

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO INDECISION

Stressbusters - Part 4 Psalm 23

February 1, 2009

Life is a series of choices and decisions. Success comes when we choose wisely. If we make dumb decisions, we fail. We make decisions and then our decisions make us, because every decision has a consequence. Since we are humans who are prone to mistakes, those consequences are often difficult and painful. So decision making can be quite stressful because we don't want to make a mistake. Have you ever been afraid of making the wrong decision? Then you have experienced the stress of indecision. We've all heard the questions: Should I hold on or let go? Should I get in or get out? Should I get married? Should I get a new job? Should I move? The stress of indecision can overwhelm us.

James 1:9 "*a double minded man is unstable in all he does.*" The Greek word for unstable literally means "to stagger like a drunk." When we can't make up our minds, we just stagger through life, always going back and forth. Sometimes even after we make a decision we start second guessing ourselves. We waver back and forth and that causes stress. Is there an antidote to the stress of indecision? Of course.

Psalm 23:3b "*He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*" The antidote to the stress of indecision is to let God guide us. For the good Shepherd not only feeds us, He leads us. He provides and guides; protects and directs. The Lord can keep us on the right track, and that's good because it is so easy to get off track. We get preoccupied with all sorts of things and forget where we are going. But the Lord can and will keep us on track. He will lead us on the paths of righteousness.

Many say that they've asked God to lead them but it doesn't work. They only get more and more confused. We can't figure it out. Why is it so difficult to know God's will? Is God playing games with us? Laughing at us? Does He get some sort of pleasure watching us struggle through the maze of life wondering what we're supposed to do? No! God wants to guide us more than we want to be guided. God wants us to know His will more than we do. But in trying to discover God's will, we often look for the wrong things. Some want a mystical approach, looking for a feeling, to be swept off their feet by some emotion; a quiver in their liver. They seek an emotional release so they can say "That's how I know what God's will is!" Others are more logical. They want a methodical approach; a recipe or formula. "Do these nine things and you will know God's will for your life." But God's will is not a recipe. Others seek a magical approach where they are given some fantastic sign, like writing in the sky, a phone call or e-mail. All these ways lead to frustration because they cause us to miss God's will. God's will is not a feeling, or a formula, or an unmistakable sign. So how do I know God's will? How do I let God guide me in the right path? Four things.

1. I NEED TO ADMIT I NEED A GUIDE

That's tough, especially for men, because it's not in our nature to ask for directions, even when we know we're lost. We want to figure it out for ourselves. So we stumble and get confused. Sheep, by nature, tend to wander off the path. They need a good Shepherd and so do we. Isaiah 53:6 "*Everyone of us have strayed away like sheep! We have left God's paths to follow our own.*" And that's the real reason why we don't know God's will. Most of the time we don't want to follow God or anyone else. We want to be Frank Sinatra and do it our way. So we don't want to admit that we need directions, that we need a guide.

Now sheep can't see very well, or very far. They don't know if a path will take them over a cliff, or into a fire. They need a shepherd to guide them, and so do we. We can't see the future. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, much less next year or ten years from now. We don't even know what's going to happen in the Super Bowl tonight. We can't see the future no matter what we do or how hard we try. The magic 8 ball really doesn't know what's going to happen. But God knows. And He can be our guide.

Since we don't see our future very well, we tend to stumble. Proverbs 14 *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* We've all made decisions that seemed right at the time, but later turned out to be wrong, or even disastrous. Some paths lead to dead ends. But we don't know that at the beginning. It is so easy to get off the right path. Like sheep, we don't know exactly where that path will lead, and so we wander and stumble. To get back on the right path we must admit that we need a guide. But some people never hear from God, usually because they don't really want to. They don't listen, because they don't think they need a guide. Psalm 25 *"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."* Humble means that we admit that we need a guide.

2. ASK IN FAITH FOR DIRECTIONS

"Jesus said, 'Ask and it shall be given, seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened.'" (Matthew 7:7) ASK! A-S-K- Ask, seek, knock. God wants us to learn to ask. That's how we get wisdom. James 1 *"If you want to know what God really wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; but ... if you don't ask in faith, don't expect the Lord to give you any solid answer."* God is willing to give us wisdom. He's even anxious to do it. He's waiting to direct us in life, but we have to do two things. First, we've got to ask the right person - God. And we need to ask with the right attitude - in faith.

Have you ever asked God for something but didn't expect to get it? Sure. That's why we didn't get it. God works in our life according to our faith. We say, "God, please guide me!" and then walk away without waiting for God to respond. We just start to work. We say, "God, I want you to give me wisdom, help me make the right decision, to do the right thing." But we don't really expect Him to do that. We think it all depends on us. If we're going to do what we want anyway, why get God involved? Wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view. It is the ability to make decisions the way God does. God always bats 1.000. He doesn't make bad decisions. He never makes mistakes. So if we trust and listen to Him, He will guide us. But we must ask and act in faith, and wait for God to respond before we act.

3. LISTEN FOR GOD'S RESPONSE

Right now, this room is filled with radio waves. There are messages going across this room right now but we can't hear them. We could if we had the right equipment, the right reception. A radio will pick up those waves because it's creator designed it to do that. And our Creator designed us so that we can hear and get guidance from God. Everyone has the ability to tune in to God, to hear what He has to say. If you don't hear God then, a) You have the receptor turned off. Maybe you've never established a relationship with God. Or b) You're not listening to it. Or c) You're on the wrong channel. If God's on channel 13 and we're on channel 4, we're not going to pick it up. Job 33:14 *"God does speak -- sometimes one way and sometimes another -- even though people may not understand it."* If God says it, why wouldn't we understand it? Because we're not tuned in.

What channels does God use? There's a bunch of them, and he doesn't always use the same channel, or even speak the same way. The primary way that God speaks is through the Bible. A lot of the directions we need in life are already here. Life is a journey and the Bible is our road map, our compass and conscience. We even have the Holy Spirit to guide us. If we're lost, a map and a compass help, but even more, it helps to have someone who's been there, someone who can actually guide us to where we need to be. Without God's guide book, we're going to get lost. It helps us negotiate the twists and turns in life. It shows us the way to go when we hit those forks in the road. We need to read His book everyday. Without it, God can't get through to us. If you want God to speak to you, read His book. Memorize as much as you can so that God's Word will always be with you, ready to be used when needed. We need to read and fill our mind with God's Word so we can know God's will.

God speaks through teachers and preachers. Have you ever felt like a teacher or preacher was speaking directly to you? God uses teachers to speak to us. Does God speak through me? Oh yeah! No one would come to hear what I have to say, but they do come to hear what God has to say through me. And I'm not unique in that. God speaks through all sorts of Christians. God will speak through you if you will stay in tune with Him and learn His word. God will use you to say things to people that they need to hear. It doesn't require special people, just a very special God. I don't know what everybody needs to hear on a given Sunday, but God knows. And my best sermons have been times when I have gotten out of the way to let the power and wisdom of God come through. That's why it is important to be in worship every week. Because each week God has a message for you. I know that in my life I have had so many major turning points because I was listening to God's Word coming through God's messenger. I cannot afford to take the chance that God has prepared a message for me and I have considered something else to be more important. God uses teachers to speak to me. Sometimes God uses pastors to preach a sermon just for you or for me.

God speaks through impressions, inspirations, ideas, and hunches. There are two extremes. The rationalist says, "God never speaks through impressions." And the mystic says, "Every impression is from God." I don't believe either extreme. Maybe you just had acid indigestion. God can give all kinds of impressions but so can gas. And the devil can give us impressions. That's why we need to test those impressions. God also speaks to us through circumstances. The old adage says that there are no atheists in fox holes. When life is on the line, everyone believes in God. And sometimes he speaks to us through our pain. God whispers to us in our pleasure, but shouts at us in our pain. Through pain, God gets our attention. Proverbs 20:30 "*Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways.*"

God is speaking all the time. Are we listening? If we do, He will lead us on the right path. If we don't get in tune with God on a daily, moment by moment basis, we're going to miss God's path for our life; the path He made for us. God moves us in directions we don't understand, but He takes us to where we need to be if we will just tune in and listen.

Maybe you think that you're so far off track that there is no way for you to return to a path of righteousness. If you think that, you're wrong. No matter how far we wander off the path of righteousness, God can bring us back. Sometimes God leads us in paths that don't make sense. They may involve a tragedy, a crisis, a lot of pain. Sometimes the path that God has designed for our life will be hard to understand. Then we need to ...

4. TRUST GOD WHEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND

In Exodus we see the Israelites walking out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery. Immediately they run into an obstacle, the Red Sea. They turn to the right and find a mountain. They turn to the left, and see another mountain. They turn around and there's the whole Egyptian army coming full force because Pharaoh decided that he wasn't going to be humiliated by these slaves. What is God going to do now? It looked like a dead end, but God knew exactly what He was going to do. He was preparing a miracle. He was preparing them for deliverance. He had not made a mistake because He could see what they could not see. Years later the Israelites looked back and in Psalm 77 they said, "*Your road led by a pathway through the sea -- a pathway no one knew was there!*" Maybe you think you're at a dead end. Maybe you feel trapped financially or emotionally. Maybe it's a relationship and you can see no way out. God can see paths that we don't see. What we need to do is to keep moving with God, going forward in faith, trusting God even when we don't see where He is taking us. God knows the way to go. He can even make a new way. We just have to trust, and then we will discover that if we keep walking with God, it will become clearer and brighter. The longer we go, the longer we grow, the more we mature and the more we learn to be like Christ.

Life is a journey. Proverbs 4:18 "*The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining brighter till the full light of day.*" Most mornings I get up around dawn, and there is some light, but mostly it is still dark. As the sun continues to rise, the fullness of light comes with it. In the same way, when we walk with the Son of God our life becomes brighter and clearer. One day we will see the full light of eternity. We will see why God chose that path for us. We will see God's purpose behind it all. What do I do in the meantime? Proverbs 3 "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*" Don't try to figure it out. We're not going to understand it all. Just trust God even when you don't understand.

Psalm 37 "*The steps of a man are established by the Lord.*" God created each and every one of us for a purpose. He had a plan for our life. He created a path for us to walk. He's doesn't force us to walk that path. We have a choice. We can go God's way or our own way. One day we'll stand before God and He'll ask "Did you take the path I led you on?" If I say, "No, I did it my way" He'll say, "Then have it your way. But your way doesn't lead to heaven. It leads to death and destruction." The scriptures tell us that. Only God's path, the path God created exclusively for each one of us will lead us to Him and to heaven. We can't just copy someone else. They were not meant to be what we are meant to be. Which is why we each need to find our PLACE in life. Because God has a PLACE for us, a path for us. And he will hold our hand and be our guide.

Sometimes God has paths cross. The path of another crosses ours. He brings people and situations into our life at just the right time to get our attention, to talk to us, to help us grow. It is God's path that lead us to worship today. That's not coincidence. It is providence. You're here so Jesus Christ can say to you, "You matter to Me. I made you. I love you. I know everything about you. I died for you. I have a plan and a path for your life. I know where I want you to go in life. I know how to get you there. I will walk with you so that you will never be alone if you'll just let me hold your hand and be your guide." So much of our stress is unnecessary when we have a guide who will be with us and watch over us. At times we will stumble and fall, but we have a Shepherd who will hold our hand and pick us up. When we walk with God we can know that everything is going to be OK even when we don't know what OK looks like.

So who's path are you going to follow? If you say, "God, I want to get back on the path that You planned for me. I want to live the way You want me to live" know that the path of righteousness is not necessarily a convenient path, or the easiest path. It will not be the most popular path. God does not believe in polls. The path of righteousness may not lead to material wealth, and we will have to take some risks in faith because we trust Christ. So why should we follow God's path? *"In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality."* (Proverbs 12:28) Our way leads to death and destruction. God's path will give us a good life on earth and an eternity in heaven. But the choice is yours. May you choose with wisdom. May you go with God, and now and always, in your life, may it be so. Amen.