

## **“Who Guides Your Waze?”**

### **Proverbs 3:1-12**

*Series: The Rest of the Story*

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On our recent vacation, Lisa and I traveled all over the Pacific Northwest. We visited cities such as Seattle and Portland and National Parks including Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens. To find all these locations, Lisa used a gps app on her phone called Waze. It gives up-to-the-minute traffic reports, suggests alternate routes, warns about roadside hazards, and even alerts us to hidden police cars. It's so successful in 2013 Google paid \$1.3 billion to buy it. The key to its accuracy is the Waze community. Every “Wazer” can report what they see on the road. In fact, if you do, you earn points. My wife has so many points she is now a Knight Wazer.

During our trip we traveled up the Olympic Peninsula of Washington on US Highway 101 - a classic road that starts in Los Angeles. In Washington, however, there were no street lights and very few signs of civilization. And it was getting dark. Even cell phone service started cutting out. But we still had Waze to lead us. Then Missy (that's what we call the Waze lady) started leading us the wrong way. She told us to leave US 101. Lisa said, “That's not right. We need to stay on US 101.” So now I was in a moral dilemma. What do you do when you have two women in the car giving you opposite directions? Which one do you follow? Here is a tip guys: listen to the one you can't turn off.

We stayed on US 101 and let me tell you Missy was not happy. At first she gently said, “Drive 0.2 miles then turn right.” I started to turn right and Lisa said, “Wait, she's still trying to get us to leave 101. Go straight.” The next time I detected a little irritation in Missy's voice. She sighed and said, “Drive 5 miles then turn RIGHT.” “She's wrong,” Lisa complained. “Don't turn. Stay on 101!” Now Missy was ticked off. “Drive 7 miles then TURN RIGHT!” Lisa put her on mute. Yet we had an uneasy feeling: why is Waze, the most accurate, up-to-the-minute navigation system, telling us to leave the most obvious, in fact the only road to our destination? Lisa checked Missy's step-by-step instructions and discovered, to her horror, that US 101 simply stopped. Beyond that there was nothing. Now that's not a big deal if you are in a town, it's high noon and you can ask for directions. But there was no one around and the sun was almost down. What did Waze know that we didn't? What awaited us at the end of the road? Construction? A sudden, sheer cliff? Big Foot? There was no other option. We forged straight ahead. When we came to the spot where Missy said the road stopped we steeled ourselves for disaster and then...nothing happened. Our little car on the Waze map just kept driving into the green oblivion. Missy messed up. I think I detected a little smile of satisfaction on my wife's face.

As we travel the pathways, byways and highways of this life, there are a lot of reasons which cause us to pull off the right road.

- Sometimes you don't want to follow the straight and narrow because life feels more thrilling and exciting to go off road.
- Sometimes you think you know better than the others and you're going to do it your way.

- Sometimes you know the right path to take but all your friends are headed off in a different direction and you don't want to appear weird.
- Sometimes you know it's a bad move but you are going to take it because you don't want anyone to tell you where to turn or what to do.
- Sometimes you are scared, lost, confused. There are a lot of voices talking to you, shouting at you and you're not sure who really knows the right way.
- Sometimes you just have no clue.

The truth is: there are times when no one has a clue. Even the Waze Community steered us wrong. Sometimes the signs can be confusing. When Lisa and I were in California for my graduation we visited Griffith Observatory. You may recognize this landmark from many famous movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Terminator*, *Dragnet* and *Bowfinger*. Yet as I walked up to the door I ran into a crazy pair of signs. One said "Entrance" and immediately below it was "Not An Entrance." Some signs lead us into danger. A road sign found in Florida states: "Hikers and Bikers, move to the side of the road when a vehicle approaches." Below the sign are alligators. I think they put up the sign.

For the road of life, God gives us all the signs we need in His Word. A helpful guidebook for your journey is the book of Proverbs. If psalms are songs and poems, proverbs are short wise sayings. A proverb is a brief, simple observation or lesson that is easily remembered and widely held to be true. Sometimes we call these clichés such as when Ben Franklin wrote: "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," "A penny saved is a penny earned," "Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days." Then of course there are the famous proverbs of Yogi Berra who used to say, "When you come to the fork in the road: take it."

The Book of Proverbs gives us guidance when we come to a fork in the road of life. It goes back to wise King Solomon and the golden age of Israel. Yet like Ben Franklin, Solomon wrote some and collected some from other wise teachers since we also find them in the surrounding ancient cultures. The purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to teach us the best path of life. It opens with these words:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair. (Proverbs 1:1-3)

Proverbs are sign posts to direct you on the journey of life. Proverbs are practical wisdom. They don't teach deep, complex concepts. That is why some people make a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. You can be very intelligent and not too wise. On the road of life there are countless decisions. Proverbs help you decide which way to turn. Proverbs focus not so much on expanding your mind as developing your character, your relationships, your work. According to the Book of Proverbs a wise person is:

- Teachable not stubborn (18:15; 19:20)
- Righteous not wicked ((2:20; 3:7)
- Humble not proud (15:33)
- Self-controlled not reckless (29:11; 19:2; 13:16)
- Forgiving not vengeful ((10:12; 20:22)

A wise person respects one's parents, is faithful to one's spouse, loves and guides one's children, values one's friends and neighbors, speaks the truth and avoids boasting, gossip and deception. That's all well and good.

Yet there is a problem with proverbs. We don't have the power to perform them perfectly. Ben Franklin, the father of American Proverbs, proved this. In his Autobiography he writes about his own project for self-improvement. In a notebook he wrote down the following 13 virtues: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, Humility. He originally had 12 but a Quaker friend told him he needed to add humility. Franklin resolved to work on one virtue, keeping score of how he did in his little notebook, until he successfully mastered it. Then he would move on to the next one until he was perfect in all 13. He even formed a secret group called the Society of the Free and Easy in which he convinced a few other single young men to join him.

I communicated it in part to two young men, who adopted it with some enthusiasm; but my then narrow circumstances, and the necessity I was under of sticking close to my business, occasioned my postponing the further prosecution of it at that time.

So while those two young men worked hard at being virtuous, Franklin went back to his old way of life. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. He didn't have the power to go through with it.

The self-improvement project Solomon offers us a different source of Power.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

This is the key verse of the entire book of Proverbs. Let's take it in pieces. **Trust in the Lord.** You can trust an endless number of guides – yourself, your spouse, parents, children, friends, pastors, celebrities, sports figures, TV shows, websites, apps on your phone. These may all be good but none of them is the best. Why? They all, at one time or another, let you down or leave you alone. As good as the Waze app is, even it failed us. The best path begins with trusting in the Lord alone. He is the source of all wisdom and the goal of all wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

“Fear” here means to have awe and respect, faith and trust in God. Whenever you face a decision turn to God for wisdom and guidance. His view is wider, longer, higher and deeper. Ask Him, “What is your will?” or simply say, “Not my will but yours be done.” Ask yourself this question: What other things do I trust in besides the Lord?

Next, Trust in the Lord **with all your heart**. Quite often we give God only part of our heart. We might give him Sunday morning but not Saturday night or Monday morning. We allow Him to be our God within the church building but not in the schoolroom, the sport fields or the workplace. He is Lord of our prayer time but not how we spend our time or our money. We may give him our souls but not our thoughts and desires. There are many chambers and rooms in our hearts where the Lord is not welcome. Yet Solomon didn't say, "Trust the Lord with a third of your heart, half or even three quarters. He wants to be Lord and King over every part of your heart, every slice of your life. If He is not King over all of it, He's not King of any of it. He is only, at best, a guest in your life. Ask yourself another question: What areas of my heart are off-limits to the Lord?"

Third, Trust in the Lord with all your heart **and lean not on your own understanding**. Too often we give everything over to God and then take it back again. Why? It's hard to give up control. Maybe we don't believe God can handle it. Maybe we are afraid of what He will ask us to do. Maybe we think we know better. Yet Solomon reminds us, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; revere the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." (Proverbs 3:7-8). My wisdom is limited. My perspective is self-centered. My understanding is thin. If I lean on my own understanding it will eventually collapse under me. I have heard many people in the pit of a problem confess, "I need another way out. My best thinking is what got me here." Where have you been relying on your own wisdom instead of asking God for His will?

Finally, Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. **In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight**. If I were to update what Solomon is saying, in essence, I need to let the Lord be my GPS in all my ways. I ask Him to guide my ways. I look to him every time I need to make a turn. If I do, He will lead me on the straight path. If I don't, there are a lot of crooked paths where I can fall. Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon warns us to avoid: the crooked path of violence and power, the seductive path of lust, the foolish path of greed and envy, the lazy path of procrastination, the dangerous path of pride. If we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, He will steer us straight away from these paths.

It takes time to change one's character. It takes work to build a new life. It does not happen overnight. Every day on my way to and from work, I pass an interesting sight on Stony Hill Road. For many months I saw an old house sitting idle by the side of the road. The siding was ripped off. The walls removed. The studs exposed. It looked like a complete wreck. Then, in the last few weeks, just behind the old house the builders began a new one. While the old one is dismantled piece by piece the new one rises. If you apply God's Wisdom to your life over time you will eventually see your old ways dismantled and a new life begin. You will leave behind the old ways to follow the best way of all. Are there some ways in your life where you are not letting God guide you?

How do you do this? Solomon says:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and

faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. (Proverbs 3:1-4)

Keep reading God's Word. Commit it to memory. Learn it by heart. Put it into practice. When you are baffled, confused and don't know which way to turn, pray and say, "I trust you Lord. May your will be done."

John Kavanaugh is Jesuit priest, an author and a professor of philosophy. He was a sharp critic of our consumerism and a materialistic lifestyle. Yet at one point in his life he was seeking a clear answer from God on the best way to spend the rest of his life. He traveled to Calcutta to work for three months at "the house of the dying." On the first morning there he met Mother Teresa. She asked, "And what can I do for you?" Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him. "What do you want me to pray for?" she asked. He voiced the request that he drove him to travel thousands of miles to India: "Pray that I have clarity." She said firmly, "No, I will not do that." When he asked her why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of." When Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, she laughed and said, "I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."<sup>1</sup>

That is my prayer for you.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust* (HarperCollins, 2000)