

Ignite Your Faith!
Part 5: The Pillar of Fire
Exodus 13:21-22

The title of this sermon series, "Ignite Your Faith!" is based upon incidences in the Old Testament when God used fire to make a profound impact upon the faith of His followers. A burning bush, a fiery furnace, fire coming down from heaven etc. But is fire only an Old Testament analogy? Not at all!

Jesus said, Luke 12:49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

So, Jesus also used fire as an analogy in his teaching. In this sermon series, we are just trying to "fire you up" for the Lord! We are just trying to "stoke up your passion for Jesus!" We're trying to "Ignite Your Faith!"

The Lord used fire in the Bible and we believe there are lessons to be learned as we examine some of those situations

Once, God actually used a pillar of fire to provide direction for His followers.

Exodus 13:21-22

21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Exodus 40:36-38

36 In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out;

37 but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out-- until the day it lifted.

38 So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

God used fire, a pillar of fire, to lead the nation of Israel out of bondage from Egypt. But in order for God to lead them, the people had to be willing to follow.

Introduction: God leads those who are willing to follow.

In all honesty, part of the problem is that we aren't sure we are willing to have God lead. While sitting in church or while sharing answers at a midweek Bible study, we might SAY we want God to lead. But deep down, we may not be too sure about that.

What if God leads somewhere that you don't want to follow?

-What if God were to lead you into full time ministry?

-What if God were to lead you into some kind of mission work?

And if He did that, what if He were to lead you to work in some foreign country that you simply would NOT want to live in?

Sometimes we want to put restrictions on God's leading.

Somewhat of a conditional submission. But then, that's not really following. Is it?

But maybe God's leading wouldn't be that extreme.

Still, there may be little ways in which God would lead you that you aren't willing to follow:

-What if God were to lead you to simply love someone that you don't even like very much?

-What if God were to lead you to forgive someone who has wronged you, and who you don't feel

deserves your forgiveness?

-What if God were to lead you to give up some habit or activity or relationship that isn't good for you?

Far too many Christians have these fears about what God might lead them to do, and so there is some hesitation. There is, in fact, much too often a lack of willingness to be led by God.

Yes God leads. But not everyone is willing to follow
God leads those who ARE WILLING to follow. And that's a choice.

Following God is always a choice.

God will lead if you are willing to follow, but you must choose to follow.
Sometimes Christians ask, "What is God's will for my life?"
But that doesn't really matter if you aren't willing to follow!
Ultimately, you have a choice.

Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

There's a choice there, isn't there? The consequences follow, but it begins with a choice.

Revelation 22:17 "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

Notice the phrase, "...whoever wishes...." There's a choice there, isn't there?

Following God begins with a choice, it begins with a willingness to follow!
And as far as Jesus is concerned, it's an all or nothing choice.
Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Revelation 3:15-16

15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!
16 So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

For Jesus, you can't just kinda-sorta follow Him. You either do or you don't. It's all or nothing.
You have a choice. But rest assured, God does lead those who are willing to follow.

So, let's say that you've thought about it. And deep down inside, that is indeed what you want! You want to be hot, you want to be on fire for the Lord!

You want to ignite your faith. You DO want to follow Jesus.
The next obvious question is, "How?"
You are willing to follow, He will lead. Now what?
Well, you just start looking for that pillar of fire! Right?!
After all, that's how He did it in the book of Exodus. So, just find a pillar of fire and you're all set.

You know what? Come think of it, I haven't seen a pillar of fire lately, have you?
I talk to missionaries regularly and I've never heard of them being led by a pillar of fire.
I've read about Mother Teresa and about Billy Graham and Jim Elliot and other great servants of the Lord, I know of no instance where they referred to a pillar of fire leading them in their service to the Lord.

We know that God led the nation of Israel with a pillar of fire during the Exodus, but is that an isolated case? Generally speaking, does God really lead people?

Yes indeed! Look at what the Psalmist wrote:
Psalm 23:1-2

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

But that's Old Testament, what about the New Testament?

2 Corinthians 2:14, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ."

Look at what Jesus Himself said in the Gospel of John:

John 10:2-3, 11

- 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.
- 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
- 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd, Jesus, leads His sheep!

If you seek the Lord's leading, if you ask for His leading, He is not going to disappoint you!

Look at his promise in Matthew chapter 7:

Matthew 7:7-8

- 7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
- 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

God still leads those who are willing to follow! But, how does He do it today?

Let me share with you four basic ways that God leads today:

1. God leads through prayer.

Mother Teresa taught that prayers that are answered are prayers that are not focused on what WE want, but are focused on what GOD wants!

You see, if our prayers are focused on what WE want, then it is WE who are doing the leading. God focused prayers allow God to lead.

After all, in the Lord's prayer, Jesus prayed,
"THY Kingdom come, THY will be done." Matthew 6:10

Unfortunately, much too often, our prayers focus entirely on our will, with no regard for the Lord's will.

Self-centered, self serving, self focused prays don't allow God to lead.

James 4:3 "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

More often than not, your prayers aren't being answered because YOU are trying to lead, rather than allowing God to lead.

If you truly want to experience God's leading in your life, it begins with prayer. But it must be prayer which is seeking His will. You must seek His leading. If you do so, he'll take care of the other concerns in your life.

That's why Jesus said,

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Or, as Mother Teresa explains, we must shift our prayers from what we want to what God wants. God leads through prayer.

2. God leads through scripture.

If you want to know God's leading, God has given you a whole life's worth of leading in the Bible.

How often do you search the scriptures for God's leading in some of the critical decisions you face? The Bible will give you guidance on just about every issue that will come up in your lifetime:

-parenting -marriage

-work ethic -finances

-morality -justice

-interpersonal relationships -fashion (what you should wear and what you shouldn't wear)

-social orderthe list goes on and on

It's all covered in the Bible.

One of the great frustrations Jesus had was that people wouldn't follow his teaching.
Luke 6:46 Jesus said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

If He is Lord of your life, then you allow Him to lead you. You seek and follow His teachings. Sadly, less than 10% of professing Christians every read the entire Bible.

The teachings are there, the leading is there. All we have to do is obey the instructions!
It's amazing how many problems can be avoided if we would follow some of the simple, basic teachings of the Lord found in the holy Scriptures.

Problems in your personal life, problems in your marriage, problems in your family....many if not all of these problems could have been avoided if you had dedicated yourself to following the Bible.

By the way, I think the same thing is true of our nation. I'm convinced that most of the problems we are facing in America today could have been avoided if we would have followed the teachings of the Bible.

Matthew 7:24-27

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

1. God leads through prayer.
2. God leads through the Bible.
3. God leads through the Holy Spirit.

Too many Christians forget that EVERY Christian has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. You are PROMISED the gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit if you are a Christian.

Acts 2:38-39

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Notice the second word in verse 39: promise! What has been promised? If you repent and are baptized you will have your sins forgiven AND you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

He's not far, far away, He lives right inside you.
It's like the guy who visited a church in San Francisco and asked a local pastor if he could call heaven from his church. The pastor said, "Sure. It costs \$10,000." The man thought that was way too much money. So, he got in his car and drove to Sacramento. Asked a pastor there about calling heaven and again was told it was \$10,000. He got in his car and drove to Los Angeles, asked a pastor there about calling heaven and again was told it was \$10,000. He drove over here to Fountain Hills and stopped at our church and asked me if he could call heaven from our church. I talk him absolutely. He asked what it would cost and I said it was a toll free call. He was surprised and asked why it was so \$10,000 in California but was free in here. I said, "Sir, you are in Fountain Hills. Here, Heaven is a local call."

If you are a Christian, it's a local call no matter where you are, because you have the Lord's local presence inside of you through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Once you have received this gift of the Holy Spirit, if you will yield to that Spirit, He will become God's guiding influence in your life.

John 16:13 "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

John 14:26 "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

If we consistently seek God's leading we can rest assured that God will indeed use the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to lead us in the way we should go.

4. God leads through the counsel of Godly friends.

Now notice that I didn't just say friends, I said Godly friends.
It is very critical that you be very careful who you are receiving your advice from.

It is very critical that you be very careful as to who you allow to influence your life.

1 Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"

Unfortunately, I see this many, many times in counseling. So many individuals or couples have gotten themselves in trouble because of poor influences in their life.
They are simply running with the wrong crowd.

It's like that old saying, "You can't soar with the eagles if you are running with the turkeys."

The Bible, of course, says it much more eloquently:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Two are better than one. Wise is the person who seeks the counsel of Godly friends.
That's just one of the many benefits of being involved in our HomeTeams.

Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

God will lead if you are willing to follow.

Through prayer, through Bible study, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, through the fellowship of Godly people.....God leads!

Are you following the Lord?