to operate. As a result, our eyes are shut to the way God wants to work. Our ears are plugged to the voices around us that may be speaking God’s truth to us. Our minds are closed to the creative ways that God works best in our lives. Then we wonder why we bang our heads against a wall and cry, “God, where are you in my life?” God is saying, “I am right here. Open your eyes.”

Someone once said that “the real voyage of discovery comes not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” This is what “acknowledge” means in Proverbs. “In all your ways acknowledge him.” This does not mean that we glibly say, “Oh, hey, God, I acknowledge you exist.” No, “acknowledgement” means going to God and praying honestly and earnestly, “God, you are bigger than my mind can fathom, yet I know and trust that you want to work in my life. I am open to however, whenever, and whatever way you want to do it. You know what is best, so I am an open vessel. Show me the path you have for me.”

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book Stress Fractures. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable."

Swindoll continued, “I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.' I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

“And a little child shall lead them.” You want the guidance of the shepherd? Then slow down and listen slowly. And you will find that the shortest distance between chaos and peace, darkness and light, a bad decision and a good decision is the distance between our knees and the floor. Amen.