

Sermon Series: Draw Near**Sermon Title: Pursuing the Discipline of Guidance****Sermon Text: Jeremiah 29:11-13**

Sermon Summary: This study looks at the discipline of guidance through the lens of Jeremiah's encouragement to the children of Israel while in the Babylonian exile. They needed to understand God's willingness to give them guidance in their lives even in their captivity. There are four areas in which we must trust God if we are going to practice the discipline of guidance in our lives. These four areas are: God's Nature (His character) God's Intent (His purpose) God's Plan (His will) God's Attention (His responsiveness). The study ends with a practical look at ways in which we pay attention to God's guidance as well as ways God helps to discover His guidance in the first place.

Full Sermon Notes

"To reveal the kingdom coming, And to reconcile the lost To redeem the whole creation, You did not despise the cross!" Folks, what Jesus did on the cross was to reconcile our relationship to The Father! And with that relationship restored, we can now seek God's guidance, His wisdom, and His presence on a daily basis! Let's pray and ask God to open our eyes to the amazing direction we can find in our lives when we seek His divine guidance in our lives. Let's Pray!

Before any talk of guidance from God will be relevant or meaningful, a person must decide if they believe in God, and if they do, can He be trusted. If a person does not believe in God or trust God then they will not seek God's guidance. It's as simple as that! There are basically five categories of people when we talk about belief in God...

Polytheism - A belief in many gods. Many religions are polytheistic. A person with this view may be devoted to their god, but believe other gods are equally valid. Some in this group follow multiple gods.

Henotheism - A belief that there are many gods, but one is the supreme god and should be worshipped.

Monotheism - The belief that there is only one true God. All other alleged gods are false, or idols. This is the Biblical view. This view is also the most rational view considering the definition of God is...

"The Supreme Being"

And then there's...

Atheism - The belief that there is no supreme being. No God.

Agnosticism - The belief that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; an agnostic claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.

Our text today comes from Jeremiah. Jeremiah was one of the most powerful and effective prophets in the Old Testament. He left no doubt as to his monotheistic belief that there is only one God. Broadman Commentary states this about Jeremiah...

"With merciless scorn, he designated other so-called gods 'empty breaths,' 'things that do not profit,' 'broken cisterns,' 'nonentities,' 'do-nothings,' 'a work of delusion,' 'lies,' 'the work of men's hands,' etc."

In our text today you'll see that Jeremiah also left no doubt as to the trustworthiness of God. If you're here today and you are undecided on belief in God, I pray that through today's message you will consider placing your personal trust in Him and begin seeking His guidance in life! Today I want to establish the fact that God can be trusted and there's good reason for us to place our trust in God and seek His guidance in our lives. Let's read our text for today which is found in Jeremiah 29:11-13...

Jer 29:11 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.

Jer 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

What a powerful word on God's nature, His intentions, His heart, His character, His purpose, His will, and His trustworthiness! In this passage we find Four Areas in which we must trust God if we are to pursue His guidance:

God's Nature (His character) God's Intent (His purpose) God's Plan (His will) God's Attention (His responsiveness)

A little background. The people of God were in captivity to the Babylonians. They were there because of their disobedience and rebellion against God. They had trusted in the temple and rituals instead of trusting in God. "Empty formalism and arid legalism" had replaced a true covenant relationship with God. The problem: They had entered a covenant relationship with God, but had committed spiritual adultery and broken the covenant. "Duplicity, dishonesty, cruelty, idolatry, sensuality and formality in worship" had come between the people and God. Now in captivity, many of the people felt they could no longer expect God's guidance because they didn't have the temple, and they weren't in their homeland. False prophets were telling them they would soon be delivered and would get to go back home.

However, Jeremiah knew different. He knew they would be in captivity for some time to come and that they needed to learn to trust God in whatever circumstances they found themselves.

They needed to stop trusting in a place, a temple, a building, religious ritual and return to the covenant relationship they once had with God. Jeremiah writes a letter to them to let them know God still loved them and had a plan for their lives, but they would have to trust Him and not their religion or their empty rituals. Now in captivity, the people are discouraged, but God had not forgotten them! They simply needed to trust Him and seek His guidance for their lives.

Now that we have a little background, let's look at four areas in which we must trust God if we are to pursue His guidance.

Seeking Guidance from God will only come when we Trust God's Nature

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD,

Who is this Lord who says, "I know the plans I have for you?"

First of all He is a righteous, holy, and just God!

Exodus 15:11 Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

And this verse we read last week is one of my favorites...

Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

But since God is so awesome, powerful, righteous and just, where does that leave us imperfect sinners?

Isaiah writes...

Isa 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isa 40:29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Isa 40:30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

Isa 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

From this passage we discover even though He is the everlasting God, the Creator God, and an all powerful God who never tires or grows weary, He is a compassionate God who cares about those who are weary and weak!

So while God is a righteous, just, and holy, He is at the same time, a loving, gracious and forgiving God. Even when we grow faint and stumble and fall, He offers forgiveness to those

who repent! What a loving God. Of course there are always consequences to sin, and some of those consequences are painful and may last a lifetime. God even offers to help us deal with those things and find His plan for our lives! If our sin has caused us to miss plan A, God always has a plan B, or a plan C, or wherever you are in the alphabet! God's just that awesome. But here's another thing about the nature of God: He doesn't force people to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. In other words, if you don't want God's guidance He won't force the issue. But when we choose to place our faith and hope in Him. He rewards that hope by renewing our strength! Why? Jeremiah weighs in a few chapters later in his book...

Jer 31:3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

This leads us to the next area of trust...

Seeking Guidance from God will only come when we Trust God's Intent

"Jer 29:11 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.

Some people that believe in God actually don't live for God because they don't like God. They believe He's mean!" They don't believe God's intentions for creation were noble, good or fair. But if your belief is in the God of the Bible, I can show you evidence to the contrary. First of all, I believe the very act of creation was a loving act. I believe God had an unending supply of love, kindness and blessing and wanted to share this loving kindness and blessing, so He created us. Jeremiah certainly believed this! Dr. Fisher Humphreys, one of my professors at New Orleans Seminary put it this way...

"Things are not all accidental, nor all unpredictable, God made the world for some reason. It would be very helpful for us, as we live our lives, to know what God's intention was in creating us. To know His purpose would be to know the true meaning of life."

Dr. Humphreys goes on to say that the purpose of God is...

"To create a community of persons who freely accept God and His love and who love Him and others in return-which is such a mystery. The mystery of God's purpose is not that we know nothing about it. The mystery is that we do know about it and that it is difficult to understand why God has chosen to include us in His circle of love, in His family so to speak."

If you decide that you don't believe in God, or don't believe He has a divine purpose for creation, then you are left with a pretty bleak prospect. In fact a well known Philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell, who I quoted last week, put it this way...

"That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of

accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins--all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

Wait a minute: my hopes and fears, my loves and my beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms? Destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system? Buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins? "The firm foundation of unyielding despair"? This firm foundation of unyielding despair has led to a world filled with shaky, sinking, despair, depression and unbelievable human tragedy. I think I'll take God's divine purpose over unyielding despair any day!!!! And this leads us to the third area of trust...

Seeking Guidance from God will only come when we Trust God's Plan

Jer 29:11 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.

From the very beginning, God had plans to bless us...

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Gen 1:28 God blessed them...

But we all know what happened. Adam and Eve decided not to trust God's nature, His intentions, or His plan. They let Satan, in the form of a serpent, entice them away from their relationship with God. They followed their selfish desires and sin separated them from God.

Gen 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Instead of following God's guidance Adam and Eve had bought the lies of the enemy. God's plan for a beautiful relationship and fellowship with humankind had been disrupted. He was heartbroken, but He was not willing to give up on the relationship. Thus began what we call the story of Redemption. We find God's ultimate plan for the salvation of that relationship in Paul's letter to the Ephesians...

Eph 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Eph 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

Eph 1:5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

Eph 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Eph 1:8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

What a plan!!! God is so good in His nature, so pure in His intentions, that even when we rejected Him and chose not to trust Him, He continued to love us all the way to the Cross. He predestined, or pre-chose, that we would know Him and love Him, but He gave us a choice.

In fact this Scripture plainly points out that part of His plan is that we be free to choose.

You see, our predestination or calling from God to be His children does not take effect until we believe and place our trust in Him...

Eph 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Eph 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

God has a plan for your life and mine and it all begins with our acceptance of His gift of Salvation in Jesus Christ. That leads us to our final area of trust...

Seeking Guidance from God will only come when we Trust God's Attention

Jer 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

When my son Derek was just a toddler, we were walking across a parking lot in Columbia, TN. It was on a big hill and we could hear down in the valley below an ambulance. He said, "Daddy, somebody got hurt!" I said "that's right son!" But I just kept walking. Then he looked up in the sky and said, "God's up there in that sky!" I kind of nodded and kept walking, then he took his hands and put them on my face and turned my head towards his face, and said, "Daddy, look into my eyes when I talk to you!" I stopped walking and paid attention, and he said, "Daddy, God's going to have to come down out of the sky and help those people!" Wow! That touched my heart.

Folks, when we pray, we don't have to worry about God's attention! He's listening to every word we are praying whether we are saying it with our mouths or thinking it in our hearts and minds. He loves it when His children talk to Him!! God will hear your prayers, your cries, your heart! But some don't believe that. They blame every difficulty on God. They believe God is so unhappy with them, that if they were to go into His presence God would tell them, "I don't have time to listen to you. You've done too much, you're just not good enough!"

You couldn't be more wrong. God wants to listen to you. He wants to be in fellowship with you. Even if you've been atheist or agnostic, God is not far from you and yes He already has a plan for you. He has predetermined, before you were ever born, that He wanted to be your friend. That He wanted to walk with you, talk with you and bless your life. How do I know this?

Paul once talked to a group of philosophers, most of whom were polytheists. Listen to his conversation with those people...

Acts 17:22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.

Acts 17:23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.

Acts 17:25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Wow!! God wants to be a part of our lives! He wants to give us guidance! He wants to have a personal relationship with us! The very purpose of creation is found in the next verse of this passage!

Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Are you willing to seek Him and His direction for your life? If you are, then I can promise you you will find Him and you will find His direction for your life! I say this all the time: God is not playing guessing games with you on His will for your life! If you want His guidance He will give it to you! And you might wonder how God directs and guides us into His will. There's multiple ways: God will use circumstances in your life, He will use Godly mentors, Godly teachers, Godly family members, and especially The Holy Spirit's leadership! But let me tell you this, it all begins with knowing the principles of life which He has given us in His precious Word. The Holy Spirit will never contradict Holy Scripture, ever! So let's get practical! God is so attentive to our cries for guidance and to our needs that He gave us a manual for life! A guide book! Instructions! Someone has said that B I B L E stands for Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth! You won't learn that in seminary and that has nothing to do with the etymology of the word Bible. The word Bible actually comes from the greek word τὰ βιβλία which means "the books." The books of the Bible, Holy Scripture do give us basic instructions and guidance for life! Isn't it wonderful that God was so attentive to us to provide for us a manual for life? Indeed! God used the Psalmist to share some amazing truths about the guidance we receive from Holy Scripture in Psalm 119:30-37. So God is attentive to you, are you attentive to the guidance He desires to give you? Here's how you pay attention to God's guidance...

Choose God's Guidance

Psa 119:30 I have chosen the way of truth;

You've got to choose truth. You've got to choose God's principles. I may sound like a broken record, or should I say a digital cd glitch, that keeps repeating the same thing over and over, but, it is a fact that must be firmly established. You must choose. Joshua said this to the children of Israel,,

Josh 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

This world is filled with choices. From the beginning of this world, God has allowed humankind to make choices. There's a lot of philosophies, religions, political and social systems out there. You have to choose what you believe is truth and then you've got to choose whether or not you'll follow that truth.

Desire God's Guidance

Psa 119:30 ... I have set my heart on your laws.

You've got to desire God's will, His principles. "Set my heart." You've gotta want it, and want it bad. Why? If you don't want it, you will not see it no matter how plain or easy God makes it. If you don't desire it you will not seek it, pray for it or accept it. The Psalmist wrote this in Psalm 40...

Psa 40:8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Here's the deal. If you only believe it in your head, and do not desire it in your heart, God's plans for your life will never become a reality for you. Why? We go after what we desire!! Lack of desire for God's will indicates a lack of trust in God and you'll care less what His will is. On the other hand, desire for God's will indicates trust in God and you will pursue it! To put it simply: You desire what you treasure! Jesus said...

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Psalmist then says we must...

Hold on to God's Guidance

Psa 119:31 I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame.

Once you choose it, and desire it, you've got to hold on to it. The world will do everything it can to pull you away from God's will, His love, His truth, His principles, everything God! Paul told his young apprentice...

2 Tim 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,
2 Tim 3:13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Does it not amaze you how bad the world wants to discredit all things associated with God, the Bible and Christianity. They will accept pretty much anything as long as it's not associated with Christianity! That should tell you something right there. Hold on to the guidance you get from God and don't let the world shame you into giving up your convictions! In the end you'll be better off and some of those people will eventually see the wisdom of your faithfulness to follow your Godly guidance and they may come to Christ because of your good witness! The Psalmist then says...

Run with God's Guidance

Psa 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

Once you choose God's ways, desire them, and hold on to them, you must run with them. Implement them. Just do it!!! It will set your heart free!!!! James put it this way...

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

So we are to...

Choose God's guidance/Desire God's guidance/Hold on to God's guidance/Run with God's guidance!

When you do these things, I promise you God will do His part to give you guidance.

God will teach you

Psa 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end.

This is for anyone who wants to learn. He will do His part. And what a teacher!!!

Psa 143:10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

And what does God's Spirit have to do with teaching us?

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.

Because The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and is present with us every moment of every day, God is able to teach us any time there is a teachable moment. If we're teachable, He's always ready to teach!

God will give you understanding.

Psa 119:34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

He will help you know what the principles mean and why He wants you to follow them. God wants you to understand His principles and that they are good for you. In fact, God wants you to understand them so much that He has gone an extra step to make sure you have His principles in your head and in your heart...

Heb 10:16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

God goes even further...

God will direct your path!

Psa 119:35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

God will walk with you as you apply the principles. He brings new meaning to the modern term, "Text support"! When it comes to the text of Scripture, and seeking to get guidance from Scripture God is right there with you by way of His Holy Spirit! You'll never be put on hold when you're seeking text support!

Psa 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

God's principles give us clear direction. When there's multiple paths to take, the bottom line is this: No matter which path you take, if you are following God's principles, they will light your path and show you the way. They will help you make the right decisions as you go down your path. Some people are paralyzed when there are multiple good paths. They're scared they might choose wrongly. What are we to do? Just follow the principles. God will direct your path!! In fact there's one more really beautiful thing God does for His part of helping us discover His will and follow His principles...

God will turn your heart and your eyes!

Psa 119:36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.

Psa 119:37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

If you'll give God permission, He'll literally turn you in a different direction if you're about to make a bad decision. It's a beautiful picture of a father with a child. They are walking a treacherous mountain trail and come to a particularly dangerous spot...The child says, "I'm scared!" The father puts his hands on the child's shoulder and literally directs him or her in the right direction. "It's okay, I've got you, just step over this way and don't look down."

Spiritually speaking, we've got to allow our Heavenly Father to guide us by turning our hearts in the right direction and our eyes in the right direction. Let's pray!