

A step in the right direction

Proverbs 4:11-13 & Galatians 5:24-26

Introduction

Just after Mel and I were married, my youngest sister came to visit us in 'Tooting' where we were staying with Mel's mum before moving to Bristol to live and study. To be honest my memory is hazy, and I may be creating a new story from fragments of random memories. Does anybody else do that?

On arrival I met my sister at Tooting Bec station. 'I'll be alright', I told Mel before leaving to meet her. There was a problem, I had never lived in London before and had no idea of the Tooting area. I met my sister, that was fine, and then I proceeded to take my sister back to my mother in law's house in Tooting by walking toward Balham. As I walked it began to dawn on me that I didn't recognise my surrounds, but I kept on walking sure that I would recognise somewhere soon. As a young male I didn't need to ask anyone for directions!

Eventually I realised that I had become hopelessly lost and called Mel from a phone box (it was 1998 - I didn't own a mobile phone). I don't remember if Mel came and rescued us, or gave me detailed instruction on how to return, but we finally arrived home. The moral of the story is you will not reach your destination by walking away from it.

On the way

Being a Christian is about directing our lives away from worldly ambition toward a holy destination, the Kingdom of God, which happens to be humanity's true home.

Journeying language is common to us all (possibly overused at times) and is found in both secular and sacred literature. The journey has been symbolically employed by many to help us understand the process of change and transformation that we go through as we mature. This symbol is used in a natural and spiritual sense of our development.

- 'Follow the yellow brick road', which leads from the home of the munchkins to the Emerald city where everything would be put right, and Dorothy would be able to make her ultimate journey home to Kansas.
- Or, more appropriately for us, the 17th Century pastor John Bunyan advises us to make our way from the city of destruction to the celestial city.
- Both roads warn us not to deviate and encourage us to keep moving forward, whether it be a yellow brick one or Bunyan's straight and narrow one.

We have two short passages today, one from the Old Testament the other from the New, both talk about the path we have to follow.

Proverbs 4:11-13

The Old Testament passage is from Proverbs, the book of wise sayings attributed to King Solomon, David's wise ruling son. Many scholars believe that rather than each of these pithy sayings being Solomon's they were collected by him and his court and became part of the training syllabus for those educated around the time of Solomon.

Evangelist Billy Graham said;

I used to read five psalms every day - that teaches me how to get along with God. Then I read a chapter of Proverbs every day and that teaches me how to get along with my fellow man.

There is a tradition in biblical interpretation that links wisdom and its personification within Proverbs with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. (Proverbs 4:6). Then in our reading; **I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.** (v 11)

Within the New Testament the Holy Spirit is the expression of divine personality which engages, teaches, and guides us along the right spiritual, ethical and moral path that leads to the ultimate destination, the Kingdom of God. Proverbs teaches that our steps are guided into the right direction through our love for God, and the wisdom that lead to him. This leads us to our New Testament verses.

Galatians 5:24-26

Christians inherited from our Israelite forebears a description of God that is fundamentally personal, though it can be hard for us to understand.

Concerning the personal nature of God manifested in Jesus, only a very small portion of humans experienced that; few of us can say with the apostle John; **'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched'** (1 John 1:1a).

Nevertheless, through the four Gospels we encounter God in Christ, as the Baptist Declaration of Principle puts it. *'That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.'* And by the presence of the Holy Spirit that encounter permeates our lives.

Now the Holy Spirit, the abiding wisdom of God with us, continues to guide us in the right direction but because the relationship is personal not simply functional, we are invited to keep in step with the Spirit.

If you want to go from one place to the other and use your car, you will plan your journey, start the car, and drive it. The car will respond to your operation, though it may feel relational it isn't, the machine is simply under your command and control. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is different, the Holy Spirit is not under your command or control and you are only under the Holy Spirit's command and control if you submit to the Spirit

The language that Paul uses in Galatians is deliberately personal, **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.** (v 25) The NIV study bible makes the notes that the verb in the Greek rendered 'in step with' can also be translated 'walk in line with', similar to the Amplified bible.

So, as some of us enjoy returning to some semblance of normality, we remember that we are in relationship with our creator who invites us to join him on the journey. If we keep in step and remain in line with the Spirit, every step will be one in the right direction.

Yet, this is no functional journey in a machine from point a to b, it is a journey to the Kingdom of God that is marked by the spiritual, ethical and moral choices that we make under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Yet, we travel this way in the sure knowledge that the destination is assured having procured our place through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Conclusion

Whatever life is welcoming you back to, keep in step with the Spirit and it will always be a step in the right direction.

Questions

1. Think of a time that you went in the wrong direction, how did it make you feel?
2. How does it feel to find the right direction (especially if we are lost)?
3. How do you discover and follow instruction from the Bible?
4. What practices do you have that help you keep in step with the Spirit?