

## Decision Making and Hearing the Voice of God

### Session 1 Our Decision Making Context

*'Decisions determine destiny'* (Jim Hurn)

Like it or not the decisions you make will shape your life. We witness people make incredibly bad decisions for very good reasons, we witness great decisions being made by people who just seem to have intuition about what is right.

I want to suggest, to set the scene for the course, a few issues that make good decision making difficult:

- We have a consumer culture that is all about short term thinking (1 to 2 year horizons)

*"If I thought that Jesus was coming tomorrow I would plant a tree today"*  
(Martin Luther)

- We feel incredible pressure to do everything and not waste our lives
- We tend to make our big decisions alone – we are very individual (defensive) about the things that matter
- There is a lack common sense (a lot of decisions are made emotionally)
- The 'step of faith' model for decision making is somewhat unbiblical
- Perhaps our ideas of 'the will of God' cause problems

Romans 12:1-2

- The world
- The mind
- The will of God – good, acceptable, perfect

The two verses in many ways set up this subject very well. We give ourselves to God and thus begins our process of responding to God. It is our part to present ourselves to God – to allow our minds to be renewed – and then (hopefully) we might be able to discern the will of God (now there is a tricky term!).

I want to explore these three phrases as they are the critical of our decisions.

#### 1. The world

We live in the world, it has shaped us in profound ways:

- We have a unique personality
- We have individual experiences/moments that continue to

- echo in our beings
- We have a family of origin that has profoundly affected us
- We grew up in a town, region
- We are educated in a certain way
- We are part of a nation/culture with its own distinctive strengths and weaknesses
- We are assaulted by the media
- We imbibe a global culture – otherness hits us continually

The person that is us is shaped by a multitude of influences. Some are our unique experiences, some are the consequences of where we live and the way our world impacts us.

*"The world is an atmosphere"*  
(Eugene Peterson)

*"Television is imagistic. Our analytical, linear thought processes are bypassed. We do not think when we watch television. We are entertained. We are passive recipients of whatever is shown to us. Therefore the influence of television, then, is not only subtle and direct, it is also pervasive, and to a remarkable degree, subconscious. It permeates the way in which a person perceives the world and discriminates between good and evil." (Gordon Smith, p48)*

Ephesians 2:1-3

- Conformity (the ways of the world)
- Compliance (the ruler of the power of the air)
- Corruption (the desires of flesh and senses)

Each of these 3 elements invade our decision making process. But the one that is hardest to discern is the influenced of the world. Generally satan is straightforward compared to the subtle influences he exerts through our culture. After a while we get to know our vulnerabilities and yet the challenges of our world are changing all the time. The issues we face next year will be slightly different to now...

Questions:

How does the world influence your decisions?

What value of the world is one you consciously struggle with?

## 2. The mind

If we believe Romans the key to not being conformed to the world, to knowing the will of God, lies with the transformation of our minds. Because guidance and decision making are conscious actions our minds are incredibly important. We have to be able to think! But...

Ephesians 4:17-24  
Futility of thinking/renewed in mind

*"If we are going to live in this world without being caught up in its patterns of thought and behaviour, our minds need to be renewed... If we are going to live in emotional maturity as men and women of joy even in a broken world, it all begins with allowing the truth to percolate in the inner recesses of our hearts and minds. It begins with learning to think Christianly." (Gordon Smith, p34)*

Romans 8:5-8

*"Here is the crux of the matter: it all begins with the mind. We can hardly overstate this. The human person is so designed that it cannot have two fundamental orientations at the same time. We need to choose between them.... One is the mind of life, the other, the mind of death." (Gordon Smith, p39)*

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

So what are your strongholds?

What sound do you hear when you are making decisions?

Philippians 2:1-5

What would having the mind of Christ look like?

We have been shaped by a long process of good and bad experiences, good and bad cultural influences, leading to good and bad thought processes. We are a complicated mixture!

Some things can be strongholds that will block you making good and positive decisions in life.

- The powerful influence of fear/anxiety
- The power of false humility/rejection
- The power of driven-ness
- The power of owed-ness

What mindset invades your thinking?

## Renewing the mind

- Facing/understanding your wrong thinking
- Praying for a renewed mind
- Praying in the Spirit
- Reading the word (lectio divina, memorisation, study)
- Learning (mental boredom)
- Reading
- Reflection
- Having real conversations

Prayer: "God renew my mind, change the way I think"

"Help me to take my wrong thought patterns captive"

## 3. The will of God

Question: is it a tightrope or a playground?

We can feel it is mystery that we will never crack or perfectly obvious. The will of God, however, is a challenging concept. We will try to tie it down a little bit...

- It is God's sovereign rulership over the earth (Dan 4:35, Hab 2:3)
- It is related to God's immutable counsel (Eph 1:9-11)
- The things that God consents - what he wants and is favourable to him (Dt 10:10, Is 53:10, Lk 22:42)
- That which gives God pleasure (1 Th 4:3, 5:18)
- It is also about God's general providence (1 Chr 13:2, Act 18:21, Jm 4:15)
- God's choices in perplexing circumstances (Ex 18:15-16, Act 1:24)

When we talk about finding the will of God, however, it is something much more personal. It is about finding God's will for a decision or direction. We are attempting to uncover some hidden knowledge – so that we can move forward confidently. And we can easily grab at coincidences or revelations out of desperation.

This seeking of hidden knowledge was common in pagan religions – it is called divination:

- The performing of rituals to get God's mind
- The ANE method was by animal sacrifice to read the entrails or to gain favour (brownie points)
- Astrology, talking to spirits, was common
- Concern was to get 'signs' (the fleece idea)
- 80% of all the remaining ancient writings were about how to find the will of God
- We now gain access to God through Jesus

*"The NT gives no explicit command to 'find God's will', nor can you find any particular instruction on how to go about finding God's will.... God is not a magic genie. The use of promise boxes, or flipping the Bible open and pointing your finger, or relying on the first thought to enter your mind*

*after a prayer are unwarranted forms of Christian divination. Reliance on signs from God is the mark of an immature person."*

(Bruce Waltke, p12)

One of our issues lies in how we see our lives. We have been shaped by a culture that has inflated our sense of importance (but we are also profoundly insecure) so we feel the need for God to intervene with words and signs. We also fear making a mistake, so what is the key? The simple desire to please God.

Once the family made our big decisions (for or with us). Who to marry, job, study. We had very little say. Now every choice is our own and we feel the need for an external authority – this is enormously stressful.

*"Far too many Christians rely on faulty logic to divine the will of God. Their thinking goes like this: 'God has a plan, and therefore He intends that I find it.' That is a non sequitur, a conclusion that cannot logically follow the premise. Simply because God has a plan does not mean that He necessarily has any intention of sharing it with you (eg Job)."*

(Waltke, p15)

*"I have observed Christians making major decisions based upon the faulty notion that God has a hidden will He wants them to discover, and it has often led to disaster... 'I've got a feeling' lacks the necessary depth and relationship that the Lord uses to shape his people." (Waltke p16-17)*

- We examine how God has called me to live my life
- We examine our motives
- What God has given me a heart for
- Where I am in my walk
- What is God saying to me through the word
- What is God saying to me through other people
- 'What is wisdom?' not 'What is my hunch?'

Waltke suggests a few simple elements to being guided by God:

- Read the Bible
- Develop a heart after God (are your desires Godly)
- Learn to open up and pray honestly
- Do not put circumstances above God's word
- We cannot always know why!

So the flavour is more relational and covenantal (He is God and we are not!) than divinational (I can know the key to getting where I want to get).