

THE GOD OF TURNPIKES AND SHEEP TRAILS

by Jack E. Albright

Consider the Good Shepherd being described in Psalms 23:3 “He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” David, the writer of this psalm, is keenly aware that God’s protective hand guided him along the winding sheep trails as a shepherd boy. God guided him when he fought Goliath with a slingshot. God’s love protected him from King Saul who through jealousy tried to kill him. He secreted him in caves when enemies sought him. God applauded when he was crowned king. God still loved him in spite of his shameful affair with Bathsheba and his ordering the death of her husband. God loved him and continued to guide him and enfold him in steadfast love in spite of all his human weakness and failures, as well as his victories.

As I see the grace and mercy God poured on David to protect him from disaster, I almost break out in cold sweats thinking of the many times God has wrapped loving arms around me and protected me from situations where my poor choices could have easily ruined my witness for God. I can join David in reviewing my journey and seeing God’s guidance, keeping me in the proper path that I may bring some glory to God. I have been kept on the proper path, not because I deserve it, but that God wanted to bring himself glory by protecting me from the dangers I had placed myself in.

We are all on a journey. With every journey we come to junctions, and with each junction we must make a decision, a choice. To avoid a choice is to make a choice. Our challenge is how to make the correct choice. If we choose the wrong road, will God still be with us or will he desert us because we have made a human error in judgment?

Many of us were taught that God has a “divine blueprint” for our lives mapped out to the last detail. We who were driven by this concept became neurotic from questions like: “What if I get it wrong? Is this the right path to follow? How do I know what God wants? If I make a mistake, will I slither out of God’s grace and his pleasure?” Obsessing on these thoughts could lead to chronic anxiety, fear and loss of self-esteem. This could make a person feel like a failure and a second class Christian because he or she did not attain God’s perfect best.

Dave Tomlinson in his book, *Still Waters and Skyscrapers*, comments, “The doctrine of ‘God’s second best’ is in fact a travesty, an affront to the one who says, ‘Behold I make all things new.’ The shepherd-God is the lover of our souls, not some petty religious functionary, who scrutinizes people’s lives to see when they put a foot wrong.”

So, if we are cruising on a smooth turnpike, or struggling on an uphill sheep trail, we can rest our souls that our loving God is traveling with us and loving us every step. He may not approve of our path, but he stays with us and helps us out of the thorn trees and back into his better way.

God owns and travels all the roads, trails, hills and valleys. He protects us from our poor decisions and even our stupidity. When our poor choices lead us to a pig pen, like the prodigal son, we will discover that God is there loving us while we decide to select a path to a better place.

Truly we can say, “He guides me in the path of righteousness for his name’s sake.”