

Learning to follow God

By Pastor Eric

This pandemic has been challenging for all of us. Children had to deal with transitioning to online learning, and then back to in-person learning. Parents had to deal with managing work, household duties, and looking after kids who couldn't go to school. People in various professions had to adapt to the ever-changing landscape. From lockdown to slight reopening, back to lockdown and then back to partial reopening, then back to lockdown, and then back to— well, you get the idea. It's been challenging for all of us. And on top of all that is the ominous threat: will my family get the virus? Will I get it? How about my friends?

Life has been uncertain. And if we read the Bible and are students of life, one of the things which we'll learn is that one of the certainties of life is that life is uncertain. We all want life to have a certainty to it. We want it to have a predictable rhythm. We want to be able to predict our next career, our next family member, our next move, and even predict the stock market. Because we want to be in control of our lives. We want to know what's going to happen next. When we don't know what'll happen next, we don't have a sense of control. And control is something we want over our lives. But life is unpredictable. It is uncontrollable. It is uncertain.

However, there is one absolute certainty in your life, and that is God Himself. He does not change. The way He deals with you and the world does not change. Who He is can be found in the Bible, the Word of God. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). He is in control, He loves you, and His plans will come to pass. Life can be uncertain, but you need to put your trust in the God who is certainly in control of your life.

In the book of Exodus, as the Israelites were coming out of slavery in Egypt, God's presence guided them. God's presence was represented by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Exodus 13:21-22 says:

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

God went before them, guided them, led them, and even protected them from the Egyptian army:

and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. – Exodus 14:19-20

God's presence would guide them and lead them every single day. And Israel would look to God — only moving when they saw that God was moving. And if God didn't move, Israel didn't move either:

Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till

Arcadia Chinese Baptist Church

the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. – Exodus 40:36-38

And God would continue to go with them, even in their years of wandering in the desert.

Well, what does all that have to do with us in the pandemic? During the uncertainty, first you need to remember that God's presence is with you. As Christians, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. God is literally with you. He is with you. One of the most reassuring phrases that God gives to man in the Bible is: "I am with you." God is with you.

Secondly, remember to wait upon God. As the Israelites didn't move unless God moved, so also learn to wait upon God and don't move until He moves. How do you know when God moves? Get the basics right: reading your Bible, praying, listening to sermons, reading Christian literature, being part of a Christian fellowship, getting advice from wise Christians. As you make all this a part of your lifestyle, you will naturally learn to listen to God. You will naturally learn when He's on the move in your life, and you'll move when He moves. Which brings us to the last point:

And this is a point which the Israelites did not do very well: learn to obey God. Don't just learn to observe when God's moving. Learn to obey Him. Learn to obey His Will and His timing. Sometimes we get impatient, and we jump ahead of God. It could be getting into a relationship that's not pleasing to Him. Or it can be even cheating on an exam or taking shortcuts on a legal matter. Don't do it. Lean to wait upon God for His timing and obey Him. Remember: His timing is the best. He's the One in control.

Just as the Israelites were to follow the leading of God (symbolized by the pillar of fire and smoke) in the desert, so you too need to learn to follow God's leading through the uncertainties of life. You can't go wrong when you follow God. So learn to follow God!