

**Introduction:**

- A. We've had difficulty with some GPS systems locating our church in the wrong place. People coming the first time have ended up about two miles north of here in the Costco parking lot. Some people aren't that good at giving directions either. Like when we were still figuring out how to get around in the hills and river valleys of western Pennsylvania. Someone giving us directions said, "*You know where the Dairy Queen used to be? Turn just before you get there.*" Sometimes it seems God himself is not that great at giving directions. Sometimes his leading in our lives can be really confusing.
- B. The first 13 chapters of Exodus have told us how God *saved* Israel from Egyptian bondage. The next several chapters tell how God *led* Israel on their way toward the land he had promised them centuries before. At the very beginning of this section there are a few verses that set out **three basics of God's leading, then and now.**
- C. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ you can rest assured that God is leading you through life. Whether or not you sense it, whether or not you know where you're going, whether you're a strong believer or a weak one, this is certain: God is leading you. **Knowing these basics will help you follow him more confidently.**

**Ex. 13:17-18...** Now wait a minute. God had just single-handedly devastated the mightiest enemy Israel would ever face so what's the problem facing battles? Once God saves us, he wants us to trust him. That's the foundation of our love for him. So once we're saved, God's whole focus in this life is our faith.

**I. THE LORD REROUTES OUR LIVES FOR OUR FAITH'S SAKE (13:17-18)**

- A. God's salvation can incline us to spiritual overconfidence. Do you see that last line of **v.18**, "*The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle*"? Some scholars suggest a

better translation would be, “*in formation*,” or “*by their divisions*.” But whether or not Israel was “*ready for battle*,” I’ve got to think they looked out across their thousands, grouped by tribes and clans, a free nation walking unhindered past the grieving and godforsaken Egyptians, and they felt pretty invincible. They must have seen themselves “*like a marching army*,” [NLT] even though they’d never wielded weapons nor gone through basic training. Illus.: You’ve heard stories of how at the beginning of a war, militias form on town squares, full of bravado and patriotism, insulting unseen enemies and boasting that they’ll be home before the bad guys know what hit them. But then in some dark and thundering battlefield, they find that war demands more of them than they ever imagined. Christians can be just like that. We come home from camp or a conference, our faith flying high, and are oblivious to just how fickle our faith can be.

- B. In **v.17** God said, “*If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.*” Not “*if they face war they might be wiped out.*” When we follow God’s leading the danger is not the threat of the enemy but the failure of our faith. The danger is that we’ll give up on God and go back to our old ways of life—the old master and slavery.
- C. If you have a really good GPS it’ll reroute you *around* construction zones so you can get where you’re going faster. God does it just the opposite. God always reroutes our lives straight into faith’s construction zones. We read here how God rerouted Israel away from Philistines and toward the Red Sea. Knowing this story as we do, we know that’s like going from the frying pan into the fire because soon Israel is going to be trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea! Plus, we know that *beyond* the Red Sea Israel faced the privations and tests of the wilderness. **By leading Israel away from premature battles God didn’t lead them away from trouble.** Same for us. God will

protect us from battles we cannot handle but he won't give us a pass on faith's difficult tests.

- D. God's abiding concern in all the places he leads us and all the times he makes us wait is our faith. **James 1:2-5** says, *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."*
- E. Peter wrote his first letter to suffering Christians. He acknowledged that they were *"suffering grief in all kinds of trials."* But then he said, *"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."* <sup>1 Pet 1:6</sup>

As believers we often sense how weak our faith is. We see our frantic worry or our murky confusion or our feeble grasp on God's promises and we feel like failures. But the fact is, you did *not* turn your back on God. You had faith enough *not* go back to Egypt—to your old masters. You may not have been a hero, but when you lost your job you did *not* lose your faith. When your dearly beloved died you did *not* walk away from Jesus; in fact, you ran *to* him. When depression or despair turned life very dark indeed you did *not* become an atheist or a pagan. When sin had a hold on you, you ultimately did *not* go back to that old life. And that is because, as the Bible promises in **Phil. 1:6**, *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

**The Lord reroutes our lives for our faith's sake. And he will not take you into anything he has not prepared you to face.**

The next verse seems kind of curious, like looking at a mummy in a museum: **v.19**.... Joseph, you'll remember was the son of Jacob, whom God had renamed Israel. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, and there, by the extraordinary intervention of God, he rose to become the very savior of that nation by giving the Pharaoh of that time a God-designed plan to prepare for a deadly famine. The last verses of Genesis record his last words:

**Gen 50:24-26...**

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.*

So many generations later, that is what they're doing here in **Ex. 13**. And eventually, when Israel entered the Promised Land, **Josh. 24:32** says, *"And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor...."*

So why is that important? Was it so old Joseph could finally rest in peace? No, Joseph was resting in peace just fine *"in the house of the Lord forever."* Joseph intended his bones to be a kind of homing device planted deep in the hearts of the Israelites. I think that in the lore of the Israelites, living for all those years in Egypt, this story—this vow—was passed on to them all. God has planted within us as Christians the same kind of homing device.

**II. THE LORD LEADS US BY GIVING US A HOMING INSTINCT INSTILLED BY THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US (13:19)**

- A. Illus.: Friday some of us attended the funeral for Garry Sittler's dad, Willard, who was 89 years old. He'd seen buddies killed in WWII. He was a gifted musician and a

beloved teacher. He loved Jesus. We sang the first song he'd ever learned to play, "Nearer My God to Thee." And we heard the words to a song he'd been thinking a lot about recently, "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be." When we hear stories like that it is akin to Israel carrying Joseph's bones.

- B. When Joseph died he was not a slave in Egypt. He was the second highest man in the country, wealthy and highly esteemed. But Joseph never forgot where his home was and he didn't want his people, Israel, to ever forget either. When God leads us out of our old lives he wants us to always carry with us our heritage of hope. I have visited with a lot of Christians as they neared death, and many more who grieved those deaths, and I cannot remember ever one who did not speak with confidence of heaven. Christians everywhere are pointed homeward with stories of believers who wanted nothing more than to get home.

Illus.: I read about a Ugandan Christian, **Henry**, who was on a bus that was attacked by guerrillas. Half his face was blown away. A Christian organization got him to Montreal where he had many operations. David Watson, an Anglican clergyman, tells of his visit with him. He could not help flinching when he saw the mask that was once a face. But Henry's eyes still sparkled. He was unable to speak, but he wrote on paper for David, "*God never promises us an easy time. Just a safe arrival.*" **Stories like that always orient us toward our true home.**

- C. This story of Joseph's bones is mentioned again in **Heb. 11**, the great chapter on persevering faith. It begins, "*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.*" And among those ancients is Joseph. **V.22** says, "*By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.*" And what

do stories like this mean to us. **Heb 12:1-2** tells us, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”*

Joseph, long gone, told Israel to persevere in their faith. The main reason believers talk about heaven is not comfort but perseverance. Those stories become within us a spiritual homing instinct urging us forward when we might be otherwise inclined to turn back to our old lives.

The third and most important basic of God’s leading is described in **vv.20-22**... Moses had met God at the burning bush and now all Israel had evidence right before their eyes, day and night, of God’s fiery and holy presence. Why did God do this? Because...

### **III. WHEN THE LORD LEADS US HE WILL NEVER LEAVE US ALONE (13:20-22)**

Israel wasn’t used to following God. They’d never done it before. When hadn’t either when Jesus saved us. God made it vividly clear to Israel that he was leading them. You and I aren’t likely to see God out ahead of us cloaked in a pillar of fire or could but these things remain true today for us.

- A. God wants us to know that he is spectacularly present and powerful. This towering pillar, changing form from night to day, was a visible display of God’s glory. Not only was it an astonishing sight but it also moved purposefully as surely as a great shepherd leading his flock.
- B. We have in Jesus Christ an even more present and powerful Guide. He *is* the glory of God made human. He promised, *“I will be with you always,”* and so he is by his Holy Spirit. Not only out in front of us, but set deep within and among us.
- C. We do not always feel his presence. That is precisely where faith comes in. We *believe* his promise that he is with us, whether we *feel* him or not. We gather with other

believers to be with him. We bow alone over our Bibles and he is there. We rest in green pastures and he is there. We travel down the shadowy path of death's valley and he is there, leading us and guarding us. **God never—never—leaves us alone. So he will never stop leading us toward home.**

## Conclusion

When God leads his people there is never any doubt about where we're headed. We are going home. But we must walk there by faith. He will lead us in directions that don't always make sense on the map we have. He will even take us into the wilderness where it seems we could die. But like Israel coming to Mt. Sinai, the wilderness is also where we come to know God.

God wants us to learn to trust him because trust is at the heart of our relationship with him. It is by trusting God that we learn to love him. I am certain that you, like me, have something going on right now where it is hard to trust God. And not one of us feel like we're very good at it. But by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can persevere. He will not test us beyond what we can bear.

God seldom explains to us the reason for the route he requires us to take but these three basics are always true of God's leading:

- The Lord reroutes our lives for our faith's sake.
- The Lord leads us with a homing instinct instilled by those who have gone before us.
- When the Lord leads us he will never leave us alone.

Remember what Henry said, "*God never promises us an easy time. Just a safe arrival.*"