

Discovering God's Will – Asking Directions Jan 10, 2010

As we launch into a new year we are starting a message series about discovering God's will. And just to recap from last week, we talked about three different kinds of talking about God's will. First there was God's providential will. These are the things God is going to do anyway. God wants to do these things through us, but whether or not we sign on, God will somehow, someway, accomplish them. You know, like send his son to earth to be our savior. These kinds of things.

So we have providential will, and we have God's moral will. These are the do and don'ts and thou shalt and thou shalt not's. These are the directions God gives us for moral living...living in right relationship with God and with others. And we get to know what both God's providential and God's moral will as we read scripture and grow in our relationship with God.

We were also introduced to God's personal will for our lives. This is the third dimension of God's will. And this is the stuff like, "Do I take this job opportunity in another place or stay here?" And what we learned last week is that God wants us to know what God thinks about our lives. God wants to give us guidance. This entire series is about the ways that we can go about discovering God's will for our lives.

As Aaron shared with us last week, we will get better and better at our ability to see or discover God's personal will for us the longer we place our lives inside the boundaries of God's providential and God's moral will. These are like bumpers on the go kart tracks that keep our lives from flying off in the wrong direction. As we live in between these two boundaries, we find that knowing God's personal will gets easier to see.

Do you remember those hologram pictures? You stare at them for like hours and then suddenly you see something in the picture that isn't there? Can you tell I didn't like those things...was never very good at seeing what I was supposed to be able to see. I just wasn't patient enough, or so I was told. Anyway, discovering God's personal will is a bit like that. When we keep our lives in between the boundaries of God's providential and moral wills, we begin to see things we weren't able to see before. We begin to see how God is leading our lives.

But maybe you're out there and you're just beginning your walk with God and you're saying, "That's great, Mark. I want to learn God's providential will and moral will, but I have to make a big decision by Thursday! I want to know those things and I want to place my life between those boundaries, but I don't have time to get all that figured out! I have to figure out now if I need to relocate my family or start a business or transfer to another college or retire or whatever. I need to get on the fast track of discovering God's will!

There is good news...that is exactly what we are going to talk about today ; ways to discover God's will by asking directions. It's about seeking guidance and counsel from people God has placed in your life. We've already talked about how God operates...that most of the time when God wants to do something, God uses people! Well the same is true of giving us guidance. God will use the people around us to help us discover his will for our lives. And today, we are going to take a look at who you should ask, and what you should ask them.

As we break down ways go to about seeking God's will through the wise counsel of others, I want us to take a look at a story out of the Old Testament where we see this principal of asking directions being put into practice.

The story comes out of I Kings 12 and in this story we are going to see some good examples and some bad examples when it comes to seeking God's will through asking directions. The story takes place just after king Solomon dies. Solomon was David's son, the third king in Israel's history. In some ways, Solomon's reign was not so good. Later in his reign, his heart wandered away from God. He was more into the gods of his foreign wives and this disappointed the Lord. But in other ways, Solomon's reign was very successful. The borders of the country were expanded to their fullest reach in history. The wealth of Solomon was never exceeded by any other king. In fact just a couple of chapters earlier there is a section in I Kings talking about Solomon's splendor. But all of this splendor had a price. Solomon had taxed the people heavily and had conscripted his people into forced labor to complete his projects throughout his long reign as king.

Our story begins as Solomon dies and his son, Rehoboam, was about to become the new king. During this time, an adversary of Solomon who had been hiding in Egypt returned to Israel and came to

Rehoboam. This guy's name was Jeroboam. So Jeroboam and what the scripture identifies as "the whole assembly of Israel" came to Rehoboam. Now I'm not sure who all is in "the whole assembly of Israel". I don't think it means the entire country, but it certainly means that Jeroboam had plenty of back up.

Anyway, they go to the new king and say, "Look, your father put huge burdens on us, on the people, with the heavy taxes and forced labor and all his extravagances, etc. If you will lighten up on all of that and treat us fairly, we will serve you."

So here's Rehoboam's big decision. He has to decide how he's going to respond to this. Is he going to make this agreement with the people or does making this concession show weakness? So he does something pretty smart right off the bat. He buys some time and says to this large contingency, if you will come back in 3 days, I will have my answer for you.

So Rehoboam does another smart thing. He uses the time he has to get the wisdom of other people. First he gathers the people who had been with his father throughout large parts of Solomon's tenure. These are people with experience and perspective that he does not have. He asks them what they think about Jeroboam's proposal and they say that given all they have seen and experienced under the rule of his father, that they believe if Rehoboam will comply and show understanding and be a king that serves his people, then his people will remain faithful to him and serve him well in return.

Next, Rehoboam calls in another group of people and asks them their opinion. This group is a group of his peers and their advice is just the opposite. They told him what he wanted to hear. "Be strong, be tough. Your dad was the greatest...look at all this splendor...imagine what the world will think of you when you do even better by being stronger!" They say "no, this is a bad deal. You must show them your power. To give in is to demonstrate weakness."

So three days later, Rehoboam is ready to give them his answer. You may know this story and so you know how this turns out. But if you don't, I'm going to leave you hanging here for just a minute. Because at this point in the story, we have already learned a few keys to seeking wisdom from others.

Use the time you have to seek wisdom.

You may not have much time to make some big decisions in life. So use what time you do have to seek wisdom and perspective. Start asking for directions. For whatever reason, people don't seem to think this very practical and proven way of discovering God's will seems nearly as spiritual as closing their eyes and opening the Bible and putting their finger down.

"Lord, my friends are going on this trip and I'm going to have to go in debt to go with them and I just want to see what you think I should do, so I'm going to just open up the Bible and whatever you tell me Lord, that's what I'll do." (opens Bible and puts down finger on Luke 15:13 - "now the young man got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered all his wealth in wild living.") The young man says thank you Lord...calls his buddies and says, "hey guys, I'm in....let's go to Vegas!"

Why does that seem more spiritual than this very practical and proven way of asking directions...seeking wisdom. God wants you to know. God wants to speak to you. Other people are tools for God to give you guidance. So use whatever time you have to get perspective, gain wisdom and insight from the body of Christ. Now the important part is knowing who to listen to. And this is another lesson we get from the story of Rehoboam.

Choose someone who has nothing to lose by telling the truth.

When we look at this story, even from a distance it's pretty clear who really has Rehoboam's best interest and the country's best interest at heart. There was one group of advisors that had nothing to lose by telling the truth. They had served Solomon for years. They had perspective. They had seen what was good and bad and what worked and didn't work under Solomon. They saw the strain and suffering of the people and saw that the power of understanding could heal the nation and serve the new king well over the long haul.

The second group of his cronies had lots to lose. They were hitching their wagon to this rising star king and saw wealth and fortune and everything that goes with it. Be careful of asking advice of people who cannot separate their self-interests from your best interest. They will not give you perspective and wisdom you need for a good decision. They will paint a perspective that serves their own desires.

So Rehoboam has sought advice and now it's time for a decision. Seems obvious what the best decision would be, right. It's meant to be a no-brainer. Everyone who reads this story knows what is best, but Rehoboam chooses to take the advice of his cronies. And the consequence of this one decision is that it

split's Israel in two. Jeroboam and the "whole assembly of Israel" - 10 of the 12 tribes - break away and Jeroboam is made the first king of what becomes known as the northern kingdom, or Israel. Rehoboam does not have the power to hold the kingdom together, but he does hold on to Jerusalem and the two remaining tribes in the south and that becomes known as the southern kingdom, or Judah.

Rehoboam gets bad advice and he takes it. You know, there may be a little more to this...and I think we're supposed to figure this out from the story as well. Rehoboam wasn't really seeking wisdom, he was seeking approval to do what he wanted to do anyway. And there is a world of difference between seeking wisdom and seeking approval. Isn't that right? You know what I'm talking about. I've done it, you have too. Make up your mind what you want to do then go find the "advice" that helps you justify it. Come on, confession is good for the soul. The next time you find yourself lining people up to justify, remember that seeking wisdom and just seeking approval are very different things. One gives you perspective, one blinds you to the truth. If you want to avoid bad decisions in your life, then seek wisdom and choose people who have nothing to lose by telling you the truth.

Don't we all want to make good decisions, and avoid making bad decisions? Seeking wisdom will help us do just that! But just like in the story, not all advice is good advice (can I get an amen on that one!). Rehoboam sought advice and he got some bad advice. Have you ever received bad advice? Here I am telling you that God wants to give you guidance through other people and yet we all know that there is bad advice out there. Bad advice can cost you financially. It can cost you a friendship or a marriage or create a broken relationship with a child or family member. It can set back your career. It can bring anger and frustration into your life. How is God in that? Well, God is walks with us through the bad decisions and their consequences in our lives. God never abandons us, and I believe God continues to try to help us recover and rebuild and repair from our bad decisions. But God does not make us choose to act upon bad advice. We have to own that.

Remember that part of seeking wisdom, part of asking directions, is to know who to ask. We've already learned one key principal...that's to ask for wisdom from someone who has nothing to lose by telling you the truth.

And here's another. **Choose someone who is where you want to be in life!** If you are looking for advice about your marriage, then find someone with a great marriage relationship that has been sustained over many years. If you want advice about dealing with your children, then choose someone who makes you say, "I hope my kids turn out that well". If you want financial advice, then find people who have managed their money well. If you want spiritual advice, then choose someone who has a spiritual maturity that you admire and hope to have someday. Choose someone who is where you want to be in life because they are there! They have a map! In essence you're just asking them to share their map! Just go to them and say, "I want to seek your advice because I want to be where you are and I'm wondering if you'll share your map with me."

Most of our advice problems...when we get bad advice...happen when we ask people who are no further down the road than we are! Maybe you're having trouble in your marriage and Bubba walks by at work and you say, "Bubba come in here. Do you know what my wife did? Blah Blah blah." Then Bubba says, "Tell ya what I'd do....blah blah blah." And you say, "That's sounds good, I think I'll do just that."

Or your trying to find a way to get bigger and better stuff and you ask so and so whose got even more debt than you do and she says, "I'd just buy it on credit."

Most of your peers, the people who are where you are in life are great people and can be good places to talk and pray, but when it comes to saying, "God I want you to speak to me about my marriage or finances or my spiritual life," then find someone who has done it...who already has a map. Chances are that most of the bad advice you have received in life comes from well-meaning people who are no further down the road that you are.

Jeroboam's bad advice came from the people who were no further down the road than he was. When he asked the people who had been there, done that, he received very different advice. They had perspective and insight. They had been there, done that and knew both the pitfalls and the possibilities. The other group, however, was no further down the road than Jeroboam was.

As we continue to break down ways to see God's guidance through other people, I have just a couple more bits of advice. **Go into the conversation sensitive to the fact that God may speak to you!** That is your purpose, so be prepared to hear something that makes you say, "aha, that's it". Maybe they are telling a story from their life that parallels yours and you go "that's it, that's what I need to do". A few years ago I was

having trouble in my relationship with one of my brothers and I wasn't sure what the best thing for me to do actually. I had ideas but I just didn't know. So I went to a friend that I knew had already walked that path with one of their brothers. They had gone through enough of a parallel situation that they had perspective that I didn't. As we talked and they told me their story, I'd hear something ringing true for me and I'd think, "I need to do something like that," or "I need to say what I'm feeling in this way". I also heard things that I knew pretty well would not work in my situation, but those things sometimes led me to new ideas that might work. Those were "aha's". That's the way God gives guidance to us. But you have to be ready to receive it.

So prepare yourself to hear from God as you visit with people. Now don't freak them out...you know. Don't call them up in advance and say, "Hey, I've asked God to use you to speak to me, can we meet?" As you visit, however, ask God to help you hear what God wants you to hear.

Here are a couple of key questions you may want to ask when you are in these conversations. After you've laid out your situation and they know the background and options, etc., you might want to ask, **as far as you know, are any of the options I am considering outside the boundaries of scripture?** And another question would be **what do you think is the wise thing for me to do?**

I think if you leverage this approach of asking directions in your life, you will be amazed at how many times God will use the body of Christ, other Christ-followers, to speak to you. But there are some big reasons that you won't take advantage of this practical and proven way of discovering God's will for your life. And the first one is **PRIDE**. It's the same reason that I won't ask for directions when I'm driving. I think that I should be able to figure this out without anyone's help! Our pride will often hinder us from seeking the directions from other people that God is just waiting for us to discover. So here's a little something that I hope will set you free. Great leadership is not about making the decision on your own. It's about owning the decision once it's been made. (repeat)

You do not have to figure out life all on your own. You don't have to figure out how to be a good husband or wife or parent or small group leader or community leader on your own. Good leaders leverage the wisdom and experience of others in decision making. They take advantage of every relationship and every opportunity to include the wisdom and experience of others. Then they make the decision and they own the consequences or outcomes of that decision.

I have witnessed this over and over through Aaron Brown, our lead pastor. This is one of the few places he's really got it all together. No really, you know that's a joke. Aaron really is very good at this. This is how he leads our staff and our church. He makes good decisions because he leverages the wisdom and experience of others. This same principal was one of the strengths of Abraham Lincoln as well.

So don't let pride get in the way of discovering God's will in your life. Another reason we won't take advantage of asking directions for discovering God's will is that **we already know what we are going to do and we don't want to hear it**. This comes so naturally doesn't it. We have a three year old in our house. We didn't teach her to do this, she just does it. "Mommy, can I have a snack?" Mommy says, "no honey, not right now, it's almost dinner time". You know what that 3 year old says next, don't you. "Daddy, can I have a snack?" We already know what we want to do and we don't want to hear wisdom when we know it doesn't line up with our wants. Jereboam did that! I've done that. You have too!

When you find yourself avoiding counsel because you don't want to hear what you think you're going to hear, that should be a big red flag waving in your face saying, "go slow, go slow". When we find ourselves avoiding counsel, and we know we're doing it, that may be God's way of saying, "slow down and check your options. You're going in the wrong direction."

The good news today is that other people are some of the best tools God will use to help you discover his will in your life. And God wants you to know...God wants to speak to you. God wants to give you guidance. So remember not just to ask for directions, but to ask the right people for directions. Seek advice and wisdom. And develop a sensitive ear to the people God puts around you because God may just be trying to tell you something!