

## God's Rod and Staff

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November 2004

**T**hey were both weathered from constant exposure to the sun. Their clothes were filthy, and both reeked of stale tobacco mixed with overwhelming body odor. Her ankles were swollen from mosquito bites, acquired from sleeping outside. They had stood for six hours on the onramp, trying to hitch a ride to ... anywhere. They asked for money for a bus ticket to ... nowhere. They were rootless, jobless and aimless.

After supplying them with some food and bedding materials, we spoke to them about spiritual priorities. We talked of putting the kingdom first, of the futility of a vagabond life, of the humiliation of begging from strangers. We tried to help them see the advantages of gainful employment, stable income, a roof over their heads. We tried to gently point out the consequences of the life they had chosen to live, and the blessings of the life God wants us to live.

It was somewhere in the middle of this brief exhortation that an overwhelming combination of sadness and relief swept over me. It was the realization of how different these two lives were from mine. Of course, I had felt it before, but it always strikes me when I try to talk to aimless travelers who pass through, hands extended in perpetual need.

I was sad because I knew that this couple did not have to live this kind of life. While I realize that the heart of our relationship with Christ is not material, our Lord did say, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Mt 6:33 – "these things" being clothes, food, shelter, etc.). God's word unveils principles that promote a materially fruitful life.

But the sadness of their plight was balanced by the gladness of the life I am trying to live for God. I realized afresh how wonderful it is to have the guidance of God, the insight into how to live in this world. No, this is not a guarantee of a certain quality of life, for persecution or natural calamity may take it all away. But if so, I will still have the very essence of life: the revelation of God's thoughts which direct me in wise choices, godly character, service (as opposed to insatiable need), and true purpose.

David, who endured his own times of nomadic wandering, still considered God as his Shepherd:

*"He makes me lie down in green pastures ...*

*He leads me beside the still waters ...*

*He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake ...*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me ...*

*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

With his rod and staff the shepherd gently nudges his sheep toward the right path. Further, he protects them from predators. Think about it: where would we be if we did not have God's word to guide us, to define what is a meaningful life, to make sense of a confusing, intimidating world? If not for God's truth, I would probably be on the streets with this homeless couple.

And the saddest part of all? To know the truth of a better life, but see your words make no sense to a couple dazed by hand to mouth survival – *"whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe ...* (2 Cor 4:4).