

Guidance (slide)

Lenten series – challenging, today practical

Wouldn't it be nice to know what God wants for me so I can just follow? Sounds good but what if it's not where I want to go? I think we call it selective hearing. Lynn has a certain tone when she calls me that affects whether I want to hear or not. We can often do this with God. We want His guidance but, on our terms, and so often we don't hear His voice. Selective hearing is a problem when it comes to guidance. The Bible is quite clear that we can know His voice and my hope is that after today you have some clear direction on how to discern His guidance. It all starts with relationship.

John 10 vs 14 (slide)

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

1. An abiding relationship (slide)

Know Him (slide)

A sheep knows the shepherd. Do you know Him? Not about Him in the Book. Knowing God is the essence of eternal life. It's a living, dynamic relationship. It's the relationship that turns ritual into reality. If there is no relationship the practice of religion is lifeless and futile. Paul, who knew Christ more deeply than most other believers, made it clear that knowing Him was his lifelong quest.

Philippians 3 vs 8-12 (slide)

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Can you feel the all-consuming desire for knowing Christ vs 8? Do you and I have this same thirst. It's another level of devotion. I don't want to know Him because of what He will give me and sort out for me. There is another level of knowing that moves from transactional to devotional. (we know about this in our worldly relationships. You can tell the difference between the two). Knowing Him is my passionate quest because I am convinced that nothing compares to knowing Him.

I Pursue Him and give Him time and space to make Himself known to me. Get caught up with Him and all that He stands for. As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you. Paul began to know Christ and saw what it did to and for Him and then He couldn't get enough. Everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. A little bit like the first time you fell in love and couldn't get him/her out of your mind. Get rid of the fake substitutes and go after Him.

As you do this you will begin to recognize His unmistakable voice. Have you experienced the worth of knowing Him? Is knowing Him a driving passion of yours?

Known by Him (slide)

This is such an important realization. I am known by Him. Do you know that? Sheep are **known** by the shepherd. He knows them and calls them by name.

John 10 vs 3

³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Each night as the sheep would re-enter the fold, the shepherd would examine each one, to see whether there were any injuries or problems that needed his care. Palestinian shepherds, have pet names for their sheep based on individual characteristics: "Long-ears," "White nose," "Blackie," etc. He knew every sheep in an intimate, personal way.

This is the deeper truth that I have to get to. It's not just this one-way effort of me desiring to know Him but understanding that He knows me, pursues me and calls me by my name. I am His. I feel safe in His presence. I feel valued, loved and known. Have you found this faith?

(My meditation experience). Do you see that this walk is a love affair, a relationship that runs deep?

Psalm 42 vs 7(slide)

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls

So hard to see precious people struggling with a sense of value, worth, being enough and acceptance. I am not worthy to be known, not good enough, not worthy of love ...This is the mind renewal that is needed. The enemy has robbed and lied

John 10 vs 10(slide)

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

I am known by the One who made me and so I trust Him with everything and obey Him without question. Amazing what that does to fear. When I choose to believe that I am His and He watches me, fear is gone. Suddenly His voice becomes clearer and guidance becomes easier.

Know His voice (slide)

Sheep **know the voice** of the Shepherd. They are **receptive** to him. They know when it is not his voice.

John 10 vs 5 (slide)

⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

A pastor put his hands up and said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" He was pretty obviously indicating himself. Then a young kid said, "Jesus, Jesus is the shepherd." The young minister, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, "Well, then, who am I?" The little boy frowned and said, "I guess you must be a sheep dog."

There are many who have claimed to be "shepherds" like the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders who were opposing Jesus. Whether in the past, present, or future, all false shepherds are alike in that they use and abuse the sheep for their own selfish interests. A Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. So often leadership in the church is used for control, status and power. This is not what Jesus taught or modelled. Spiritual leadership is servanthood and sacrifice.

So many do not have this intimate relationship with the true Shepherd and are therefore led astray, because they don't know the voice of the Shepherd, the voice of truth. (Africa so sad, abuse of trust and faith). Here in the US, all over the world. People have traded the voice of the true Shepherd for the false one. Israel traded the voice of God for the voice of man. Asked for a human king. We continue to do it today.

Those who know the true Shepherd know His voice, and so they know a stranger's voice when he comes as their shepherd and they do not listen to him. To not be deceived by a false shepherd I have to know the voice of the true Shepherd, His name is Jesus.

Follow His leading. (slide)

Once I know His voice, I must choose to follow Him.

John 10 vs 4

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

John 10 vs 27

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

(he leads me beside still waters and into the valley of the shadow of death...Psalm 23). He clears the way before me and protects me. The invitation of the gospel is to follow not to lead.

Yet the things that drive us are unrelenting and they're oppressive. And the choices that we make to pursue our goals are often unreliable for bringing about the life we hope for. "What drives you?" is the wrong question. The question should be, "Who leads you? Who do you follow? Who is your shepherd?" Jesus is the true Shepherd. He knows His sheep and He cares for them. He laid down His life as a sacrifice in our place to forgive us for our sin and He goes before His flock and gives to us guidance and protection and provision and peace. He is the only way to good pasture. He is the only way to an abundant life and to a life of blessing. So, the question is, "Will you follow Jesus? Will you listen to His voice and let Him lead you?"

Clearly, a follower of Jesus is someone who knows Him and is known by Him. Knows His voice and does His will.

Matthew 7 vs 21-23 (slide)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you.

Can you see that this life in Christ is not compartmentalized and event driven? It is an all-consuming relationship that affects all of me all the time. It can't be a “prayed the prayer now I'm in”. Show up on a weekend. It is a growing love relationship where I know Him and am known by Him and I am caught up with wanting to follow Him and do His will.

With this in place I can now go after dealing with specific guidance and Romans 12 gives us some good advice on this.

2. A Surrendered will (slide)

Romans 12 vs 1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

It starts with the surrender of my will. Not my will but yours Lord. Don't let me make any decision based on my will and desire but let it be all about you and your best for me. We must understand that guidance is about discerning His will and not mine. It's not aligning Him with my will, it's aligning my will with His. We can so easily play the game with God. This is what I want so I will figure out a way to make it what God wants.

I surrender my will which purifies my motives, then I move to the mind.

3. Renewal of the mind (slide)

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

I remove the stranger's voice from my mind so that It's the Shepherd's voice that I am clearly hearing

I have to get rid of the noise—conformity to this world. Clarity in my mind and my thinking.

My mind is the basis of how I operate on earth. It's where my thoughts live and decisions are made.

Mind renewal is about identifying wrong thinking (based on lies and deception that come from the god of this world) and replacing it with right thinking (truth that comes from Jesus through His word and the Spirit). This has huge implications on discerning His will and making the right decisions.

EG I believe I am damaged goods and not worthy of love, how does that affect my decisions? If I believe I am beautifully and wonderfully made and loved by my Creator with great value and worth how does that affects my decisions? What I believe about myself greatly affects how I make decisions eg who I date and choose to spend the rest of my life with. Who I hang out with, what I drive, where I live etc.?

Testing and proving God's will requires a mind that is centered on what is true. Now I can get really practical

3. Test and discover (slide)

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

5 steps (slide)

Scripture (slide)

I need to be in alignment with the word of God.

Be careful about using the Bible as a magic book to decide God's will. The most important way to use the Scriptures is as the already revealed will of God. There are a lot of things I don't need to pray about...dating/marrying an unbeliever (missionary dating), Cheat on my taxes, Can I lie to my boss, do I have to love my wife,.....There are a lot of things we pray about where the answer is already right there, just read it and obey it.

Psalm 119 vs 105 (slide)

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

When I am in the Scriptures, He will use it constantly in my life and give me what I need for each day as opposed to. I need to make a decision I better start reading my Bible so I can hear from God. How many times have I found that (Night in Fergana) (Judges 6 vs 14)? Being in the Word should be a constant practice rather than when I need it to make a decision.

Spirit prompting (slide)

We understand the will of God through the Word of God. It is the Spirit who makes the Word come alive to us in. If the Spirit is not in you the Bible will make no sense and will not be your guide. The word is the sword of the Spirit in our lives. The Spirit teaches us as we submit to Him.

John 16 vs 13(slide)

¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 14 vs 26 (slide)

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

It's like having a "holy instinct" if. It's the voice if the Spirit.

Reason (slide)

Acts 15 vs 28

²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.

Sit down and write out the pros and cons. Don't throw reason out of the window. It should be a part of the process. I know many who have made a decision based on a verse when everything else was clearly showing otherwise.

Circumstance (slide)

Acts 16 vs 6-7 (slide)

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

God uses Open and closed doors. They could have disobeyed by trying to force something that was actually contrary to the Spirit's leading even though it was for a good purpose. Many times, I have thought it was right to do something, began moving, and the doors closed. I look back and am thankful. Circumstances are part of guidance.

Others (slide)

The body of Christ plays an important role in helping discern His will.

Western culture is individualistic so focuses on personal guidance. Don't like to depend on others.

God's people were not always this way

Jews were led out of Israel together as a people

They all saw the cloud and the fiery pillar. It was not individuals. They were a people under the rule of God.

Then came Jesus and He modelled how to hear the voice of the Father

Matt 18 vs 19-20 (slide)

¹⁹ "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

There is something about discerning His voice together.

Are you faced with a decision and struggling to get clarity? Call on God's people.

Life group. Someone you trust - Personal holiness, mature and living faith,

Unjudging, Compassionate and committed.

Spirit given unity is a "sense" that this is what we need to do.

4. Make the decision (slide)

Can I say that these principles have made discerning His will so much easier for me and then the confidence to make a decision. Big or small eg Car

Surrendered my will (motives of the heart are pure)

Grounded in truth

Aligned with Scripture

Sought counsel

Within reason

Circumstances confirm

Peace with the Spirit

Make the decision and move with confidence.

Going back to Paul's example.

Notice that they had made a decision and were moving. God closed doors and moved them in another. When My heart is pure and will surrendered, I can't make a bad decision because He can always overrule

My life examples – US move

So, what decisions are you facing where you need guidance? Do the work, take the steps and make a decision with confidence.

Try it this week