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“The LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Exodus 14, 15).

Following God

Central Truth: Follow the Lord always.

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A beautiful Christian hymn expresses this resolve: “I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, no turning back.” What a worthy resolve!

Following God's leading is not quite as simple as it appears. It calls for an abandonment of self-will and surrender to the divine will. It demands humility and persistence. It is not easy, even though it is rewarding beyond estimation.

Look at Moses' experience in following God as He led Israel from Egyptian bondage. He faced six challenges which you might face in following Jesus today. (1) God may seem to lead the wrong way. (2) God may lead you through places of danger. (3) God may lead you into situations where you are helpless. (4) God may lead you where it seems impossible for you to follow. (5) God will lead you to victory. (6) God will lead you in the practical affairs of daily life. The comments which follow will develop those six challenges that you might be encouraged to follow Jesus with the resolve, “no turning back, no turning back.”

Follow God When It Seems the Wrong Way to Go (Exodus 13:17—14:4)

Moses' mission was to lead Israel from Egypt into Palestine. Take a map and look at the direction of travel. Palestine lies to the northeast of Egypt. The shortest route would go eastward into Gaza and then northward into the heart of Palestine. Anyone would expect God to lead Israel in that

direction. But He led Israel to the southeast instead.

Did Moses make a mistake in the direction of travel? No. God went before in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21, 22). God was leading them in the “wrong” direction! The northeast route would have kept them from being hemmed in by the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. The northeast route would have kept them from a long journey through the desert. The northeast route was the “reasonable” way to go. But it was not God's way.

God has a purpose in all that He does. Hear this word: *“It came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt”* (Exodus 13:17). Follow Him even when you do not understand His direction.

Follow God When It Involves Personal Danger (Exodus 14:5-12)

God does not promise that the way of His leading will always be easy. Neither does He promise that it will always be free from danger. He does promise that He will be with you every step of the way. It is safe to follow Him who is Captain of the Lord's host (Joshua 5:15) wherever He may lead.

God led Israel in the pillar of cloud and fire. (1) He led them through a dangerous landscape, a terrible desert. How would they find food and water for three million people and their livestock? How could they cross the Red Sea?

(2) God led them south on the wrong side of the Red Sea — the west side when they needed to be on the east side. Sooner or later they would have to cross. But the sea was becoming wider and deeper the farther south they went. Look at their older people, their infants and children, as well as their flocks and herds. God's leading was getting them into trouble!

(3) God led them where they were susceptible to an attack by the Egyptian army. And it happened as they feared. Pharaoh heard of their route and thought they had lost their way. He followed them with his army, thinking he could drive them back into Egypt. The Hebrews cried in dismay when they saw Pharaoh's war chariots and knew they were hemmed up against the sea. They cried out to the Lord, but the sea was still there and the army was still there. They were certain that they would be killed.

Do not cease to follow God when you feel He is going in the wrong direction or when He has brought you into danger. Just remember that He has a purpose in all He does, whether you understand or not. Keep on

trusting and keep on following Him.

Follow God When It leaves You in Helpless Situations. (Exodus 14:13, 14)

It is not unusual for God to bring His children into situations beyond their ability to control. He takes control and shows His power in those situations. Keep on trusting Him. If others about you are fearful, call them to look to the Lord for help. God will not lead you into a place from which He cannot deliver you. You will see His glory the clearest in your helplessness.

Israel was helpless at that point. The Red Sea was before her and she could not cross it. The war chariots of Pharaoh were behind her and she could not fight them. The deserts were around her, and she could not flee there to safety. The condition was hopeless in terms of human resources.

Man's emergency is God's opportunity. Do you believe that? If so, why do you become fearful in dangerous times? Paul's thorn in the flesh, which he thought was a hindrance to his ministry, was the occasion for God's strength to be manifest (II Corinthians 12:7-10). His desertion by fellow Christians when he stood before Caesar was the occasion for God's presence and deliverance to be experienced in a special way (II Timothy 4:9-18). And you will find it so in your emergencies. God never deserted His children in their troubles. He was with Daniel in the lions' den and with the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30; 6:1-28). He was with Israel when she stood between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. In fact, the pillar of cloud and fire moved between the Hebrews and the Egyptians and kept the camps separated all through the night.

It is when you have no one but God that you discover you need no one but Him. Keep on following Him in those situations when you are helpless.

Follow God When It Seems Impossible (Exodus 14,15-18, 21-29)

In response to their prayers, God said to Moses, *“Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward”* (Exodus 14:15). Go forward? The Red Sea lay before them. To go forward was to march into the waters of the sea. The leading of God was impossible to follow, wasn't it? If He commands it, do it. He never sends where He does not go. Where He goes, you should follow, whether it seems impossible or not.

God often leads into impossible situations. It was impossible for Joshua to conquer Jericho (Joshua 3). It was impossible for Gideon to win a battle

over a much superior military force, particularly since he had only three hundred men (Judges 6). God's people follow Him, knowing that though the situation is impossible to them it is not impossible to Him.

God enables His people to go in impossible ways. He sent king Jehoshaphat into battle against greatly superior numbers with the promise, *“Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD. . . . the LORD will be with you”* (II Chronicles 20:17). Over and over He says to His people in their troubles, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (II Corinthians 12:9). He specializes in doing “impossible” things. The psalmist said that God *“alone doeth wonders”* (Psalm 139:4). And He still does!

Follow God for He leads You to Victory (Exodus 14:30, 31)

Moses lifted up his shepherd's staff (which was now called the rod of God) over the Red Sea. The Lord sent a strong east wind all that night. Gradually the waters receded. A path opened through all the way across the waters of the sea! A wall of water stood on each side of that path, and the exposed ground was dry. The people hastened down into the sea, between the walls of water, and crossed to the other side. God had provided deliverance for them, praise His name!

But the danger was still there. If Israel could cross in that path through the sea, so could the Egyptians. And sure enough, here came Pharaoh's chariots down into the sea. But the Lord released the water upon them. The invincible army of Egypt was destroyed. The Hebrews were free on the east side of the sea.

Now it becomes clear why God led them in that direction. The land of Palestine was under Egyptian control. Israel could not have possessed the land without having to fight the Egyptian army. God broke Egypt's military power at the Red Sea so that Israel could go in and possess her possessions. He had a purpose which the Hebrews did not know. Had they known in advance, they would not have been so fearful. God does not give us full information on His work. He calls us to trust Him and follow Him, whether we understand His leading or not. Do you have enough confidence in Him that you will follow with assurance that His way will lead to victory and joy for you? The safest place in the world for you is in the will of God.

Follow God in the Practical Affairs of Your Daily Life

Following God might lead you through severe trials. You may face broken health, financial crises, family problems, or scores of other troubles. But it is in those situations that your faith shows the best and His power is exhibited the greatest.

You can prepare in advance to follow when you do not understand God's leading, when He seems to lead in the wrong direction, or when you face seemingly impossible challenges. Affirm your relationship with God as His redeemed child. Cultivate your faith in Him by reading and meditating on Holy Scriptures. Resolve to be faithful to Him whatever it may seem to cost. Then when the testings come, stand firm. You will be standing when the battle has ended in victory.

You will greatly bless those you love as you faithfully follow God's leading. You will set an example for them to follow in their times of personal trials. Let them see how a Christian faces difficulties. Let them see in you what faithfulness really means. You will leave a legacy far beyond material wealth.

Younger adults may have a problem following God because of a lack of experience or of example. Older adults may have a problem, having been disillusioned when following God was not what they expected. Even so, let each one start anew, following God.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why should you resolve to follow Jesus, not turning back?
2. How can you know when you are truly following God?
3. How might God's leading seem the "wrong way" today?
4. Into what "helpless situations" might God lead you?
5. How can you follow God when He seems to demand the impossible?
6. How can you be sure following God will bring victory?
7. How will following God benefit you personally?
8. How will following God benefit those you love?
9. How can you follow God more perfectly than ever before, starting today?