

Our Guiding Hero

Study 1 - The need for a guide



Cedric Robinson is the Queen’s Guide to the Sands, the royally-appointed guide to crossing the sands of Morecombe Bay, an ancient, unpredictable and treacherous tidal crossing in northwest England.

There has been a guide here since 1548 when these sands were a major transport route in the area. Prior to this date, monks from a nearby abbey at Cartmel Priory would accompany travellers and traders safely to their destination. Many in the past, and more recently, have died walking or working on these sands.

Cedric knows the sands and tides well, having been the guide since 1963, these days taking tourists across the ancient route. Some areas

can be up to a mile across, others only as wide as the path he has previously marked with laurel branches (which will stay as markers for a few days before being washed away by the rising tides).

The point is that we can trust Cedric because he knows the way, understands its dangers and has already walked the path so that we can follow in safety.



Is there a useful piece of advice given to you as a young person that you still remember?

Losing Sheep

Read Jeremiah 50:6, Psalm 119:175-176, Nehemiah 9:19-20

“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam...” - Jeremiah 50:6a

The image of shepherd and sheep in the Bible would have been a very familiar one to the people of Jeremiah’s day, as sheep were all around them. The sheep depended on the shepherd for their safety and sustenance, and the shepherd’s role was a very responsible one.

Psalm 23 talks about being led by the shepherd to still waters and guided onto the right paths. Without the shepherd, the sheep stray, become lost and often prey to wild animals and robbers.

Nehemiah was speaking into the period of exile when the people often forgot their God and made idols, went their own and drifted from the path prepared for them.

God could have abandoned them as a hopeless case but did not, and with mercy and compassion led them from the front, with pillars of fire and cloud, visual reminders to themselves and any they might meet of whose people they were, and the God they served.

SAMPLE



How easy is it to feel lost in contemporary culture, and in what ways?



Thinking of world leaders today, how well do they 'shepherd their flock'?

God is working his purpose out

Read Jeremiah 29:10-11, Acts 2:23

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” - Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah had a 40-year career as a prophet, reflected in the 52 chapters handed down to us! It is not the most cheerful book in the Old Testament, bringing as it does plenty of bad news in the days leading up to the exile of Judah to Babylon in the sixth century BC.

Jeremiah’s prophesy lays bare the rebelliousness of God’s people, which is to lead them into exile from the Promised Land. It is almost as if God’s promises are unravelling, and yet the

message is that alongside justice is mercy, and God will not abandon his people, because there are plans for their future that will be realised.

Yes, there will be exile, it will last 70 years, but within the apparent death of exile seeds of new life and hope will be sown. When the people turn to prayer they will be heard. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)



How might ‘our plans’ sometimes take precedence over ‘God’s purposes’ and what can we do to prevent this happening?



How can we understand exile as being a part of God’s purpose for his people?

“You may think the president is all-powerful, but he is not. He needs a lot of guidance from the Lord.” (Barbara Bush)

“At death, you’re going to be needing some spiritual guidance and some kind of inner knowledge that extends beyond the boundaries of the physical world... it’s what’s inside that counts.” (George Harrison)

“No man need go blindly to destruction, for God has given him guidance and power of seeing whither he goes.” (Sabine Baring-Gould)



Gods bigger picture

Read James 4:13-15, Acts 18:19-21

“When they asked him to spend more time with them, (Paul) declined. But as he left, he promised, ‘I will come back if it is God’s will.’ Then he set sail from Ephesus.” - Acts 18:20,21

In allowing free will, God makes it plain that there is no micro-management of believers’ lives, but many Christians will acknowledge that it seems to be God’s will for them to be where they are, either for their benefit or that of the community that has welcomed them.

In Acts 18 Paul is in Corinth where he meets and joins the tent-making business of Aquila and Priscilla (who themselves had only just arrived from Italy). With a base to operate from, Paul spends a year and a half teaching in and around the synagogue, bringing many to faith and baptism and upsetting some as well.

Then Paul leaves Corinth, and with Aquila and Priscilla sets sail to Ephesus, capital of the Roman province of Asia. Leaving the other two there, Paul then travels around the area ‘strengthening all the disciples’. His two friends set up their business in this new city and host a house church (1 Cor 16:19), sometime later returning to Rome (Rom 16:3).

It’s a story of Christians being brought together to expand God’s work. It’s a busy time, and although Paul is sure in his own mind that God doesn’t want him rooted to one place, he promises to be back if that is God’s will.



What experience have you of God using ministers or evangelists to build up the local church before handing the work on to others and moving on?



And what of God bringing individuals or families into the church who just seem to be the right people for that time?



Remembering Jonah, who ran away when asked to go to Nineveh, have you ever felt a call to go somewhere or take up a role within your local church or community?



On using a compass

“A rusty nail placed near a faithful compass, will sway it from the truth, and wreck the argosy.”
(Walter Scott)

“He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast.”
(Leonardo da Vinci)

SAMPLE

Avoiding bad advice

Read Jeremiah 23:1-2, 23:25-27, Luke 11:52, Jude 17-19

“I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’” - Jeremiah 23:25

Jeremiah didn't hold back when talking about those who should have had the best interests of the people at heart, but instead were allowing them to scatter and wander without protection - these so-called shepherds of God's flock.

It was those in authority, the kings, civil heads, priests and prophets to whom the words of Jeremiah were directed toward, those not only guilty of dereliction of duty but working actively to lead the people away from God and into idolatry, to “make my people forget my name” (v.27).

Some of these false prophets would declare, “I had a dream!”, and dreams can be a means of divine revelation, but also of fantasy, as many who are able to recall their own night-time dreams might well agree.

Luke 11:52 talks about the so-called experts in the law who instead of opening the Scriptures to people were too engrossed in the trivial requirements of the law and had ‘lost the plot’. People were confused and being hindered in their desire to enter the kingdom of God.



Martin Luther King declared ‘I have a dream!’ and was certainly not peddling falsehoods. Nelson Mandela said, ‘I dream of an Africa which is in peace with itself’, which was a wonderful aspiration. But how easy is it to be caught up in crusades and causes that have less to do with the common good of all and more to do with the personal ambitions of a charismatic leader?



How do we recognise a poor guide?



What advice would you give to a young person growing up in today's world?

Takeaway

Pray for children you know, that they might find hope for their future in the journey through life.