

Series: STAPLES - October 25, 2009

KNOWING GOD'S WILL
Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:2-8; Matthew 7:7-11

1. When I was about 11, my family started vacationing just south of North Bay at Martin's Cottages on Lake Restoule. Susie Martin ran the cottages; her husband, Borden, was a guide who took fisher-persons back into the bush.

-The deal is—if you're going to make the most of a fishing trip in a new place, you **need** a guide. The point of fishing is to bring fish out of hiding into your boat. That's hard to do if you don't know **where** they're hiding. Guides **know** where these fish are hiding under the surface of the water and what they're hungry for.

-So, one day we hired Borden as our guide to take us into the bush for some **real** fishing! So, we got up before dark, drove over this long, muddy path to the first lake—and then portaged to the second. It was one of those days with my Dad and brother—and Borden—that I will always remember—because, see, **I** caught the biggest fish! And it's **all** about me!!
 - a. For thousands of years, people have tried to peer under the surface of life and time. And they've looked in some **very** weird places—reading livers, palms, Tarot cards, crystal balls--trying to figure out what the future holds and what they should do.
 - b. But there's only One in this universe who knows what the future holds—and that's God. And not in some foggy, mysterious, general sense—perfectly. He knows what tomorrow will bring on every square inch of this planet; He knows—not just what people will do—but what they'll think **as** they're doing it. He knows **everything**.
-And the thought is, "Lord—if you **know** all this—couldn't you share it with me? As **your** friend, I would do that for **you!**"
 - c. Sometimes—because the enquiring mind **wants** to know—there's some weirdness that surrounds this whole concept of God's guidance. Anyone remember the game, **Let's Make A Deal** with Monty Hall? "Is the prize behind Door #1, Door #2, or Door #3?" As if God were playing a game with us.
 - d. To make God's guidance in life even **more** confusing—the language some followers of Jesus use gives the impression that God tells them which shirts to wear, which parking spaces to take—and which breath mints to buy. "Yeah, the other day God **told** me..."
2. So I want to do my best to bring some clarity in this whole arena of God as our guide; of knowing and doing God's will—if that's okay.
-Anyone know what this is? It's a set of blueprints. They're for the renovation of this building—from the strip club it used to be to the church it is today. It was a **messy** job. Filthy! But this set of plans describes exactly what needs to be done—in amazing detail. Now, what if someone said, "How about if we build me a little house over in the corner?" Well—this is a set of plans to renovate this building for specific purpose. It's not about someone having a little house.

-Here's the most important thing in all of this to know. God's will *isn't* centered around me—or you having a great, successful, healthy life. Does God guide us individually? Of course. But it's WAY bigger than that. And it's always within the context of his greater plan—like this set of blueprints. And that *plan* is the final renovation and reconciliation of *everything*—people and all creation—to God.

-*This* is precisely where guidance from God totally eclipses the concept of trying to use God as your daily horoscope, or peer into the future so you engineer your personal success. God's overall plan is to redeem everything, find those who are lost, and bring the *shalom* back to this world that's been lost. Does God care about us personally? About loneliness? Need? Food? Homes? Jobs? Of *course* He does—but it fits into His larger plan of using us, His people, as His means of renewal and restoration.

-Something else. Within that big plan is this community—like one page of the blueprints. We are gathered here as part of a community that God wants to use as a transforming influence in this part of the globe. God's will for us is not just centered in on us doing well in the little cluster of personal kingdoms; God has a collective will for us—and how we live together and relate and love and use our resources—and become *Good News* to all of those around us. And His will for us—and guidance relates to the part you and I play in the larger community. And together we need to be in contact with God to know what He wants—and in sync with each other to *be* the part of this body that He's calling us to be.

-It's within those contexts that God guides us—because He's coordinating *everything*—and moving all things toward a really, really, *really* good end. Are we clear on that? It's *not* about me. And don't get cocky, because it's not about *you* either.

- a. So. *How* does God guide? In the Old Testament, God used a bunch of different methods to lead his people. For a period of time—He lead them through a pillar of cloud during the day—and a pillar of fire at night. True story. A little kid taking a Bible quiz got this a little mixed up with the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and wrote, "Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, and a ball of fire by night!"

But I digress. Sometimes He guided them with that culture's version of casting lots—or throwing dice.

- b. -David, in Psalm 23, makes God's leadership so clear—that He's like a Good Shepherd leading his sheep to pasture, to water—finding them when they're lost, protecting them in the dark places of life. God promises to lead us such that goodness and love are in our wake—and we come home with Him forever. But when the Messiah, Jesus, Son of God—the *Good Shepherd* shows up—He clearly reveals God's heart and God's ways. He shows us the *big* plan of loving God and loving others and serving the world; but He also makes it clear that the God of the universe is interested in each one of us *personally!* By the way, if you want to know how God views life—look at Jesus. He came to reveal who God is

- c. Before Jesus went to the cross, He made it clear that He wasn't leaving his people stranded. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit would come to indwell every person who would trust and follow him—and draw them into a loving relationship with God and with each other.

-This, friends, is an **absolutely amazing thing!** The Spirit—the very one who lived in the prophets and helped them write the Scriptures and guide whole nations...has come to live in followers of Jesus. **Us!**

-Now, here's our struggle as followers of Jesus. If the Spirit of God is living in me—how come life gets so confusing? Why do I sometimes feel so lost and out of touch?

Why doesn't the Spirit His me over the head with my own cell phone, text me—**speak up!** The **short** answer in this is; We are made in God's image—and He wants to engage us **in the process!**

3. Let me explain what I'm saying. God wants to grow us up. The way He **does** this is by engaging us—people made in **His** image--fully in the process of doing His will and accomplishing His greater purposes.

-Jesus told us to pray to God as **Abba**--our **Father in Heaven**. How do children learn to how make good, intelligent decisions? Well, by **actually making them**. For a time, parents control everything a child does—what they eat, where they go, who their friends are—everything. Do you think most parents would still like to be giving that kind of direction to children who are in their 20s? You know, telling them who to date, where to work, where not to go...? The **correct** answer to that would be **NO!** It's because your role as a parent is to **teach** them to make good decisions.

-How does God do that for us?

- a. Again, think of it from a **parent's** perspective—how we teach our kids the basics. We teach them that the laws of gravity, physics and cleanliness are real—and if they disregard those laws they will surely die! We teach them relational intelligence, how to live, emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy lives.

-Last week we talked about the importance of getting to know what God has said about life in the Bible.

The Bible gives us the big picture of what God's up to. The Bible reveals God's plan for how we handle our souls, our relationships, our money, our spouses, our friends, our gifts and our opportunities.

-Does God guide us individually? Nudge us toward people in need? Help us to know where we can serve best—make our greatest contributions? Of course. But probably 95% of what God wants us to do has already been revealed.

*To make it all easy enough for a child to understand, Jesus boiled it down to two commands: **“Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind”** and **“love your neighbor as yourself.”**

*And the specifics are there too. Sex is too powerful to be used indiscriminately, so it's to be reserved for a man and a woman who are married to each other

*Money is seductive. It needs to be fully surrendered to God, invested in what He's up to in this world and **never** given power to make our decisions for us.

*In our relational world, it's **always** God's will to love; to live with humility and in unity. We are called to treat others as **we** would want to be treated. No exceptions.

*We are called to walk humbly with our God; to use our advantages and opportunities, our power, our resources, our freedom—to love, serve and help those without a voice, without power, without resources and without freedom.

*We are called to be free—and disentangle ourselves from anything that would make us a slave, whether it's food, alcohol, stress, busyness, prescription drugs, sex, or friendships.

*In short, we are called to put God first, **give** of ourselves and **bless** others. To be **Good News** wherever we go.

- b. Sometimes we as parents give our kids rules that are more about our weirdness than their health, right? Like, my Mom used to iron our sheets. I thought that was normal until I asked Lori if **she** would do that. Man, I'll never do **that** again!

-What God has said is not about **His** issues or **His** hang-ups. It's about the fact that He **knows** what is right and good. I want this to be very clear. God will **never** lead you to do something that contradicts truth He's already revealed. "Others can't do this—but **you** can, cause you're **special!**" Won't happen. You don't even have to **pray** about that! What you and I need is the courage and strength to do what He's **said** to do! God is pointing the way to life—and the **other** way leads to death.

- c. God has given us **incredible** freedom to live and choose and breath—within these guardrails. Not only that, He's sent His Spirit to live in us. Through the Spirit, we not only have a **Counselor**; we have the power to actually **do** what God wants.

4. Let's talk about some of the key biblical guidance on actually **finding** guidance when the way isn't clear. Proverbs is a book of incredible wisdom—written largely by Solomon. Listen to what he says:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. (Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT)

-Notice the progression here:

- a. First—**trust** in the Lord with **all** your heart. This doesn't mean that you think that God probably has a good plan; when you trust someone—particularly God—with **ALL** your heart—it means that your confidence in Him, in His ways, in His plan forms the basis for all the decisions you make—and to do anything else would be a dumb mistake. There's nothing halfway about **all your heart**. And **that's** how this passage says to trust God.
- b. Second. As you live your life—don't just base in on your own understanding. You have to think way, **way** bigger than that. There are times in this life when

God's will defies conventional wisdom. Your life is not about this moment—or even the next ten years. You have been created for eternity.

You have been created to make a difference in this world—not just bring home a paycheck, stay dry, and have a little fun. Trusting in the Lord with all your heart means that when the time comes—and it will—when God wants conflicts with what everyone else says—including what you *feel* like doing—you choose to believe God and do what He asks.

- c. Third, **Seek His will in all you do...** Remember what I said earlier—that God's ultimate plan is to redeem and renew everyone and everything? ***That's God's will!*** This isn't telling us to look into God's big crystal ball and see the future. It's telling us to seek our place in the context of all that God is up to.

-By the way, know what sometimes happens when people talk about finding God's will? What they *really* mean is, "I want to **know** what He wants—so I can decide whether or not I want to do it!" God guides people who have already **decided** that they will do what He asks--because He's God!

- e. And then these final words: **...and he will show you which path to take. (Proverbs 3:6 NLT)** Remember the guide I told you we hired to take us fishing? For the **guide** thing to work—you have to follow Him. Cause, see, when you're out in the bush—the choice to **not** follow him could get you lost. We get that when we're in the bush—and lost in the trees, rocks, lakes, mud and mosquitoes. But in everyday life, our arrogance kicks in, and we begin to think we can play God in our everyday lives.

-And ***that's*** the question this passage raises. ***Do I really trust God? Like more than me? Do I trust His motives—that He has my best interests at heart?*** Do you **trust** God? Finding his will is not finding a **lucky** path—the way that leads to you being the big shiny star, being granted 3 magic wishes and envied by all your friends as a wonderful success. No, knowing God's will means you and me finding our place in His magnificent plan for ***everything***. .

5. What I'd like to do in closing is go through some practical advice in knowing God's will that I hope will be helpful.

I'd like to do this by exposing some of the fog and the myths that surrounds this whole arena. As usual, this is not original with me.

- a. Myth #1: God only speaks to and gives guidance to spiritual giants. Anyone remember Balaam? He was this big deal false prophet from the Old Testament who was asked to pronounce a curse on Israel. While he was on his way to do that, his donkey kept going astray. He ran off the road, smashed his leg up against a stone wall—and finally laid down on the road and wouldn't move to avoid an angel standing in the path. Balaam was furious—and beat him with a stick—and the **donkey** spoke to him. It's a **really** funny scene!

So. If you've ever had any thoughts that God only speaks to and guides spiritual giants—***think again!*** Neither Balaam or his donkey would fall into that category! God can—and does—speak to anyone! He doesn't play games! He knows that we **all** have a deadline, called death—and the thought of us reaching that deadline without accomplishing what we were created for is unthinkable for Him!

- b. Myth #2: If I'm in tune with God, He will guide all my decisions so ***I don't have to make them.*** How many of you have ever just wished **God** would make the decision and spare you the anxiety of the whole thing? I have. God's plan, friends, is not for us to put our brains on cruise control and climb into the back seat for a snooze.
- God will guide us in the process of ***choosing***—but we can't abdicate from the process.
- c. The third myth is that knowing God's will is an individual thing between us and God. That is **so** far from the truth.
- Let me say it again; we are called to live out our faith in a ***much*** bigger and greater plan; a cosmic plan that is vast and beautiful. And we are called to do this within a community of people in whom the Spirit lives--people who follow Jesus.
- This is why it is **so** important for you to be connected with a smaller community that you can serve with and do life with. When people really get to know and love you, they will see strengths you will ***never*** see—and traps you will miss if you're flying solo. Hear this: ***Part of God's will for your life is to travel with others!***
- Just a warning about living in community. There are people in some communities that have a habit of telling others what God's will is for their lives. That stuff is ***extremely*** dangerous. In our first church, a couple told me that they had actually gotten married because the guy went up to the girl and said, "God told me we're to get married!" She ***should've*** said, "Well, God didn't say a word to ***me*** about that! If He does, I'll let you know!" That is a ***misuse*** of God's will!
- d. That leads us to another myth. It's the myth that there's the leading of the Spirit is just a random thing that may or may not happen. And that's not true.
- God has already given us significant guidance on what we live for, on how we use our resources, on how we handle our lives and our opportunities, on staying on contact with God through prayer. God has revealed **so** much through the Bible—if we'll take the time to read what it says—think ***deeply*** about life and what is calling us to do—and then actually ***do*** it! Truth is, sometimes we don't actually ***want*** to know what God thinks.
- Would you like a couple of tips in knowing God's will? First, God will tend to guide you and I along the lines of how we've been gifted. I once had a kid in my youth group named Melvin who told me God was calling him to be a professional vocalist. Problem is—Melvin couldn't sing! How many of you think maybe ***Melvin*** was calling Melvin to sing?
- Second, the Spirit will ***always*** lead us toward servanthood—not ***being*** served. And He will ***always*** lead us toward loving God and others—not getting others to love, be kind to us...and live in awe of us. And He usually leads us to do the ***hard*** things—not the ***easy*** ones.

-My sense is that what we need in most cases is wisdom—especially in the context of stressful situations and decisions. And it's in this context that James, leader of the Early Church, says:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:5-6 NLT).

-It's pretty clear; if you really don't know what to do—**ask our generous God for wisdom!** And ask with a mindset of moving forward, believing that He has given you what you need—and what you asked for.

- e. This **moving forward** part is **very** important. Anyone here ever had any success in steering your car when it's in park? You can't steer something that's not moving. Now. Sometimes knowing **how** to move forward is challenging. Jesus said:

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8 NLT)

*Jesus, in the context of praying to a Father who gives good gifts, uses three different words. And they're listed in increasing intensity. **Asking** is verbal. You need a job—so you ask your Father. “Lord—I believe you want to care for my daily needs through the work I do. **Help me find a job!**

*What do you do next after you pray? Sit by the phone? No—you **seek**. You see what's available, what you like to do and are good at—you **look!**

*Knocking takes the intensity to another level. You begin to drop off resumes. Book interviews. See—you move forward—confident that God will walk with you through the process. Sometimes this process gets prolonged—and we get impatient. Jesus says, **keep** on asking, **keep** on seeking, **keep** on knocking! Know why? Because God is at work in the process every bit as much as the end result. He builds character; He brings us into contact with others we'd never meet
He grows our faith—and that's a good thing! Jesus closes this passage by saying that God loves us like a parent loves their kids—and He gives **good gifts!**

6. Here's the problem we face in October, 2009. Our world system offers us more options than we could ever take advantage of in 100 lives. Our lives are clotted with internet advice, reality shows and how-to books...and **busyness**. Jammed to the edges. Left to ourselves in the crazy busy lives we live—and our chance of hearing the Spirit's voice is pretty small.

-Clutter creates confusion. Sometimes God shouts, shatters solid rock, and lights bushes on fire. But most of the time He speaks softly to encourage us; nudge us toward things He wants us to do—people He wants us to help and love.

- a. I think our crazy, busy lives may be the #1 enemy of **everything** we want. It's a treadmill—and it doesn't lead anywhere good that **I'm** aware of.
- b. There's another problem—at least with me. Lori tells me that my loss of hearing is compounded by another problem—the #1 problem most wives have with their husbands—which would be? "**He just doesn't listen!**" It's isn't a **hearing** problem. I'm just listening to everything else.
-Friends, **listening** for God's voice is a muscle we can develop. God has something to say!
But in a busy, noisy world—it will take some practice. Prayer can easily become a **drive-by praying** we throw our list at God and then say, "Sorry—gotta go!" Wouldn't it be tragic to not listen to a God who wants to speak into the chaos of our lives?
- c. Busyness, not listening—and a third roadblock: **Fear!** Has anyone here besides me ever been **afraid** of what God might talk to you about—or ask of you--if you were to listen?
*Is it possible that—if you listen—God might talk to you about an uncomfortable topic? Like how you treat your spouse, or how you judge and gossip—or your pride—or the kind of stuff you're watching—or how you spend your money? Yep! Is it possible that God might lead you to do something that's scary—or give something that's hard to give? Yep!

-But I look at it like this—at least on my better days. Life, by itself, will take me scary places. I'm not smart enough to keep myself out of them. So...I'd rather be there knowing that God is up to something good—as opposed to realizing I'm just being stupid, proud and self-centered! And when God guides and speaks and works—He's **always** up to something good!

Q & A

7. God **still** speaks. The Spirit **still** guides. The world **still** gets changed, and people **still** get blessed by those who will stand in the middle of the stream of what God is up to; by those who will lay **everything** on the line and say, **God—use me—WHATEVER IT TAKES!**
If you're a follower of Jesus, the Spirit of the Most High God is living in you—just waiting for you to listen and cooperate. And He will guide your steps—for the sake of the world! He's **promised!**