

**GOD IS SO GOOD**  
Week 2 *Living a Spirit-led Life*  
April 15, 2018 Pastor Roger Barkley

Some years ago, Amy, my wife at the time, and her daughter Kristy did what I now consider an intervention for me.

They were concerned for my health and for the health of our new marriage.

At the time, I was a sales manager with reps all over Southern California, so I was on the road a lot.

Plus, twice a week I was taking MBA classes at Cal Poly, and I was taking a couple of ministerial classes in Huntington Beach because I was debating whether to go into ministry.

They met me at a restaurant on Beach Blvd. and said that something had to change, that I was so stressed that I was going to have a heart attack or something, plus our marriage wasn't exactly being bliss.

I was earning good money, I was married to a beautiful woman, my son was attending a prestigious private school ... life should have been great, but I was tied-up in a knot of confusion and anxiety.

I couldn't decide which way to go in my life: continue on the corporate path, or change careers and become a minister.

An MBA would help secure my corporate position, but at the same time, I was excited by the idea of going into ministry.

Rather than decide, I was trying to keep my feet planted in both worlds.

This is what Jesus' brother James calls being "double-minded".

James 1:8 *Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*

The Greek word we translate as "unstable" originally meant to stagger like a drunk.

The fact is that I wasn't going to have peace of mind nor succeed at either goal until I made a decision – and that decision would determine the person I would be for the next forty or fifty years.

You've heard me say, "First we make our decisions, then our decisions make us."

But it's also true that not making a decision is, in itself, a decision that leaves us staggering and unstable.

Maybe you can think of times you have staggered along, stressed and second-guessing because you couldn't make a decision.

Maybe it was about a big decision like changing careers.

Or, maybe whether to stay in Los Angeles, or retire to Arizona.

But there are lesser areas where you try to keep a foot in two worlds at the same time.

How about your social circle?

You go to church, you're committed to your spiritual growth – but you've got friends whose idea of relaxation is a Saturday night of boozing.

They're fun, but their jokes are racist or degrading to women.

So, you stagger along, trying to keep a foot in both worlds while holding yourself back from full commitment to either.

This is not the life God has planned for you.

God wants you to excel and to have peace of mind by letting the Spirit guide your life.

Psalms 23 says that God restores my soul.

How?

Well, first with rest and renewal – as we talked about last week – and by leading us on paths of righteousness.

The Message translation helps us hear the Psalm's promise in a fresh way:

Psalm 23:3 *True to your word, you let me catch my breath* (lay down in green pastures, restore my soul) *and send me in the right direction* (paths of righteousness).

One of the most common questions I'm asked is how to hear God's voice.

We want clarity, we want to be on the right path but we don't literally hear God speak to us.

Let me say that most of us don't hear God's voice in an auditory way.

Some do on occasion – but for most of us, that is not the most dependable way to wait for God's guidance.

So, how do we follow God with good decisions?

**First**, we can't follow a culture that does not follow God.

This is easier said than done, because we are immersed in our culture ... we just think this is the way things are supposed to be.

I know a couple who are church-goers (not here) who got the bug to upgrade their house and so moved to a more upscale neighborhood.

There's nothing wrong with having a nice house in a nice neighborhood, but I think they expected that this upgrade would improve their family life and make them happier.

That's what our culture assumes.

More equals happier.

But soon after visiting their new neighbor's home, they realized that their kitchen was terribly out-of-date, and that their furniture was looking shoddy.

So, over the next year or so they gutted their kitchen and installed the latest style of countertops and stoves, bought new leather furniture ... but of course the upgrades were never ending.

Now they not only have a bigger mortgage payment, they are stressed and borrowing money from their family.

Why?

A culture-driven decision to upgrade life actually degraded their life.

*Romans 12:2 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. ... Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

It's human to want to be accepted, to be part of the crowd, to be like everyone else, but the Bible is full of warnings about that.

The Bible shows how this attitude destroyed Israel.

For hundreds of years they cried out to God that they wanted to be like their neighbors ... they wanted a king, they wanted different gods, they wanted a freer lifestyle.

God replied that He didn't make them to be like everyone else.

God said that He'd given them moral principles and laws that other nations did not have, and that He'd called them to be a light unto the other nations ... but the Israelites rebelled over and over, which ultimately led to their demise.

You cannot conform to our culture, be just like everybody else, and consistently follow God's path because they are often going in different directions.

*2 John 2:16-17 Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from Him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.*

**Second**, if you want to have peace of mind and make wise decisions, surround yourself with wise, godly friends.

Proverbs 13:20 *Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces.*

Most of us are vulnerable to complainers.

We get caught-up in their melodrama, and then we become negative ourselves.

Have you noticed that?

They nitpick this and that, and suddenly you're right in there with them.

This is bad, that's no good, the good old days were better – and you lose focus on what is right and possible.

When you're with friends, you have to decide whether you will be a thermometer or a thermostat.

A thermometer just reflects the temperature of the environment.

They're making degrading comments about women? I join in.

They're making racist slurs about immigrants? I join in.

They're complaining - I'm complaining.

But thermostats change the environment.

A thermostat turns the heat up or down.

So, you go along to get along ... but at some point, maybe the best choice is to not hook in with them at all.

You choose which you'll be, which path you'll follow.

You can't soar with eagles if you're running with turkeys.

*1 John 3:7 ... do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as Christ is righteous.*

One of the reasons we want every person here to belong to a ministry team is because they are safe places where you are surrounded by wise, godly people.

I look forward to our Lead Team meeting each month because we share about our lives, and I go away every month encouraged and with new insights not just about church affairs but my personal life as well.

My team cares for me, and I care for them.

Remember when Dave Philipps wanted to found Children's Hunger Fund?

He wanted to quit a really good job and turn his garage into a food collection center for hungry kids

Tons of naysayers said he was foolish to leave his job, but he gathered twelve mature Christians to meet with once a month for prayer and frank discussion.

When he did decide to launch the Hunger Fund, he had peace of mind, and together they had mapped-out a plan that has now fed multiple millions of families.

Join a team.

Find a couple of people you trust and plan a monthly chat at Starbucks, share what's going on, pray together, get encouragement and guidance – there is a wealth of wisdom right here in our church.

**Third**, don't let circumstances lead your life.

Have you ever heard someone say things like,  
“I slept in this morning, so it must have been God's will that I not go to the gym. Maybe I would have injured myself.”

Here's the problem with that kind of simplistic thinking: just because things fall into place doesn't necessarily mean God is manipulating them.

I know that when I really am “in the groove” and doing what God wants that doors do open, that there’s a sense of being in the flow ... but you’ve got to use some discernment.

Just because a door opens doesn’t mean you should walk into a dark room.

Acts 27 tells about Paul being taken to Rome.

In a prayer God told him to delay the voyage for a few days because a big storm was brewing over the Mediterranean.

*Acts 27:10 Paul warned, “I see only disaster ahead for cargo and ship—to say nothing of our lives!—if we put out to sea now.”*

But a couple of verses later, it says that a gentle breeze came along:

*Acts 27:13 When a gentle southerly breeze came up, they weighed anchor, thinking it would be smooth sailing.*

For the crew, the new circumstances must mean that they should sail, even though God had warned otherwise.

*Acts 27:15, 17 ... but at sea, a violent typhoon storm arose which made it impossible to control the direction of the ship. So we gave up and just let her drift...*

Have you ever had a gentle breeze come up in your life, and thought, "This is exactly what I wanted" but you were heading straight into a storm?

A too good to be true financial investment?

The seemingly right person for a job that you decided didn’t need all the pesky interviews?

Of course, the other side of the coin is that if God has called you to do something, then you may have to hold on to trust in the Lord while circumstances appear aligned against you.

**Fourth**, I must want to be led.

Psalm 40:8 *My God, I want to do what you want. Your teachings are in my heart.*

Back when I needed to lose 30 pounds, realized that I couldn't have a big internal debate every time a piece of cake passed in front of me.

No.

I had to decide ahead of time that I wasn't going to eat cake or whatever and then live that decision.

Decide upfront, then live it.

You don't have to debate with yourself each morning whether to go to the gym, or to read your morning devotion, or whatever.

You've already decided, so there's no anguish, internal conflict or stress.

Following God is the same.

I decide I'm going to prepare myself to receive the Spirit's nudge, and that I'm going to obey.

Some people ask for more life guidance, but God says, "Look. I've already given you things to do and things to refrain from. You're not doing those yet, so why should I give the next steps?"

Let's be frank.

People say they want peace of mind, but then they spend hours on Facebook, glued to CNN or FOX, and they hang-out with negative, melodramatic people.

If you want the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then you have to trade some of that time for a quiet space where you can pray and listen.

And if you want God's will, you'll find it in God's Word.

Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*

God's will is found in God's Word, so if you aren't devoting some time each day to reading and reflecting on scripture, then you aren't going to understand God's will.

We all know that scriptural verses can be taken out of context and used to justify all sorts of nonsense ... even cruelty.

It is only as we live with the Biblical narrative as a whole, that we understand the movement of God through history.

The big narrative includes God's call to prophets to face-down the demons of intolerance and injustice, and God's healing of personal demons as well.

And as we prayerfully live with the Biblical narrative it comes alive for us because the Holy Spirit becomes an intermediary in our conversation with scripture.

When you devote regular quiet time to scripture and prayer, then when temptations or choices come your way, your mind will recall relevant passages.

So, get back into the habit if you've not done it in a while.

Turn off your phone, shut down Facebook or CNN a half hour early ... that's a good thing in itself ... and invest that extra time to quietly reading and praying over scripture.

Start your reading with a prayer, maybe from psalms:

*Psalm 27:11, Teach me, Lord, what you want me to do, and lead me down the right path.*

And then listen.