

# ***Decisions***

## ***3. Getting Guidance from God***

April 29-30, 2017

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Welcome to the third week of our series “Decisions.” Making good decisions is crucial, because the decisions we make today determine what our lives will be like tomorrow. But it is not so easy to make wise decisions consistently. That’s why we are looking at what the Bible says about how to make decisions that lead to a fulfilling, God-honoring life.

Last week Linda and I decided it was time to change a couple of chandeliers in our house. My father is a mechanical engineer and could do this job blindfolded. Unfortunately, handy-man skills are not hereditary. My DIY projects generally look like I did them blindfolded. I changed out a chandelier once before in my life -- it was about 10 years ago. I seemed to remember it wasn’t too hard. I didn’t think I’d need directions...maybe just a quick YouTube video as a refresher. But when I tried to hang the first chandelier the wiring kept getting twisted when I screwed in the unit. The video didn’t say anything about that, so I pulled out the directions. They came in three languages, but they didn’t give me any hints about how to keep wires from getting twisted up. So I called a guy for advice. It sounded simple on the phone, but it still wasn’t working in my dining room.

After 3 hours I had succeeded in exchanging the old chandelier with bare wires hanging from a hole in the ceiling. I finally caved and called someone who did this for a living. I had to admit that I needed someone in the room with me to show me how to solve the specific problem I was having. We decided to return the second chandelier.

Sometimes life throws us something more puzzling than a replacing a light fixture.

- When your kid shuts you out of their life
- When facing decisions about elderly parents
- When you are not sure whether to apply to that job

Wouldn’t it be great to have an expert you can call on just what you are facing? Someone who has the experience and perspective - who knows what we don’t and who will show us which way to go? Good news; there is! God offers to guide us through the maze of life when we turn to him and ask. Let’s read this promise from James 1:5 aloud together: *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should*

*ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)*

If you are not sure what to do about a decision or a problem -- ask God. He will give you the wisdom you need to make the call. That is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of wisdom! Getting guidance from God can sound like a mysterious process. Most of us would like to receive guidance from God, but we may not be sure how that happens. There is no fool-proof, 3-step process to receive God's guidance. It is more fluid and personal than that. But there are some principles that can help us as we seek God's guidance.

**1. God gives guidance to those who ask and listen.** When facing a decision, the first question to ask is, "Have I prayed and asked God about it?" Some think that only select, spiritual giants hear from God. Not so. Every believer can hear from God. We just need to ask and listen. Verse 5 says *If any of you lacks wisdom*, not just spiritual special forces. *you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault*. God is generous about giving wisdom! He is lavish in giving guidance on what to do.

And when we ask, God doesn't say, "Now you come and ask --- why didn't you ask me before you got yourself into this mess?" He won't say, "I'll show you what to do *after* you clean up your act." No! God gives generously to all without finding fault. That's good news! God wants to guide us - give us wisdom -- but we have to ask.

Why wouldn't we ask? Sometimes we may not ask because we don't want to hear his answer. Ever get an email you don't want to read because you know you won't like what it says? Or get a phone call you didn't want to take? We humans can block out voices we don't want to hear - even when it's God's. We may be anxious for the Lord to forgive us and take us to heaven when we die, but less eager for Him to tell us how to live the rest of our lives, how to treat our spouses, deal with business partners or spend our time. We may not be open to his guidance about what movies we watch, how we treat the poor or people of other races. So we just don't ask.

In order to be guided by God, we need to be open and responsive to Him and be ready to follow where he leads. We need to learn to hear God because he doesn't speak to us in an audible voice like everyone else does. We hear from God in different way.

**To hear God's guidance regularly:**

***Pay attention to The Bible***

If you want God's guidance read the Bible. The Bible is the most reliable way to hear from God. When you read the Bible you are getting God's thoughts and word. If you need to make a decision and want God's guidance, read the

Bible. *Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes [commands/words] of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

Even if you are not simple, reading the Bible can make you wiser. It can help us make decisions that will lead to a richer, more meaningful life.

Now, the Bible won't give me the address of the particular house I am supposed to buy. It won't list the name of the company I am to work for. So how will it help me make decisions? Here's how: reading the Bible will show you who you are and how God loves you. Then you will make decisions consistent with that reality. Sometimes you will find a principle that applies directly to your question. It will change your perspective, which leads better decisions.

The more you read the Bible, the more likely you will be to hear from God at other times, too. Maybe it's because the Bible gets us on God's wave length. We are in tune more with his voice, his ways. Our mind is more open to communication from heaven. Exposure to the Bible also helps us recognize what is God's voice and what isn't. So read the Bible and take it personally. It is God's love letter to you! Every promise in the Bible is for me! Everything it says it says to me. Don't read the Bible just for information; read it as a message from God to you! Pray that what you read will be real in your life!

### ***Pay attention to other people***

God will use the words of other people to speak to us. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't be speaking to you today! Linda and I prayed a lot for God's guidance when we were buying our first house. At one point we were considering a particular place. We liked the way it looked, and the community was a solid one. It had a scenic lot. It was in our price range. We arranged to take a second look at the place, and we were prepared to make an offer that night. I had asked a friend who was a contractor to come along with us that night to give us his opinion. He took some time looking the place over, and then he pointed out several structural issues I hadn't noticed. He told me, "If I were you, I'd keep looking." We took his advice, and boy, am I glad we did! I can see now that if we had moved there, we would have had much more expense than we wanted. The house we have now suits us better in so many ways. We were asking God's guidance, and he guided us through our friend.

Sometimes we will hear God's guidance through the words of a neighbor, a colleague, a boss or a parent. They might not even *realize* that God is guiding us through them. Sometimes we will hear from God through someone who hears a message from God for us. This is sometimes called "prophecy." 1 Corinthians 14 tells us we are to seek to prophesy. I am excited that Robby Dawkins is going to return in just a few weeks. This time, he is going to be equipping us in how to hear from God for ourselves and others. I highly encourage you to be with us. We are inviting people from other churches, but as Crossroaders you get free tickets and the first notice about it.

## ***Pay attention to Inner Leadings***

When you pray for God to guide and speak to you, pay attention to thoughts, pictures or impressions that come to you. They may be God communicating with you. Over time we can learn which thoughts are from Him and which are not. A primary way to know: ask yourself if it is consistent with the Bible? God never leads us to do something that is against what the Bible says. Is this consistent with God's character? For example, if you hear condemning words, you know it is not from God. God will *convict* us by pointing out our sin and where we need to change, but he will not *condemn* us by telling us we are rejected and evil.

## ***God speaks, but doesn't make all our decisions***

We know this instinctively because we don't pray about every decision we make. For example, how many of you spent time in prayer seeking God about what to have for breakfast this morning? Hey, we're told it's the most important meal of the day! And there are a lot of options. Even if you say, "I'll have Cheerios today"--- you have to choose what kind of Cheerios to have! You can choose from: Original, Multi Grain, Multi Grain Peanut Butter, Honey Nut, Honey Nut Medley Crunch, Honey-Nut Gluten Free, Apple Cinnamon, Pumpkin Spice, Fruity, Very Berry, Chocolate, Chocolate Gluten Free, Multi Grain Dark Chocolate Crunch, Frosted, Dulce de Leche, Cinnamon Burst....There are more, but I'll stop there.

Now, you could ask God for wisdom about which Cheerios to eat, but I don't know anyone who does that. And if we do pray for God's guidance about which breakfast cereal to eat, very few of us would get an answer from God. And there is a reason for that. It is not that God considers that too small an issue. It is because giving specific guidance in every moment would not accomplish God's purpose for us.

Have you ever gotten frustrated because you've prayed about which direction to go, and then still didn't know which way to go? That's happened to me. It's frustrating! It makes me wish God gave us a life GPS. That way, every time I came to a decision God would tell me which way to go.

*Me: Should I date this person or not?*

*God: No; your perfect partner is 18 months away.*

*Me: Should we buy this car?*

*God: Yes, it has great acceleration...*

That GPS would be "God's Positioning System." But God doesn't work like a GPS, because giving us moment-by-moment directions would not accomplish God's purpose for us. In other words, it wouldn't put us where he wants us.

There are several reasons for that:

God wants us to live in relationship with him and trust him. Sometimes we want God's guidance because we want to remove all the uncertainties from life. If God tells us to do something, then the results are his responsibility, aren't they? So getting God's guidance would take all the stress out of life - just do what God says at every step and the responsibility is up to him. But God hasn't chosen to work with us in that way. He has given us the Bible that contains the guidance we can't do without, but we still have to use judgment in how to apply what it teaches. If God gave us directions every instant, we would be like robots -- but God wants us to be in genuine relationship with him. To do that we need to be walking with God in prayer and trust.

He is developing our spiritual maturity. God's ultimate purpose for us is not to drive a certain car or say the right words to our boss. God's purpose for us is to become like Jesus and to participate in what God is doing in the world. God wants to use the process of choosing a house or a vacation spot to shape us in Jesus' image.

For example, if we *have* to have a certain car even though we can't afford it, there is something unChristlike working in us that God will want to transform. Or if we spend more time taking care of the car than we do with those we love, God will want to reshape us. If we are jealous and coveting other people's cars, God will want to use the car envy to shape us more like Jesus. God wants us to be able to think through an issue with Jesus' thoughts -- with Jesus' values. That's maturity!

God's goal for us is to have "the mind of Christ" - to think and act like Jesus. **1 Corinthians 2:16** *But we have the mind of Christ.* Sometimes he won't tell us specifically what to do because the process of working through it will form us more in his image. If you pray and ask God what to do and don't get an answer, it's not because he doesn't care. It may be that he is giving you the option because either way you choose will be consistent with his purpose for you. It may be because as you work it out with the understanding you have, he will shape you to be more like Jesus.

### **Act on the guidance you get**

If we act on what God says to do, we will keep hearing him speak. If we ignore him, we will stop hearing him guide. Our response makes it easier or harder to hear God. When we do act on what God says, we will see him work in amazing ways. We will also grow closer to him.

Jessica saw God work when she acted in his guidance. She was kind enough to share her story with us.

*I had a wonderful Lenten experience with Draw the Circle, and was encouraged by my small group to share my circle story. I believe the biggest challenge I faced was obedience. One of the first readings led me to ask God what I should be circling and I heard clearly that God wanted*

*my family to shed and avoid greed. While I don't consider greed to be a core problem in our lives, God must have. Throughout the next 35 days we responded to multiple promptings to give our gifts of time and money. My husband bought \$150 of formula for the man in front of him, simply because he felt prompted to do so. We gave a financial gift to our sitter, helped a teen get a tux for the prom, and volunteered for several time demanding activities. While we were obedient in this prayer God was working and moving in my Circle prayer. My circle prayer was praying for my dear friend and his wife to conceive a baby, after 3 1/2 years of trying. But even as I was praying this I knew it was the wrong prayer so I began praying for my friend's salvation. I spoke to my troubles and told them about my God...telling the huge boulder in front of my friend's heart to be moved away. Then I read in Draw the Circle that If we wanted God to answer bold prayers then we needed to make bold moves. I felt very strongly that I was supposed to gift my friend and his wife a crib...but that was craziness. I told my husband and he agreed that was crazy and risky and potentially hurtful. We told our small group and they agreed it was crazy. But BOLD. After a week passed by my husband and I agreed we couldn't shake the feeling that we were supposed to send the crib. So with great reluctance we did. I was petrified and prayed diligently that this wasn't the biggest mistake of my life. I love my friend and would never want to hurt him with a gift that seemed to mock his pursuit. He received the gift with silence (which is big for him). His wife was moved and renewed in her own faith. Success! But the biggest success was yet to come. Through continued circling, fasting, and even chanting of "fill the crib"...God said yes. After three and half years my friend and his wife are expecting a baby (maybe more than one!) and I am expecting my friend to return to Christ. He and his wife attended church with us on Easter Sunday...and I am overwhelmed by joy and the magnitude of what Christ can do when we pray boldly, expectantly and are obedient to God's pull on our hearts.*

*[Steve] Jessica, how did you know that it was God speaking to you to give the way you did?*

*[Jessica] At first I didn't know it was God and tried to ignore it, but eventually we realized it was him.*

*[Steve] Did you have an inner debate whether you should do the things you did?*

*[Jessica] Yes, but I'm so thankful we listened to his prompting.*

What decision are you facing today? Have you asked God for wisdom? Ask God to guide you and then act on the light you have.