

# **“Guide me in 2023”**

## **Introduction**

Good morning everyone! Happy new year to you all. I hope you all had a blessed Christmas season and that you are ready to get back into the full swing of things.

My family and I had a very good time away, but its good to be back with you, our church family, and I am trusting that this year is going to be a great year for all of us.

We are currently in between series, we will be starting a new one soon, but today I felt led to share with you about God’s guidance. I know that at the beginning of a year, there are a lot of decisions that we all have to make.

My daughter Hannah is starting High School tomorrow, and already she is faced with a bunch of decisions. Which subjects does she want to take? Which sports does she want to participate in? So many decisions, and its such a blessing to have all these opportunities, but with all these decisions in life, it can be stressful!

I’m convinced one of the reasons people are so stressed out today, is because of all the decisions we have to make on a daily basis. But that’s life! Life is a series of choices, of decisions.

Many would say, success is basically a matter of making wise decisions. If you make foolish decisions, you fail in life. We make our decisions, and then our decisions make us. Because every decision has a consequence.

Now because we're human beings, which means we're prone to make mistakes, decision making can be very stressful, because you don't know what's going to happen.

Who of you have you ever been afraid of making the wrong decision? I know I have. Some of you right now are facing the stress of indecision. Just this week you've been facing a major issue. Should you hold on, or should you let go? Should I get in, or should I get out? Should I get a new job? Should I move? Should I get married? The stress of indecision begins to get to you.

So it makes sense that the Bible says in James, that a double minded person is unstable in all of their ways. The Greek word for unstable, literally means “to stagger around like a drunk.” When you can't make up your mind in life, you're going to stagger through life.

Sometimes, even after we make a decision, we start second guessing ourselves; “Did I do the right thing?” We waver back and forth, and that causes even more stress.

So, is there an antidote to that kind of stress that comes from all this decision making in life? Yes there is. Praise God.

Psalm 23, is one of the most well known Psalms in scripture, and although it is very well known, its not always very well understood. Let me remind you of what it says;

**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:1-3)**

There are a lot of wonderful truths in this Psalm, but the last line is very special to me. **"He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake."**

Some translations say; he guides me in "paths of righteousness." He sends me in the right direction. The correct way.

With all my heart. That is what I want for my life. To have the Lord guide me along the right paths, for his name sake. That is what I want for you, and your families. That is what I want for our church. That God would guide us.

So, very simply, today's message is called;

### **Guide me in 2023**

It's a prayer that I am trusting you will pray with me. As we begin this year, that this will be our heart - God, please guide me in 2023.

You see friends, the antidote to the stress of decision making, is to let God guide you. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. I shall not want."

The good news is, the Lord God, our Shepherd, not only feeds us, He leads us. He not only provides, He also guides. The good Shepherd not only protects, He also directs us.

And our God has said "I will guide you through this life, if you trust Me."

He says I will guide you on the paths off righteousness. This just means the right path. The right track.

Man, you and I both know how easy it is to get off track in life. It's easy to become preoccupied with ridiculous things, majoring on the minors. But God is the one who can keep you on track in life.

Now perhaps you're here today, and you're a bit skeptical. You think, I'm not so sure about that Neil. Maybe you've tried it. You've asked God to guide you, to lead and direct you. But you ended up even more confusing than before!

And so you feel, why is knowing God's will so difficult? Is God playing games with us? Is He playing hide and go seek? Does He get some kind of perverse pleasure watching me struggle through the maze of life wondering what I'm supposed to do? Of course not.

God wants to guide you. He wants to guide you more than you want to be guided. God wants you to know His will more than you want to know it.

One problem is, we often look for the wrong thing when we're trying to find God's will.

Some people go for the '**mystical approach**.' They are looking for a feeling. They want to be swept off their feet by some emotion - a quiver in their liver.

They are looking for some emotional release, so they can say "That's how I know what God's will is!"

Others are more logical. You want a '**methodical approach**' to God's will, a mechanical approach. You want somebody to give you a recipe, a formula - nine ways to always know God's will for your life! Simply apply the recipe. Well, unfortunately, God's will is not a recipe.

Some people take a '**magical approach**' to God's will. They're looking for God to do some fantastic sign, He'll write it in the sky, call them on the phone, send them a WhatsApp.

All of these ways lead to frustration and cause us to miss God's will. You see friends, God's will is not a feeling, or a formula, or something He wants you to be frustrated or fearful about.

So can you know it? How do I let God guide me on the right path?

The Bible says you need to do four things:

Admit you need a guide

Ask in faith for direction

Listen for God's response, and

Trust God when you don't understand

Today I just want to talk about each of these for a few minutes.

First point today;

### **ADMIT YOU NEED A GUIDE**

Now. This sounds easy enough. But this is actually really tough, especially for men! Right. Men. When we're lost, do we want to stop and ask for directions? No. It is not in the nature of a man to stop and ask for directions. We just don't do it.

So we stumble and get confused. Sheep, by nature, tend to wander, to get off the path. They need a good Shepherd, and so do we. We tend to wander.

Isaiah says;

**“Everyone of us have strayed away like sheep! We have left God's paths to follow our own.” (Isaiah 53:6)**

This is the real problem why we don't always know God's will. The fact is that most of the time we don't want to follow God or anybody else whether we're a Christian or not. We want to go our own way. We don't want to admit we need direction, a guide.

Sheep have poor vision. They can't see very far. Instead of saying “He's as blind as a bat” you would be more correct saying “He's as blind as a sheep.” A sheep cannot see very far ahead. That's why, on a path, they don't know if that path is going to go off a cliff, or lead them into danger. So they need a shepherd, someone to guide them.

Likewise, and don't take this the wrong way now, you're like a sheep. I'm a sheep. Human beings can't see the future. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, much less next year or ten years from now. You don't even know what's going to happen this afternoon.

God made you so that you don't see into the future no matter how much you try. Even with all the gimmicks people may come up with to predict the future, you don't really know what's going to happen. Why did God do this? So that you would depend on Him. So that He could be your guide.

The problem is, because sheep don't see very well into the future, and we don't either, we tend to stumble.

In the book of Proverbs it says; **"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12, NIV)**

We've all made a decision, that at the time, seemed right, but later on, turned out to be wrong. Some paths lead to dead ends. They lead nowhere. That's why it's easy to get off track. Just like sheep tend to wander and can't see into the future neither can we, and so we stumble.

So the first step, is to just to admit, “God, I need help.” “God, I can't do this on my own.” “Please guide me in 2023.”

I've got some European friends, where it is their winter time now. It's the season where we got the sun, and they got the snow! And skiing is a big thing in those parts of the world in winter time. Not long ago, while my friends were there, up on the snow covered slopes, they saw someone with a big sign on his vest saying “Blind skier.” He was astounded.

If you have ever been skiing before, you will know how difficult it is to ski with two “good eyes,” much less with “no eyesight at all.”

My friend wondered how on earth they do it. So a little later, he went up to a ski instructor and asked him. The answer was fascinating; Each blind skier is given a

guide. This guide will ski beside, behind, or in front of the blind person – but always in a place where they can communicate with each other.

He was then told that there are two basic forms of communication that the guide will use, the tapping together of their ski poles to assure the blind person that the guide is still there; and the communication of simple instructions about what to do next. The guide may say, “Go right, turn left, stop, slow down, skier coming up on your right, tree dead ahead!”

The only responsibility of the blind skier, is to exhibit “complete trust” and “immediate obedience” to the instructions of the guide.

If you think about it... Life is a lot like skiing downhill, totally blind. We can't see even five seconds into the future. We can't see the danger up ahead. We can't see the struggles and the heartaches that may await us. We can't even see other “skiers” who might ski right into us.

In life...we are flying blind. None of us is like that. I hate not being able to see what's going to happen. I sometimes get really nervous when I am forced into making decisions that I know will affect the rest of my life... and in those times I really need God to come through for me, but sometimes, when I need him the most, when I need his guidance the most; It feels like he is not there, on that dangerous slope beside me. Any of you ever feel like that? Ah, I am not alone!

I think we can all relate. But here's the truth. He is always right here with us. We are never alone. But he wants us to admit that we need him, and he wants us to trust him.

Some people say God never speaks to them. But the truth is, they probably don't really want Him to. Maybe deep down, they're still not convinced they want him as their guide.

**So what about you. It's a new year. Do you plan on doing it your way? Or is your prayer, God, guide me in 2023.**

Psalm 25 says; **"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." (Psalm 25:9, NIV)**

Humble means, I admit I need a guide. God, I need you. Guide me in 2023. Please guide me along the right paths, for your name sake.

Here is the second point today;

## **ASK IN FAITH FOR DIRECTIONS**

Jesus said; “Ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened.”

A.S.K could stand for: Ask, Seek and Knock. God wants you to learn to ASK.

Toward the end of last year I had a lot of big decisions to make, and that can always be overwhelming, but I brought those decisions before the Lord, I asked him for his guidance and help, and I can honestly say that I felt that he gave me the wisdom I needed.

James 1 tells us how to get wisdom, **“If you want to know what God really wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; but ... if you don't ask in faith, don't expect the Lord to give you any solid answer.”** (James 1:5-6, LB)

You see, God is willing to give wisdom, He's eager to give wisdom, He's waiting to give you wisdom, He wants to direct you in life, but you've got to have two things lined up: First, you've got to ask the right person - God. And second, you've got to ask with the right attitude - in faith, expecting an answer.

Have you ever asked God for something, but you didn't expect to get it? I remember I once last year I did this. It was a rather big ask, and I was rather surprised when he did it!

Have you ever asked God for something, and not really expected a response. Come on. Sure you have. We all have. Well here's a thought, maybe that's why we often don't get what we ask God for, because we truly don't expect him to answer us! God works in our lives according to faith.

So many times we say, "God, please guide me!" and then we walk away, not even waiting for his guidance. We just immediately kick into 'do it ourself mode.'

But God has promised us wisdom. What is wisdom? Wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view. Wisdom is the ability to make decisions the way God makes decisions. And here is the wonderful thing about God. He never makes a bad decision. He never makes a mistake. He says, if we trust Him, and listen to Him, He will guide us. But we must ask in faith.

**So as you stand at the brink of this new year. What do you need to ask of God? What wisdom do you need? Maybe you want to take some even right now, to bring that before the Lord. Maybe you need to take time this week to write that down and bring it before the Lord.**

And remember, don't just ask and miss the next part, faith means we ask in faith, expecting an answer...

This is why the third point today is;

### **LISTEN FOR GOD'S RESPONSE**

We are so conditioned to rushing ahead, to push for what we want or think, that many of us struggle to LISTEN. We struggle to wait on the Lord. To listen to his response.

One of the things we love to do at the beginning of the year as a church family, is to take the time to seek the Lord in prayer and fasting - to seek him - to set aside a sacred time - to listen to him. Keep a lookout for this, we will be announcing more about that soon.

Because in this world, there are so many voices, so many opinions, that if we are not careful, all that noise and stuff can so easily drown out the voice of the Lord in our lives. Often God is speaking, but no one is listening.

I will give you a practical illustration.

Right now, this room is filled with radio waves sharing communication. There are messages going across this room right now. You can't see them, but if you had the proper reception, you could tune in and hear these messages. Certain channels are for the police and emergency workers. Other channels are for Neighbourhood Watch Groups. Right now there are messages being sent through this room that we can't hear. A proper radio can pick up these communications. Because it was created, by its designer to pick up radio waves.

In a similar way, God designed you to hear His voice.

There is a receiver in you, to receive guidance from God. He wouldn't have made you without it. That's what makes you a human being. Out of all the creatures God created and put on the earth, only human beings have the ability to tune in to God to hear what He says.

So if you don't hear God, then there are a few possible reasons;

a) You have your receptor turned off - perhaps you've never established a genuine relationship with God.

b) You're away from it all the time, and you're not really listening to it. Or,

c) You're on the wrong channel - if God's on channel 13, and you're on channel 4, you're not going to pick up what God is saying.

I believe God speaks often, we're just not tuned in. For God does speak—sometimes one way, sometimes another—though not many perceive it.

So then, what channels does God use to speak to us? Well, there are many channels that He uses to speak to us. The Bible, teachers, impressions, circumstances, pain. He doesn't always speak the same way.

In Alpha, we talk about five ways in which God guides us. Nicky Gumbel calls them **the five C.S's**. Let me run through them quickly, the first is;

## **Commanding Scripture**

The bible. The primary way that God speaks is through the Bible. A lot of the direction you need for life is already right here, in the pages of scripture. God says life is a journey, and He's given us a road map. He's given us a compass - our conscience inside of us. And He's given us a guide - His Spirit within us.

If you're lost, it helps to have a road map, and a compass, but even more, it helps to have someone who's been there and who can actually guide you through that desert. The Bible is God's guide book, a road map, and if you don't read it, you're going to get lost. It will help you negotiate the mazes and the directions you face in life. You need to read scripture everyday. If you don't, it will be like you're on the wrong channel. Maybe you're so heavily tuned in to Netflix, that you've never heard what God was saying on the other channel.

So, if you are one of those people that still say God never speaks to you. I have a simple question for you. Are you reading the Bible everyday? Not just every now and again. Because if you've never memorised a single verse of scripture, why would God bring that to mind when you need his guidance? If you've never put anything into your mind and heart, why would God bring it out at the right time? God's will is found in God's word. Read it daily. Read it systematically. Marinate your life in it. Here's the next way God often speaks, through his...

## **Compelling Spirit**

The Holy Spirit leads us. Throughout scripture, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is there to counsel us, to help us to know God's guidance, to assist us in listening to God, and to compel us to take the right path.

God's spirit can speak to us through impressions, inspirations, ideas, godly hunches. Now sure, there are extremes here. There is the skeptic who says, "God never speaks through impressions." Which is dead wrong. And then there is the mystic who says, "Every single impression is from God." Which is also not true. You may have just had a bad chicken curry the night before. God can give all kinds of impressions, but so can gas! So make sure it's the Lord. The devil can also try to impress you to go in certain way. That's why you need to test every word with scripture. Then there is also good old...

## **Common Sense**

God gave us a brain, and he expects us to use it. In the book of Proverbs God contrasts the way of the foolish, and the way of the wise. Some choices just make sense.

Another one of the ways in which God guides us is through godly advice,

## **Counsel of the Saints**

The Church. Saints are the New Testament word to describe God's people. God often speaks through his people. God speaks through teachers, Godly Bible

teachers. Have you ever been in a crowd like at church and you feel the preacher is speaking directly to you? I sure have. In that moment God is speaking directly to you, through them.

God also does that through other Christians. Counsellors, leaders, brothers and sisters in Christ. God speaks through every believer at different times.

That's one of the reasons why you never want to miss church. So many of the turning points in my life, major turning points, happened when I was listening to a Bible study or a message. When the doors are open at the church, I want to be there, because I think "What if God has prepared a message for me and I don't show up?" Finally;

### **Circumstantial Signs**

Sometimes God uses circumstances to speak. He can even use pain. I heard one leader say; 'God whispers to us in our pleasure, but He shouts to us in our pain.' God gets your attention when you're in pain. As the old saying goes, there are no atheists in fox holes. When your life is on the line, everybody believes in God.

Proverbs 20 says; **"Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways." (Proverbs 20:30, GN)**

So, God is speaking. Are you listening? If you listen, tune in. He will lead you on the right path. If you don't get in tune with God on a regular, daily, moment by moment basis, you're going to miss God's path for your life - the right path, the path He made you for.

And remember, God often moves us in directions we don't understand. But if you listen, if you tune in, and you obey, you'll get on God's path. If you don't, you'll tend to live your own path. Following your own path leads to broken dreams, broken hearts, broken lives, broken homes. We have a society that is broken and falling down because people are not following the right path God intended for each of us to follow.

The good news is that the path of righteousness is also the road to recovery. When you come to God saying, "I'm way off base. I missed the path somewhere along the line. Maybe early in life, or maybe just a few days ago. I need to get back on the path." That's the road to recovery. God can turn you back around.

I know some of you have been thinking you're too far off the path for God to get you back on, or you've wasted too much of your life. I want to say to you, you're dead wrong. No matter how far off the path you've gotten, God can bring you back on. Sometimes God's going to lead you in paths that don't make sense.

Which brings me to my final point today, sometimes the path that God has designed for your life will be hard to understand. And when that happens, you've got to...

## TRUST GOD WHEN YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

You are not God. An example of this is from the Old Testament when the children of Israel were finally set free from Egypt after 400 years of slavery. Moses had gone to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go" and Pharaoh said he'd had enough, get out. So they leave. The whole nation starts marching out to freedom, and not far into freedom land, they hit their first big challenge. The Red Sea.

On one side of them is a mountain range that is uncrossable. On the other side is another mountain range that is uncrossable. In front of them is an ocean. Behind them, in hot pursuit, is the Egyptian army, that has now changed its mind and decided to come and slaughter them all. What is God going to do now? The path looks like a dead end.

Even though they did not understand, God knew exactly what He wanted to do. He was preparing them for a miracle. He was preparing them for deliverance. He had not made a mistake, because He could see what they could not see, and He opened the Red Sea, and they walked through.

Years later, the Israelites looked back and in Psalm 77 they said,

**“Your road led by a pathway through the sea - a pathway no one knew was there!” (Psalm 77:19, LB)**

Some of you are facing some dead ends right now - financial, emotional, relational - but what you may not realise yet, is that it's not really a wall; it's a door. God can see a path that you don't know about.

The path you're on right now may be one that is dark, despairing, discouraging, and you might feel depressed about it, and you think there is no way it will work out. You think it's impossible.

But, if you will just keep on moving in faith, if you will trust God, even when you don't see a way, then He can make a way for you. When you think it's not going to happen, if you'll keep on walking on that path God has put you on, it will become clearer and clearer, brighter and brighter, and more understandable the longer you go, the longer you grow, the more you mature, and the more you learn to be like Christ.

Life's a journey. One day you will stand in the full light of eternity and see why God chose a path particularly for you. That mystery, crisis, chaos, that you feel now, that you may not see any value in, one day, in the full light of eternity, you will understand. You'll see the big picture. You'll see God's purpose behind the path He specifically chose for you.

What do you do in the meantime? You do what Proverbs 3 says **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."** (Proverbs 3:5-6)

What does it mean “don't lean on your own understanding?” Its means don't always try to figure it out. You're not going to understand most of the things that happen in your life until you get to heaven.

So never judge the path God leads you on until I you get to the end. Don't criticise an unfinished plan. Have patience. One day you'll realise why it was all happening. You'll see that God knows what He's doing. God does not make mistakes. God does not mess up. God knows what's best for you. You cannot see what He sees. He sees the future. He can see the end result. You can't. All those problems, heartaches, difficulties and delays, thorns in the flesh, physical ailments, all the things you ask "why" about, one day, it's going to be clear. In the light of God's love. But in the meantime, lean not on your own understanding. Trust God.

I love this verse in Psalm 37; **“The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.” (Psalm 37:23-24, NLT)**

Even before you were born, God knew the steps you would take. God created you with a custom plan. He has a path that when He created you, He designed you to walk down that path. He's not going to force you to walk down the path. You have a choice, an option. You can either go God's way or your way.

But one day you'll stand before God and He'll say "Did you take the path I led you on?" If you say, "No, I did it my way" He'll say, "Then have it your way." And that way doesn't lead to heaven. Only the path God has for you leads to heaven. The Bible says that all other paths get on a road that leads to destruction. They seem right, but they lead only to death.

But God has a custom plan and path for your life. It's a big, big mistake for you to try to copy somebody else's life. You can't live their plan, you can't walk their path, you can't be what God made them to be. You were meant to be what God meant you to be, and nobody else. God wants you to be you. He wants to be your guide. He wants to hold your hand through life.

If you don't follow the plan, the path, that God created for you - the path of righteousness - then you will experience life's greatest tragedy which is a wasted life. This is not a small issue. We're talking about whether you're going to waste your life or not, whether your life is going to count or not, whether you're going to be what God made you to be in this universe or not. The greatest tragedy in life, is to exist, without ever having known or fulfilled the very reason you were made for. What a waste!

Sometimes God has paths cross. God has another person's path cross your path. He brings people, circumstances, instances into your life at the right time to get your attention to talk to you to help you grow. Obviously, part of God's path for your life, was to be at King of Kings today. You are not here by coincidence. It's providence. You're here not by accident. You're here so Jesus Christ can say to you;

“You really matter to Me. I made you. I love you. I know everything about you. I died for you. I have a plan and a path for your life. I know where I want you to end up in life. I know how to get you there. I know how to get you there safely. I will walk you through life. You'll never go it alone, if you'll just let me hold your hand and be your guide.”

So much of our stress is unnecessary. It's irrelevant, unneeded. When you have a guide that says; “I'll walk with you, and if you stumble, it's OK. Because I will hold you by the hand.

As I close today's message. The ultimate question is this: Who's path are you going to follow in life? Have you admitted that you need a guide? And that only God can guide you along the right paths? Have you asked in faith for his directions? Are you willing to listen, to really listen? And to trust Him? No matter what.

Let's pray together.

Credit: Adapted from message by Rick Warren called “The antidote to indecision.”