

The Leading of the Lord

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in the Lord and following His path, and warns against the consequences of not doing so.

Duration: 59:53

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 1:7, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 7:24-27, John 10:27, 1 Corinthians 9:27

Topics: "Direction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the pathway that God has for His people and the importance of having a burden for souls. He emphasizes the need to live for God and shares insights into the character of God through the story of Pharaoh and the Israelites. The preacher highlights how God hardened Pharaoh's heart to demonstrate His power and bring honor to Himself. He also addresses the blindness that can come upon people who once knew the Lord and emphasizes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

Transcript

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None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. And Proverbs 1-7 says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Tonight we're going to go into the Word of the Lord. We're going to look at quite a few scriptures. I want to talk about a characteristic of Almighty God.

The fact I suppose I could say that He takes His Word very, very seriously. He requires honesty in His people. He requires an open heart, the willingness and ability to allow a deep searching of the Holy Spirit.

He has a pathway for His people. There were people that responded today to that altar call at three o'clock who really want a burden for souls. You want to live for God.

I'm going to talk at the end of this message about a pathway that will get you there, and how to be sure that you're on the pathway of the Lord. I'm also going to talk about circumstances that I have seen over the years as a Christian man and as a pastor, where I've seen an incredible blindness come upon people who once knew the Lord and walked with God, and yet they seem to have been given to a mysterious blindness. We're going to talk about that.

I need your prayers tonight, so let's pray together as we get into this Word that Jesus Christ would be lifted up and glorified, that His kingdom will go forward with great power, and that I'm believing tonight that believers are going to be made solid. There are some maybe that are wavering tonight, but I'm believing that people are going to be made solid, set on a path. That's my heart's desire.

It's the Lord's heart's desire. I know it's Pastor David's heart's desire that through the expounding of the Word of God, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, that this church body will be made solid, that we will not be moved by winds or waves or anything that happens to come our way, but we will know who God is. We will know His voice.

We'll know the voice of the Holy Spirit. We'll not listen to any other voice. Jesus said that about His sheep, My sheep know My voice, and another they will not follow.

And so we will develop in our hearts such a deep and intense love for the leading of the Lord that no matter what it costs, no matter where He takes us, we will willingly, as Peter did, stretch forth our hands and we will follow Him, even if it means the death to all that we hold dear in our own hearts and our own lives, so that the purposes and plans of God might be formed in us. There is a pathway that God has for each one of our lives. And I don't know about you tonight, and I'm hoping your heart's the same as mine.

I don't want to miss that pathway that God has for me. I know where I've come from and I know where I am today. I don't know where I'm going to be tomorrow, but I do know the one who holds my hand and I know the one who's leading me.

I never want to let go of that hand. I never want to lose it. I never want to become stubborn.

I never want to substitute my will for the will of the Lord. I want to walk with Him all the days of my life. As the Apostle Paul said, I want to bring this flesh into subjection, and lest when I have preached the gospel to others, I myself should end up a castaway.

We need to have a wholesome fear of the Lord, a wholesome fear, not an unholy trembling fear, but a wholesome reverence for God. The one thing I do know about the Lord tonight is that He takes His word very, very seriously. We're going to be in the Word tonight, so be prepared.

Ask the Holy Spirit now to give you an open heart. Oh, Jesus, we love Your Word. I love Your Word.

Your Word truly is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. And I ask tonight for an empowerment of the Holy Spirit that You would open wide the path that is before us. Make it clear.

Lord, You have a path for every believer. You have a path for Your church, a pathway for every generation. Open wide that path to our understanding tonight that we may see the pathway that You have laid before us and understand how we can keep our feet upon it.

God, keep us from turning to the left or to the right of all that we would learn in Your Word, not only this day, but in every service we come into. Every time Your Word is opened, every time under the unction of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is lifted up and magnified and exalted. Oh, God, set our affections on things above and not on things below.

Give us Your heart and take away from us the stony heart of the uncircumcised nature, oh God, and give us the heart of Christ. Oh, Holy Spirit, sanctify me tonight. Sanctify my mind and my heart, this physical, frail body.

God, touch me with Your power tonight and let every word that comes from this inward man be birthed in Your heart. Jesus, the people need to hear from You. They don't need to hear from me tonight.

They need to hear from You. Holy Spirit, it's Your voice that needs to be heard in the church. Oh, God, relegate me to some backseat somewhere and come and stand before the people and be heard tonight, oh God.

I ask, Lord, that You give every person tonight the ability to look beyond the vessels that you stand in this or any other place, oh God, and to see Jesus high and lifted up above every other name that is named. Lord God, we give You honor. We give You praise tonight.

Be magnified, not only in this house, but be magnified in our lives. Oh, God, I love You tonight. I love You, Jesus.

And I thank You, Lord, that You will fill my mouth. You'll fill my inward parts because You love this people, Lord. You love them.

And they've come asking for bread. You said You'd not give them a stone. They've come for water.

And You said You'd give them living water and that it would flow out of their bellies. They've come, many of them, looking for direction. You said that Your Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

And God, You will give them direction tonight. Oh, Lord God, hold this church in the palm of Your hand. Keep the course steady and straight that we may bring honor to Your name, oh God, throughout this generation, Lord.

Oh, Jesus, I thank You for Your sovereign hand. I thank You, Lord, for Your protection in Your precious and holy name. Amen.

Psalm 125. If you'll turn there. We're going to look at some truths tonight that might be hard.

But nevertheless, they're truths that we need to hear. Psalm 125, the leading of the Lord. They that trust in the Lord, verse 1, shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.

What a beautiful promise. If we will put our confidence in Him and trust in Him, that we will not be removed. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever.

Tonight, the Lord is round about us. If you're a believer in Christ and you love the Lord and you love the Word of God, this Word is for you tonight. The Lord Jesus is all around you, just like the mountains round about Jerusalem.

He's surrounding you on every side. He despises your enemies. Hallelujah.

He hates your enemies. And He encamps around about those that fear Him, those that love Him. He encamps around about them.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to know tonight that the Lord is with us and the Lord is around us and the Lord loves us? For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the rod of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity. Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good and to them that are upright in their hearts. God does good to those who are upright in their heart, who have a clean and a pure heart before Him.

As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. But peace shall be upon Israel. This is an incredible verse of Scripture.

I want to just read it again. It talks about those who turn aside from the path of righteousness, those who begin to walk in their own ways and do things that are right in their own sight, but not right in the sight of God. And in verse 5, it says, As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, who will lead them forth? The Lord.

It doesn't say the devil, but the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. In other words, God will gather them together with other workers of iniquity, but peace shall be upon Israel. We see this graphically displayed or explained in the book of Exodus.

If you go back there in chapter 14 in the book of Exodus, we see the children of Israel in this chapter being led out of captivity into marvelous victory, a place of blessing that God had prepared for them. He had brought Moses and with a mighty hand, he had brought judgments upon the nation of Egypt. And now the Lord was bringing his people out.

And we see a marvelous and wonderful thing happening here that will give us some insight into the very character, the very nature of God. You see, Pharaoh let the people go because God brought him to a place where he absolutely had to let them go. But the Lord said something in chapter 14 in verse 4. And he said, I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he shall follow after them.

And I will be honored upon Pharaoh and upon all his hosts that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people.

And they said, why have we done this? That we have let Israel go from serving us. And he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. So here's Pharaoh.

All kinds of plagues have fallen upon the nation. The whole nation is in ruins. The firstborn of Egypt of man and beast had all died.

There's death in all the land. Finally, he realizes he can't fight against God. He lets God's people go.

There's a great victory celebration that day as they all leave Egypt, taking their young ones, their old ones with them and spoiling the Egyptians. And then the Lord now puts a thought into Pharaoh's heart. It's the leading of the Lord.

He is going to bring Pharaoh into a place where he says, I'm going to be honored upon him. And all of a sudden Pharaoh, who was more than happy to be rid of the children of Israel, is now turning and saying, why have we done this? But it was God that put that thought in his heart. It was God.

He said, I will harden Pharaoh's heart. I will and I'm going to cause him to follow after the children of Israel. And in verse 17, in the same chapter, he says, and I behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians and they shall follow them.

And I will get me honor upon Pharaoh and upon all his hosts, upon his chariots and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I have gotten me honor upon Pharaoh and upon his chariots and upon his horsemen. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, now we know that was Christ, removed and went behind them.

And the pillar of the cloud went from before their face and stood behind them. And it came, that's the angel of God, came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel and it was a cloud of darkness to them. That's to the Egyptians, but it gave light by night to these.

That's the children of God. So that one came not near the other all night. Now there's an incredible thing.

Here's the Lord. He's leading two sets of people. He's leading one set of people into freedom and he's leading the other people right behind them into judgment.

They're both going in the same pathway. They're both being led by God. And God is right between the two camps.

He's right between the camp of Israel and the camp of Egypt. To one, he's light. That's who Christ is.

He's light unto light. And the word of God became flesh. And he who comes to Christ, the scripture says, comes to the light.

He was light to those who were walking with him. He was light to those who loved him. He was light to those who were walking in the pathway prescribed.

But yet there's another camp coming right behind them and he's darkness to these same people. The same God. He's light to one people and he's darkness to another who are falling right behind.

And he's leading them both. The Egyptians were blinded by the Lord so that the waters that were a wall to the children of God drowned the children of Egypt. It's an incredible thing.

God brings up the water and he makes a wall on each side and through it all, that's through trial, through tribulation, through distress, that's what those walls really represent to you and I. Through every obstacle that's before them and before us today, they walked right through the midst of it and the very things that should have drowned them became a wall on either side. And they walked right through the midst of the trial. They walked right through the midst of impossibility on dry ground.

And that's what it's like for a child of God who's walking with God, who's walking in the light, who's allowing truth to come into the heart and penetrate the heart. But here is this other camp of Egypt that are coming behind. They are led by a different motive.

God is leading them. He's turning them over to their lusts. They desire to control the people of God.

They desire to enslave the people of God and use them for their own gain and for their own advantage. And so the same waters that were a wall, the same circumstances and trials and difficulties that were a wall to the children of Israel now became the drowning forces for the children of Egypt. They tried to go through the same place but they couldn't go through because God was not with them and their circumstances overwhelmed them and they all drowned in the sea.

And the interesting thing is they couldn't stop because the Lord was leading them. They couldn't stop. They were just driven by their lusts.

They were driven by anger and rage. They were driven by other things than by the spirit of God and the righteous leading of God that should have been in their lives. David says in Psalm 125 verse 4, he says, Do good, O Lord, to those that be good and to them that are upright in their heart.

In other words, O God, do good to those that are good and to those that are upright in their hearts. And as for such that turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with other workers of iniquity or with the workers of iniquity. I have seen in my life as a Christian and as a pastor, people led out of safety, gone into places of difficulty and spiritual disaster.

The one sign that a person is being led out of safety is that there's a mysterious blindness that comes upon their life. I've heard it called a judicial blindness of God and I believe that with all my heart. There's a justice, a judgment that comes upon the heart, the life.

And there's a blindness that comes upon people and you can't do anything about it. You can't stop them. You can't talk them out of it.

They become determined in their heart that they're going in a certain direction. Even if that direction is virtual spiritual suicide, you can't stop them from walking in that direction. I remember years ago, I was involved with a group of ministers and we went into a certain city and we established a church body in that city.

And it was a young church. It was a thriving church. There was about 80, maybe 100 people there.

And there was a glorious presence of God in this church. When the people would meet, just the glory of God would come into this church. And the people loved the Lord.

They wanted to walk with God. And it came time to set the church in order. Now, the denomination I was part of, there was a governmental structure to this church.

And part of that structure said essentially that anybody who is in bondage to alcohol or nicotine or anything or any other substance cannot be in leadership in the church body. And I believe that with all my heart. You can't, if you're not free, you can't be proclaiming freedom to the people.

You've got to be free in your life and in your heart from all of these different things. And so when we came to the people and talked about the things that had to be done so that the church could be set in order, there were two men that had been instrumental and had significant influence in this particular group. And when they found out, because they smoked, both of them smoked.

And when they found out that they were disqualified from leadership in the church, we told them essentially, all you have to do is stop smoking and repent of this thing and prove that you're over this thing

and you wouldn't be qualified. The people could, you could let your name stand, the people could vote for you, et cetera, et cetera. But these men didn't want to give up their habit.

And so they arranged a meeting, a secret meeting behind the backs of those that were in authority at a specific person's house that was part of that church body. And in that meeting, they virtually poisoned the people. They said, this is legalism, that we will not be brought under the control of these people.

They're going to try to dominate our lives. They poisoned the people. It was all a smokescreen, really, because it was simply because they smoked.

And sad to say, the people were gullible enough to hear them. And they had this series of secret meetings that we know nothing about. And I began to notice that the disposition of the people was getting more sour by the week.

Every week we would go and have service. They were getting a more deeper and sour disposition until the people finally rose up. And they said, we will not be brought under the government of anybody.

We are in liberty. Christ has set us free. And so we're going to walk in freedom.

We won't have any government over us, no control over us. We're just going to do our own thing. We're going to pray.

We're going to seek God, and God's going to be with us. We warned them. I remember having a meeting with the people, and I warned them that what they were doing, they could try to put a spiritual covering on it, but it was rebellion.

And that there was a dangerousness in what they were doing because a deep spiritual blindness can come upon the lives of those who do these types of things. And so they persisted in their direction. They went their own way.

These two men, in particular, virtually destroyed this church. They destroyed it. It was within a matter of a month or two, completely dissipated.

They drew off some people after themselves and tried to start a home thing. It amounted to nothing. It never does, folks.

It never amounts to anything. If it's birthed in rebellion, it will never grow. It's doomed right from the start.

God's not with it. In the book of James, he said, the Lord resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. So no matter how much they pray, no matter how spiritual they try to pretend they are, God's hand is against them, so it can't prosper.

It can't go anywhere. A mysterious blindness came upon these people. Within a year and a half, the man who had hosted the meeting in his home, was a friend of mine, died of a heart attack.

His wife is paralyzed today with a brain aneurysm. Very sure about six months or eight months after he died, she suffered a brain aneurysm. One of the elders, as he called himself of this particular group, a friend of mine went to visit him about a year later after this all happened.

He knocked on the door. He opened his door. He let him in.

He had left his wife. Another woman was there. He wasn't married to this other woman.

Here they are living in adultery and fornication. He offered this friend of mine a glass of whiskey and then started to talk to him about how wonderful the Lord is and how great the Lord is and how God has so blessed him and how God is so with them. Another man that was in this group, one of the men that was instrumental in splitting this particular church, not splitting it, destroying it, he came to my office about a year later and he sat down with myself and my associate pastor and he said to me, he said, Pastor Carter, he said, we are so blessed to the Lord.

He said, this is the few that were left now after this whole thing had dissipated. He said, we have found a man just like we are, just like we are. He said, he's got a heart just like ours.

And I knew the man that they had found. This man was a wolf. I knew he was a wolf.

He would go into a town. He would set up a church. He would preach the success and prosperity gospel whereby you gained money by giving him money.

When he had milked the whole flock, when he had fleeced the flock, that he would close up the church and move on, which is exactly what he did. And he said, we found a man just like we are. He is a wonderful man.

He said, and he is giving us, he was sitting there across from my desk. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He said, he is giving us revelation.

He said, incredible revelation from the word of God. He said, and I said, well, tell me, what is some of the revelation that he's giving you? He said, well, one of the most profound, he said, is that you don't have to be like Jesus. You just have to follow Jesus.

You don't have to be like Jesus. And in other words, this man was teaching them, you can smoke and drink and dance and do anything you want. And as long as you say you're following Jesus, you're going to go to heaven.

He said, he's just like we are. And I remember sitting there looking at him in absolute disbelief. This man had sat under the gospel.

He'd sat under some very, very strong preaching. And I remember closing my Bible and looking at him and thinking in my heart, you're right. He's just like you are.

You have found a man after your own heart. God has given you what you've been asking for. You know, there's a warning in the scripture.

There's a time when a certain people say, take away from us the prophets that are exposing our sin. Take away from us the men that are causing the holy one of Israel to come before our faces. Take these men away from us and give us prophets that prophesy unto us smooth things.

And so the Lord doesn't withhold from these people. He gives them the lust of their own heart. He releases them to the lust of their own heart.

That's what happened to the armies of Pharaoh. They were released to their lust. Their lust was to control the people of God.

And so they pursued that lust and they drowned in their pursuit of that lust. They were being led out of safety. And incredible, the man who had hosted the meeting.

And at that meeting, you know, the theme was legalism. We'll not be brought under the control of these people. They're dominating, controlling people.

We won't be brought. And basically all it was was a structure that would protect them from the wolves that they were about to come under. And they didn't know it.

When that man suffered a heart attack about a year and a half later, as he was being taken out of the house, he died before he got to the hospital. And as he was being taken out of the house, he turned to his wife. He said, have Pastor Carter preach my funeral if I don't make it.

Isn't it funny that all of a sudden, the man who was the legalist, all of a sudden now he wants him to preach his funeral. Something changed in his heart when he knew he was going to die. There was a reaching out.

All I can hope, I had to preach his funeral. I'll tell you it was a dismal funeral and a dismal experience. And all I can hope is that somewhere on the way from his house to the hospital, he had time to cry to Jesus.

He was in such pain. I really don't know if he did. His wife told me he died in a backslidden condition, turned away from the Lord.

And so I really don't know. I hope he had time because he had been a friend of mine. This man had a ministry, a very powerful ministry.

It affected a lot of lives. But he had let something get into his heart. He had turned away from walking in humility before God.

The devil had come in and gotten a hold of him and he was led out of the safety of God. And a mysterious blindness came upon his life. The apostle John, referring to the prophecy of Isaiah and talking about the religious, Jesus was talking about the religious people of his day.

He says he has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them. It's an incredible thing. What we see in the book of Exodus, we saw when Jesus came and was ministering during the time of his earthly ministry.

Here's a certain class of people, usually the lowest of society, the beggars, the poor, the lame, the blind, those that nobody had any time of day for. They're falling at his feet. They're kissing his feet.

They're loving him with all their heart. They're shouting, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And he's light unto them.

The way of eternity was opened up to these people. They're coming in while he sits with the Pharisees and eats in breaking alabaster boxes of expensive ointment and pouring it on his head and pouring it on his feet. Heaven has been opened to them.

They've been given revelation that they can get through the times of difficulty and trial and darkness and lay ahead and God would be with them and they would get to heaven if they would trust and believe in him

for their salvation. But yet at the same time, there's another people learned in the scriptures, sitting in the synagogue every Sabbath day, opening up the Word of God, reading and teaching from the book of Isaiah and all of the other prophets and yet God is right in the midst of them and to one he's light and to the other he's become darkness. The Pharisees, the learned people of the day, are standing around while lepers and beggars are leaping and dancing and praising God for joy.

The Pharisees and learned of that day are standing around saying, we just don't see how a prophet can come out of Nazareth. We just don't see how this carpenter's son can make such an audacious claim to be the son of God. To one he was light and to the other he was darkness.

My brothers and sisters, it always has been that way and always will be that way. Although the scripture today warns about the pursuit and the love of money, there are those who feel that God is leading them in that direction. There was a family, we had a Christian school at our church in Canada.

And there was a family that I became aware that was going, that had two children in the school and they had become associated with a church that preached a love of money gospel. You know, the gospel that says, use faith to get Cadillacs and all that kind of thing. That's what faith is all about.

And so I felt an obligation as a pastor to call them in and I said to them, you're welcome to leave your children in our school if you want to. I said, but you need to know that we're going to be teaching your children that what they are learning on Sunday is a lie. I said, we're going to be opening the word of God.

We're going to be teaching them. And I said, I'd like to share some scriptures with you about what we're going to be teaching your children. Because at first they said, well, that's all right.

I mean, can you imagine that? You're going to church and you're sending your children to a school that's going to teach them that what they're learning is a lie. And initially they said, well, that's okay. That's okay.

I mean, you talk about an incredible blindness that came upon a people. And so I opened the word of God. I said, I want to share some scriptures with you.

So I opened the word of God. Firstly, I remember this as clearly as if I was sitting there right now. I opened the word of God to the book of Matthew and I began to read some words to them.

And it was words like this. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness. What have we just been talking about? A time when light turns to darkness.

That's a time when we resist the leading of God. How great is that darkness. No man can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and man or money. Therefore, I just kept on reading.

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor yet your body what you shall put on. Is not life more than meat in the body than raiment or clothing? Behold the fowls of the air, they don't sow or reap or gather into barns that your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much better than they are? Why do you worry about clothes? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not.

And yet I said to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Then we just kept on going and I said, for all these things do the Gentiles seek after. Your heavenly father knows that you have needed these things, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

Therefore take no thought for tomorrow, for the moral shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Now I finished reading that and they were sitting across the table, this couple, they looked at me and she said to me on his behalf and her behalf, well, that's just your opinion, but we believe, no, I hadn't offered them an opinion yet.

That's just your opinion. I said, okay, well, I'd like to read you another scripture. So I turned to the book of 1st Timothy chapter 6. 1st Timothy chapter 6. And I began to read these words beginning at verse 7. We brought nothing into this world.

It's certain we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, that's clothing, let us be there with content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which what? Drown.

What happened to the children of Egypt? They drowned. Which drowned men in destruction and perdition. Verse 10 says, the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

So they have erred from the faith. And then I went on to read, but thou, O man of God, flee these things, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called and has professed a good profession before many witnesses. Again, I closed the Bible.

I looked up at them. She looked at me right in the eye and she said, well, that's just your opinion. But we believe.

This is the end of side one. You may now turn the tape over to side two. I was dumbfounded.

And I began to realize, God, these people are judicially blind. And what caused this judicial blindness to come upon their lives? It came out of their own mouths. They understood the Word of God.

They opened the Word of God and they knew what it meant. But they chose to believe something else. And that's what the judicial blindness of God is all about.

It's opening the Word of God and seeing the Word of God, that it's reasonable we lay our lives down as a living sacrifice for God. And reading it and understanding what it means, but saying, yes, that's good, but I believe, I feel, the God that I serve says, you hear these words all the time. It's a judicial blindness.

It comes by rejecting the claim of Christ upon your life. It comes by turning away from the truth. It comes by casting aside the Holy One of Israel, as Isaiah said, taking the truth and throwing it into the streets and trampling it underfoot and choosing to set up another standard before God.

An incredible thing. They knew what the Word of God said. But they chose to believe something else other than what it said.

So I told them, I didn't have any other choice. I said, you need to take your children out of this school. You need to go your way.

They said, the Lord is leading us to this place. And I went to open my mouth. I went to argue with them further because it was spiritual suicide.

They were heading to a place that was going to drown them, just like the children of Egypt. The love of money, the Scripture says, drowns men. In destruction and perdition.

And they err from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. They were going to sit under a Gospel that was going to drown them with the cares and concerns of this world that was going to choke the seed that was planted in their heart and make them unfruitful in the Kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, it was going to send them to hell because the Bible says covetousness is idolatry and no idolater will enter the Kingdom of God.

They were going to establish a false god. They were going to try to recreate Christ. That's what all of these theologies and all of these doctrines do.

And totally nullify the claim of Christ upon the believer's life. And I opened my mouth and I was about to plead with them and argue with them and the Holy Spirit checked me and said, close the Bible. Don't argue with these people.

I am leading them. And I was dumbfounded. And God spoke to my heart and said, they have chosen their path.

It's their choice. I am leading them. And I'm going to talk to you about what that leading is all about.

I'm leading them. There's a group of people that God in every generation leads into His presence. Into the Holy of Holies who touch the very heart of God.

But there's another group that He leads out of His presence. Away from His presence. Because they chose to reject the claim of Christ.

And there are those who say, well, I'm safe because I'm praying. There are movements, there are Christians in North America there are movements that say, well, I'm safe because I'm praying. Or there are different movements that arise and begin.

And the people justify what happens in their midst by saying, well, we were praying. So this has got to be of God. No, not necessarily so.

I knew a man one time that was a man who'd get up in the morning. He would pray from 4.30. A pastor friend of mine knew him very well. He lived in his house.

He would pray from 4.30 in the morning till seven o'clock. He would pace back and forth, cry out with strong tears unto the Lord. And it was only within a short time after all of this display that he set his hand against the church and tried to destroy a good man of God.

God destroyed him. He died not too long after doing that. Died in absolute disgrace.

Died cast away from the Lord. A man, if you went into a prayer meeting, you'd say, this is a holy man. If you had not much discernment, how he'd pray with strong tears.

He'd cry out with strong crying. But there was something wrong. Just because you prayed doesn't mean that you're safe.

You need to know that, brethren and sisters in the Lord. You can be in a movement that's praying and not necessarily be safe. I'm going to show you something from the prophet Ezekiel.

Go to Ezekiel chapter 14, please. Ezekiel chapter 14. An incredible passage of Scripture.

Beginning at verse 1. Then came certain of the elders of Israel and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face. Should I be inquired of it all by them? Therefore, speak unto them and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God.

Every man of the house of Israel that sets up his idols in his heart and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face and comes to the prophet, I, the Lord, will answer him that comes according to the multitude of his idols, that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart because they are all estranged from me through their idols. So there's an incredible thing. Here's a man coming to a prophet, inquiring very sincerely, maybe in some cases, of the Lord.

But God said, if this man comes to me and prays before me and inquires of me and he's got idols in his heart, I will answer him according to the multitude of his idols. And then you go on to verse seven. For every one of the house of Israel or of the stranger that sojourns in Israel which separates himself from me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face and comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me, I, the Lord, will answer him by myself.

So it's the Lord that's going to answer now, not the prophet, the Lord. I will set my face against that man and I will make him a sign and a proverb. I will cut him off from the midst of my people and you shall know that I am the Lord.

And if the prophet be deceived when he has spoken a thing, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet and I will stretch out my hand upon him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. They shall bear the punishment of their iniquity. The punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeks unto him.

That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be my people and I may be their God, saith the Lord God. Now that's an incredible thing. It talks about a man coming with perhaps even strong crying, perhaps with strong tears.

It can all be an exterior display and coming and inquiring of God. In this case, it was through a prophet. And the Lord looks down on that man and looks and sees what's in his heart.

And he says, I'm going to answer him according to the multitude of idols that are in his heart. Now we would say today, what is an idol? And how does that relate to what we're talking about? Well, the Puritan writers said essentially that an idol is anything that stands between you and I and a wholehearted surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. It can be a job.

It can be family. It can be self-ambition. It can be a number of things that stand between us and wholehearted surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's an idol that's in the heart. It's something that we have placed there in the stead of God. Just like these people who knew what the claim of Christ was, but chose to believe something else.

Chose to put something else in between themselves and the claim of Christ through his word upon their lives. In the case of this elder of this particular church that was a man, supposedly a man of prayer. I know the pastor and I both began to feel that something was wrong in this man's life.

His idol was self-will. He was a stubborn man. It was his will or no will.

And no matter how much he prayed in the morning, when it came time to a church board meeting, you knew what was really in the spirit in the heart of this man. There was no ability to compromise. There was no ability to just say, well, let's just hear from the Lord.

It was his way or no way. When he got something in his heart, then that's the way it was going to be. The pastor felt a different leading in a specific case.

I knew this pastor. He was a friend of mine. The pastor said, no, we're not going your way.

We're going to do it the way that God has spoken in my heart to do it. And incidentally, that was the way of great blessing. God has just opened heaven to this particular church.

Incredible blessing has come upon this church. This man said, no. He opposed the pastor and he went to the, he even went to the extent of driving to a former town, a great distance away that this pastor used to live in, to try to dig up dirt on his life so he could discredit him so that he could have his own way in the church.

He went, he stopped his car. He got lost. I want to tell you about the leading of the Lord.

He stopped his car. He got lost. He got out of the car.

He and another little crony that he'd found that would accompany him. I'm talking like an ex-policeman now, I guess. He walked up to the door.

He knocked on the door. And it was a God-fearing man that opened that door. And he said, tell me, why have you come here? And so he, fearing no evil himself, told the man why he was there.

The man said, come into my house. And he sat them down and opened the word of God and laid the two of them right down in the dust and told them they were sinners, told them they were rebels, told them what they were doing was wrong, and then kicked him out of his house. The fear of the Lord came upon the younger man.

And he turned from his ways. He repented of what he was doing and realized it was wrong. This older man, so stubborn, so set in his ways, continued on his pursuit until God took him.

I'm not necessarily saying he took him home. He took him. He took him.

And the Lord reached out to that man right to the end of his life. But there was never any indication that he ever changed his ways. Here's a man that's up in the morning.

He's praying. He's seeking. Somebody asked me one time, can you seek God? Can you be up praying five hours a day and go astray? Absolutely.

If you're seeking God, but your life is not in line with this book, God can answer you according to the idols that are in your heart. And then all of a sudden, instead of coming deep into the heart of Jesus, you're going farther and farther and farther and farther away from the heart of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

The knowledge of the holy is the beginning of understanding. Some people would say, well, you're laying on us an Old Testament truth that's got nothing to do with the New Testament. Oh, yes, it does.

In the book of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, the apostle Paul talks about a day coming upon the earth when people have chosen to walk away from the Lord. And that would include, I believe that many who were even called by his name and walked in his house. And in chapter 2 verse 10, it says, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.

And for this cause, God shall send upon them strong delusion that they should believe a lie. God shall send upon them. A last, a New Testament last generation is going to have a flood of delusion come upon them for the simple reason that they refuse to embrace the truth.

It's not that they didn't learn. The apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, in the last days, there's going to be a people always learning. I feel he looked ahead in the Spirit and saw the numerous conventions throughout the western world.

They're always learning, but they're never coming to the knowledge of the truth. The knowledge means a deep, heartfelt embracing of the risen Christ. Where they lay aside their old garments, and lay aside their old ways, and lay aside their old will, and put off the old man, and put on the new man created after righteousness in Christ Jesus.

And come out of that place of wrestling, not like this elder that I talked about in this church that says, my will or no will, but they come out of this place of wrestling by saying, not my will, but thine be done, O God. Lord, take my life. Use my life.

They're not looking for prominence and preeminence throughout the world or in the church. They're looking for servanthood and the lowest place they can find in the house that Christ might be glorified through their lives. There's a difference in these people.

But this last generation, he says, that because they would not receive the love of the truth, God shall send upon them strong delusion. I firmly believe in my heart that we're living in an era of great and strong delusion upon North America. Brothers and sisters, you just have to open your eyes.

It doesn't make any sense what a lot of people are following now in this generation and professing that it's Christ. It's just like the people who sat in my office. It's just like the elder who thought he could destroy the church and get away with it.

They're sitting and following something. And I prayed often. I said, God, how can this be happening to your church? How can it be happening to your people in this generation? And I turned back again to the Word.

And he says, because they receive not the love of the truth. The embracing of Christ means the breaking of this human vessel. It means the absolute destruction of our own will.

It means the laying aside of things that we count dear to ourselves. It means taking on the very heart, the very nature of our risen Savior. It means the willingness to go, not be ashamed of His name, and speak His name to the pouring out of our literal physical lives, if necessary, that others around us may come to the saving knowledge of Christ.

It means an absolute selflessness, putting off of self, and putting on of the new nature in Christ. That nature that's willing to go, as we heard at three o'clock today, to the farthest reaches of this world, that those who are lost and sit in darkness may come to the saving knowledge of Christ. That's the pathway that leads to safety.

That's the pathway that leads to the heart of God. That's the pathway that you and I can walk on, and know that we are in the very center of the will of God. My brothers, my sisters, I implore you.

I plead with you in the name of Christ. When you open this book, let it examine your life. Don't ever get to the point where you know what it says, but choose to believe something else.

Don't ever get to that point where the judicial blindness of God comes upon your life, because you've just rejected the claim of Christ as a believer. There's a pathway of God in this and every other generation. David said it the best.

Psalms 27 verse 11, he says, Teach me thy way, O God, and lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies. That's my prayer all the time. God, lead me in a plain path, in a simple path.

I've prayed many times. God, I'm a stupid man. Lead me in a plain path.

Don't make me have to guess. Don't make me have to be spiritually spooky about it, God. Put it plainly before me that I can know that you would say, This is the way.

Walk in it. Walk in this way. John chapter 10 verse 3, Jesus says he's speaking about the door, and he says to him, or the shepherd of the sheep, he says to him, The porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

He leads them out. I want to hear him calling by name. I want to hear his voice.

I want to be led by the Spirit of God. I want the Word of God to be a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. And then I have an assurance that I'm going to walk through the midst of this crooked and perverse generation, shining as a light out in this darkness that's all around us.

He leads them out. The porter opens the door. The sheep hear his voice.

The porter opens the door. The sheep hear his voice. He calls them by name.

When's the last time you heard your name called? When's the last time God has been speaking to you out of the Word? Not for somebody else, not to get a message for some other people, but for yourself. He's been speaking about something that needs to change, some direction you need to go in. And he leads them out.

And the best place I can think of being led out of is out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ. You're a royal priesthood, the Scripture says, a holy, peculiar people called to show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. You can be sure, firstly, that you're on the path of the Lord if you're being led out of darkness continually, if you're putting off the deeds of the old man, if you're learning to love your enemies, if you're learning to walk in righteousness and truth, you're on the pathway of God.

This leading of the Lord is a pathway of humility. David said in Psalm 31, verse 3, For thou art my rock and my fortress, therefore for thy name's sake, lead me and guide me. For thy name's sake, O God.

Have you ever prayed that? I have prayed that. Lord God, for your name's sake, for your name's sake, don't let me ever bring disgrace to you, Lord God. I've prayed and I said, God, if I'm ever going to bring disgrace to your name, you know my heart, you know the pathway that's before me, then just take me home.

Just kill me, just take me home. That's all I ask. I don't ever want to bring disgrace to the name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It's a pathway of humility that acknowledges that God's ways are higher than our ways and that God is smarter than we are and God knows better for our lives than we know for our own lives. His ways are the ways of life. O God, you're my rock, you're my fortress for your name's sake, lead me and guide me.

It's a pathway of truth, the leading of the Lord. Psalm 43 verse 3 says, O send out thy light and thy truth and let them lead me. Let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy tabernacle.

O God, send out your truth. I pray that every time I stand to preach in this pulpit, I pray it every time somebody else stands to preach in this pulpit or any other place or any time maybe I listen to a tape of somebody that's respected in the kingdom of God. And I would say, Lord, send your light out in the truth and let them lead me.

Let them lead me closer to your heart. Let them lead me to a deeper consecration. Let them lead me out of myself, of the vestiges that are left in me that I don't see but you see them, O God.

Lead me out of these things and bring me to thy holy hill. Bring me to Calvary. Bring me to that place of surrender.

Bring me to that place of being poured out for you first, O Jesus, and secondly for my neighbor and those that are around me. Bring me to that holy place. The leading of the Lord takes us on a pathway of surrender.

David said in Psalm 61 verse 2, when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Hallelujah. Lead me to the rock. It's a path of surrender.

My ways are not your ways, O God. Did we just simply agree with the word of the Lord in Isaiah? My thoughts are not your thoughts. O God, lead me.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Take me to a place where I can see. Take me to a place, Lord, where I can understand the pathway that you've laid before my life. Deliver me from the brutality of the carnal heart.

Deliver me from the foolishness of following the lusts of my own heart and somehow thinking that it's your word that's leading me. The pathway of the Lord is a path of deep, deep searching. David said it the best in Psalm 139.

Search me, O God. We sing it all the time. Know my heart today.

Try me and see if there'll be any wicked way in me and lead me in the path of life everlasting. Search me, O God. Search me, O God.

Oh, brothers and sisters in Times Square Church, I beg you in the name of Jesus, don't ever lose that cry in your heart. Search me, O God. If that elder would have had enough sense to say, search me, in his prayer time from 4.30 to 8 o'clock every morning, if he would have had enough sense in one of those mornings to say, search me, O God.

God would have revealed to him that he was a stubborn man. God would have revealed to him that his ways were not the ways of the Lord. God would have revealed to him that he was in rebellion to the established authority in that church.

God would have revealed to him that he was on a path of destruction. God would have brought him to a place of brokenness and humility if he would have just had the sense to cry out and truly mean it, search me, O God. Search me, Lord.

Search me. We can come up with ideas in the carnal nature, brothers and sisters, and we can decorate them with spiritual robes and put bow ties on them and make them look so nice. We can cover them with a Christmas wreath and present it to God as if it's birthed out of his own heart and it's out of our heart.

And we spend all our time trying to pray our will into existence. Search me, O God. Paul says in Romans 2.4, do you not know that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? That's where the Lord leads his people to, a place of continual repentance before him, a place of continual humbling, a place of continual, like the elders in heaven, casting our crowns before his feet and bowing down before him and saying, God, God, God, form your nature in me.

Jesus, don't let me walk in a way that's going to blind me or blind others around me. It's a continual pathway of repentance, the pathway of God. It's also, this leading of the Lord takes us on a path of protection.

Go to Matthew chapter 6, please. I want to show you one last thing before we close. Matthew chapter 6. Jesus is teaching the people how to pray that famous prayer that we pray so often in the house of the Lord.

In Matthew chapter 6, in verse 9, he says, After this manner therefore pray ye, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth. You can add in there, in me

as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Verse 13, Look at it carefully and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

And lead us not into temptation. Remember the children of Egypt being led into a place where they were going to be overwhelmed by what was a wall of deliverance to the children of God. Lead us not into temptation.

Henderson's pulpit commentary says it this way, the word lead can be better translated or translated other ways. It can be translated to be the word carry. Carry us not into temptation or put us not or place us not or bring us not.

Robertson commentary says it would be better translated by saying, Do not allow us to be led into temptation. Now the apostle James says it this way, Let no man say when he's tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil and neither tempts he any man. So God is not the one who does the tempting, but every man is tempted when he's drawn away of his own lust and enticed.

So the context to this verse, Jesus is saying to pray this prayer is just God, don't remove your restraining hand of protection from off of my life. Remember when we started in Psalm 125 it talked about the Lord and camps around about those that fear him like the mountains round about Jerusalem. But as for such that turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with other workers of iniquity.

And so the context is simply this, God, don't take your restraining hand off of my life. Lord, don't let me get to the place where you just simply release me to follow the lusts of my own heart. You release me to go to a place where I will fall into temptation and be virtually overwhelmed by my enemies, but deliver us from evil.

The New Testament in modern speech says, but rescue us from the evil one. Do not allow us to be led into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. That's got to be the cry in the heart of every child of God.

Oh God, don't let stubbornness so get a hold of my heart that you're forced to take your hand. Don't let me wrongly interpret your claim upon my life that I get to a place where you lift your restraining hand off of my life. And the next thing that happens is the natural lusts of the carnal nature just simply take over and I am led by my own lust into a place where I will drown, where I will fall away from the goodness of God.

Now, Psalm 23 talks about the path of the Lord as being a path of refreshing in life. And that's exactly what it is. Morning by morning we sing, at new mercies I see.

A path of refreshing, a path of life. Psalm 23 verse 2 says, He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.

Hallelujah. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His namesake.

Hallelujah. Oh God. Oh, hallelujah.

Hallelujah. One last scripture, Revelation chapter 7. Do you love His word? Verse 16. This is where the leading of the Lord is going to take those who love Him too.

Verse 16 and 17. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them and shall what? Lead them unto living fountains of waters.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Would you stand with me, please? Brothers and sisters, I don't fear too much today anymore. But the one thing that I would fear above all else is that mysterious blindness.

That comes on a rebellious heart. I've seen it time and again as a pastor. I've seen it again.

I've seen it since I've been here in New York City. A mysterious inner blindness coming upon those who set their judgment above the word of God. Being led, they'll tell you that we're led by God.

God's leading us and they're right. God is. The thing that they don't understand is that the restraining hand of the Lord has been taken off of their lives.

They've been released to follow the lust of their own heart. And what should have been light now turns to darkness. And Jesus said, if the light that's in you be darkness, how great is that darkness? In other words, when you've known the truth and you've turned from it, all the scripture that you've memorized, all the time you spent in church, everything that you've ever heard now makes the darkness within greater than any darkness that you ever even knew before you got saved.

How great is that darkness? The only way out of that kind of darkness is a repentance to say, God, keep my feet on the righteous path. For your name's sake, Lord, God, lead me and guide me. Don't ever let me set my judgment above your word.

Give me the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord will keep you, my brother and my sister. It will keep you.

The fear of the Lord. There are many people in the house of God that fear police officers on the street more than they fear the Lord. Simply because they are out there and they are empowered if we step out of line to bring into force certain laws that govern the country or govern the city, whatever the case is.

And yet we somehow feel that we can do anything we want and that there's no judicial part to the word of God. And when people have that kind of a careless attitude, that's when this mysterious blindness begins to overtake them. They begin to walk in their own way.

They develop their own theology. They start their own thing and somehow feel that God is leading them. The sad reality is that eventually they're right.

God has released them and they're now following the lusts of their own heart. My altar call tonight is very simple. This is the conclusion of the tape.

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