

**Text:** [Exodus 40:1-14, 34-38](#)

**Date:** June 2, 2019

**Title:** “The Pillar of Fire & Cloud: God’s Guidance”

**Theme:** God will guide us on our way, if we follow the instructions and make space for God in our lives.

## Intro

Today we wrap up our series from Exodus

I hope you’ve had the opportunity to read through Exodus over these past few weeks

And if you haven’t yet, I encourage you to take the time – and I hope these sermons can be like guideposts to lead you through the book

Because these stories can be a powerful reminder of God’s guidance in uncertain times

## 1

Steph recently got a new car

I hadn’t driven it very much until the other day

My car was in the shop, and I had a lot of driving I needed to do Friday

So I borrowed hers

It’s got some cool features

Like a “lane drift” warning

Are you familiar with this?

The car constantly monitors to make sure you’re staying between the lines

It got a touch annoying when I was driving around town because, you know, you give a biker some extra room and it beeps at you

But on the highway, I kind of liked the reassurance that if I lost focus and started to drift, the car would put itself back in the proper lane

I wish that life were more like that, don’t you?

It’s very easy for us to drift from the places where we wanted to be

To lose focus on God, to lose focus on our relationships, to lose focus on our own health and well-being

I guess there are alarm bells and warning lights that go off in all these places, but what I find with the alarms is that too often they kick in a touch too late

Only after a major health scare, severe depression, or the threat of divorce  
do many of us ever bother to pay attention  
It's the same with our faith – only after bumping up against a spiritual wall –  
an unexpected loss or moral struggle, do we really consider how far  
we've drifted out of the lane

We long for God's guidance in our lives, but too often we just don't know  
how to get it

## 2

When you read Exodus, you feel like the people of Israel had it almost too  
easy

Now, I'm not saying wandering in the desert for 40 years is an easy thing

But the scriptures say God appeared as a pillar of cloud during the day and  
a pillar of fire during the night (though exactly what is meant by that is  
unclear, one possibility is a cloud with lighting inside)

When the cloud moved, the people moved

When the cloud stopped, the people stopped

That's almost as good as Steph's car

Just like a GPS – do what it tells you and usually things come out alright

Now I guess you could argue with the cloud

Maybe you wanted to stay a little longer in a place

But if you wanted to stay with your people, you followed the cloud

It was a simple system

It was clear and direct – unmistakable, in fact

Contrast that with our lives, where we often don't know if we're headed in  
the right direction, or if we're drifting out of our lane

As we celebrate our graduates today, I really feel for our younger  
generations, who are figuring out career paths

It seems to me that nearly every industry and every institution is changing  
faster than any of us can really comprehend

We tell our kids to "follow their hearts" but it's hard to know how to build a  
life that has meaning and that can also pay the rent

### 3

So, knowing that the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud have been replaced by Google, Siri, and Waze – what is there in this passage that is still meaningful for us?

Well, the first point I'd make is this: follow God's instructions  
If you've read the book of Exodus, then you know how detailed the instructions were that God gave to Moses about how to make the tabernacle

The tabernacle was like a portable sanctuary that Israel carried with them in the desert

It was almost like a prototype for the Temple that Solomon would build later  
The instructions were specific, about how to create everything and set it up

It was a lot like buying furniture from Ikea, except the instructions were ALL words and no pictures

There was a large outer part, where the main altar for burning sacrifices was located

There was a smaller inner part, where only the priests could go, where incense was burned as a sign of God's presence

And then there was the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and where very few ever stepped foot out of both reverence and fear

Exodus 40 describes how, after finding all the appropriate Allen wrenches, everything was ready

Moses set things up exactly as he was instructed

He consecrated everything and everyone with special anointing oil, to set the things and the people apart for service to God

And then, the scripture says, "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle"

God showed up when Moses followed the instructions

What this suggests to me is that God's guidance can be found when we follow the instructions that we've been given

That means, very simply, learning all we can  
About the scriptures, about how Christians make ethical and moral  
decisions  
Studying the Bible is important, especially if you can study it in a group with  
some folks whose faith you respect  
Every time you come to it, I guarantee you will take away something new to  
help you live out your faith with just a little bit more wisdom

Nothing is better in combating our tendency to drift from the lane than the  
study of the Scriptures

Those are the blueprints (remember Kathleen's sermon from 2 weeks  
ago?), the instructions, the owner's manual for living  
The Bible is where I most consistently hear God speak to me  
When we stay engaged with the scriptures, through personal study,  
through a small group, through worship –  
We find the guidance we need to stay in the lane

#### 4

What else is happening in this story – aside from Moses following the  
directions?  
Quite simply, and quite literally, we can say that the people of Israel are  
making space for God

That's what the tabernacle was meant to be  
A space for God to dwell on earth  
And when God's house was done, God moved in!  
The pillar of cloud showed up

So, if we're looking for God's guidance, the other thing we can do, aside  
from following the directions, is create some space for God to enter in  
And we might think of the space WE need to create in the same way it was  
set up in the tabernacle  
We move from this outer court to an inner, most Holy Place  
The outer court we can think of as all the religious "stuff" we do – going to  
church, reading Christian books or listening to Christian music, etc.

Which is important, it provides a kind of a backdrop against which God can  
show up, to lead and guide us  
These things constantly remind us that God is there

But as we move toward the inner parts, that's where the real shaping and  
guiding happens  
Maybe through the close friends with whom we can have spiritual  
conversations and wrestle with everything that's happening in our  
lives  
People who help us hear God's voice

And then in the most inner sanctuary, the Most Holy place, those are our  
times of silence and solitude with God  
Our times of deep prayer, where it's just us and our Creator, our Savior

If we want to know God's guidance in our lives  
We can't just stay in the outer court  
We need those dear friends who can help us to see what God is doing in  
us  
We need prayer and silence to understand and process it

## 5

So that's it, God's guidance  
Through following God's instructions  
And through creating space

We, unfortunately, don't have the benefit of the pillar of cloud  
As simple as that would be

It's hard to know how God is leading us  
And sometimes – let's be honest – we don't figure it out until years later  
Or even then, sometimes it still takes someone on the outside looking in to  
see what God has been doing in our lives

We long to be led by God  
To know that our feet are securely in God's path  
That we're not drifting from the lane  
I'm just not sure it's ever all that simple

What we've been talking about over these past weeks has essentially been  
about learning to trust God – to trust God's provision and protection  
And learning to trust our own ability to hear God  
Finding the patience not to run ahead, nor to fall behind

All the time – but especially in uncertain times,  
Following God's lead is about learning God's instructions  
And creating spaces in your life where you can meet God

Amen.

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