

2012-11-25

West Valley Presbyterian Church

AKA: Guide

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Yesterday I sat down to write out what I have been meditating on for a little over a week. I thought that I knew where I was going to take this message on how God guides us, but as I was working to flesh out my outline I just felt like I was going in the wrong direction. You might say that God was guiding me towards sharing with you today a different message. That is my hope. So I gave up and started re-thinking the whole thing. My prayer is that this is the message God wanted me to give and that it would be helpful to you and glorifying to God.

Okay, let's talk about guidance. I don't know about you – but I am someone who really likes to know what's going on. I want to know my role, my place, and I want to know the expected outcome. I don't think I'm alone, in fact, from looking at our culture I see a lot of people who desire to know the future.

One of the most popular shows on cable right now is Long Island Medium. It is a reality TV show about a Long Island Mother who is

constantly told by “spirit” to walk up to strangers and give them a message from a deceased love one. She works as a paid medium, but if you know where she’s shopping there is a good chance you can get a reading for free.

The Magic 8 Ball is a toy used for fortune-telling or seeking advice, manufactured by Mattel. The same people who have brought us the Barbie Doll.

The functional component was invented by Albert C. Carter, who was inspired by a "spirit writing" device that was used by his mother, Mary, a Cincinnati clairvoyant. Eventually the device caught the interest of Brunswick Billiards and they commissioned the traditional eight ball look.

So this little ball is supposed to help us know the future. And it knows the future by tapping into the spirit world. That is a horrible toy.

Another tool used by society to know the future is astrology. The horoscope. Open up the newspaper and you will be told that Venus is in alignment with Mars and if you’re a Scorpio you shouldn’t do any shopping today. Or Mars is in the third plane of the solar system which means that today is a horrible day for the Gemini love life. Probably shouldn’t call the girlfriend.

Today, for research purposes only I checked my horoscope, I'm a Sagittarius, and was informed that I was doing things the hard way, painting with a small brush, when I should be painting with a large one. – I have no idea what that means.

When I was 9 my friend Peter and I called the Psychic Hotline. We claimed to be his father and the psychic told us a lot of really interesting things – but somehow missed that he was talking to a 9 year old boy. Peter and I learned nothing about the future – but we did learn that our parents were not amused by a \$80 dollar charge from a psychic.

Let's be honest. We want to know the future. We want to know what's happening. We want to prepare ourselves, we want to make good decisions, we want to know what's going to happen, and we want to know where we should go. That's the root attraction of psychics, and horoscopes, and magic eight balls.

The bible says a lot about this kind of guidance. **Jeremiah 10:2-3** reads, **“This is what the Lord says: “Do not act like the other nations, who try to read their future in the stars. Do not be afraid of their predictions, even though other nations are terrified by them. Their ways are futile and foolish. They cut down a tree, and a craftsman carves an idol.”**

So scripture is clear. Horoscopes are out. But how are we supposed to know what we should do. We would really like to know where we should live, who we should marry, when we should retire ,where we should eat lunch. Where do we turn for guidance if not the stars? The Christian answer, the expected answer here, is God. But let's be honest, that's not so easy.

Exodus 13:21 tells us that following Israel's deliverance from Egypt, "...the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." –Israel had it easy. You and I, as far as I know, do not have the luxury of God's presence in a supernatural pillar guiding us throughout our day.

But even if we did, even if we knew God's will, I'm not sure that we would be so good about listening.

Recently the Young Adult Bible Study group read 1st Samuel. 1st Samuel is the story of the 1st Kings of Israel, beginning with Saul. Saul is appointed by God through the Prophet Samuel. And Samuel comes to Saul and gives him messages from God. But Saul doesn't listen, and what happens in the middle of the book is that God grieves his appointment of Saul as King.

1st Samuel 15:11 reads, **“I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.”** Samuel goes to confront Saul, and tells Saul that he has lost his kingdom because of his disobedience. Throughout the book we actually see that God removes his spirit from Saul. God cuts out Saul and stops sending Samuel to speak to him. In fact, this passage is the last time before his death that Samuel talks to Saul.

Later, ironically, is that after rejecting Samuel all through his life Saul actually goes to a Psychic to call up the spirit of Samuel so that Saul can find out what he should do. Now, there is debate about what happens, whether the spirit that appears is Samuel or a demon, but either way Saul is condemned.

Now what's frustrating for me about Saul's life is God was talking to him. Saul had a prophet who was telling him what he he should do. All the world is looking for guidance, Saul has it and Saul rejects it. And then after a lifetime of ignoring the instruction of God, Saul knows that God has stopped talking to him, and Saul seeks out a psychic to do what only God can do.

Let me twist this. If you could know what God's will was, if you could know what you should do, if God was communicating to you, would you do

it? Would you seek it out? I think we are too much like Saul. We often hear what God wants us to do, but our own sense of timing or our own idea seems like a better plan. So we ignore God and do things our way. For Saul the result was that God stopped talking to him.

Israel, a people who were supernaturally led by God out of Egypt through the red sea, guided by a supernatural pillar, constantly rejected God and did things their own way. This is the ugly part of our human condition. This is sin. That God would be so clear and we would still reject his leading.

You and I do not have a supernatural pillar guiding our steps. We do not have a prophet relaying messages from God. But we do have scripture. In fact, we're told that through scripture God guides us. Let me read for you:

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

**Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.**

**Psalm 119:11 - I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.**

**Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.**

**Psalm 119:130 - The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.**

**Psalm 119:133 - Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.**

Now, if you are familiar with the bible you are going to recognize that the bible does not work like a Magic 8 Ball. Generally you can't ask it a question, open to a random page, and get an answer. I know that sometimes God will honor this... but you need to use caution. I mean, God forbid you ask God how to resolve an argument, flip your bible to a random page, and put your finger down on **Deuteronomy 25:12** and read, **“you shall cut off her hand. Show her no pity.”**

It is important to recognize what the bible is when we read it. The bible is a collection of books with one overarching story. Man has sinned, we didn't listen to God, and as punishment our relationship with God was broken. God is then working to put us back into relationship with him. God sends Jesus, who dies on the cross bearing the weight of our sin, and resurrects defeating the power of sin and death in our lives for his glory. When we acknowledge that truth, when we chose to follow Jesus, we begin a relationship with God, and he wants to guide us.

Through scripture we are guided by God through learning his values, commandments, and principals. The book isn't going to tell me who I should marry, where I should live, or how many children I should have. But it's going to teach me about the character of God so that I can make choices that align with his will.

I am convinced that the only way we can be guided by God is to develop a love for God. Ultimately, that is what got in Israel's way, in Saul's way, in our own way. We don't love God so we don't follow God.

Let me paint a picture for you of what it means to love God. I have a friend who is a youth leader in Oregon. She has given up asking her students to have a quiet time or devotional time. Instead she tells her students to have a date with God because it communicates something different. When we go on a date, we go on a date with somebody who we want to know better, somebody who we like to spend time with, somebody we admire and through that date we get to know that person better. We get to know their likes and dislikes. Eventually you know that person to the point where you can predict what they want you to do. You learn that somebody doesn't like tulips, but they like orchids.

Now, if you brought them tulips you wouldn't be a very good boyfriend. It's the same with God. If we spend time with God, going on

dates with God, we will begin to learn who he is. His character. We will learn that God is loving, and that he cares for the poor – something that I think we all enjoy – but we will also learn that he is just and that he is angered by our sin. It would be a mistake to assume that we know God and to stop actively learning about God, just as it would be a mistake to stop dating your girlfriend when you marry. A relationship, I'm learning, is about continuing to learn about the other person.

I assure you, no matter how long you have been a Christian or how much you have read the bible that there is still more to learn about God. I am constantly being challenged to think about God in a new way. To see him in a new light, to question what I know to be true.

I think this is the primary way that God guides us. Through understanding his values through scripture so that we can know how we should live. But last January you might remember we had a sermon series about the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, God's presence within us, will guide us as well. I don't want to discount the role of the Holy Spirit. But I would suggest that sometimes the Holy Spirit can be silenced and we can convince ourselves that what we want to do has come from God. I find that it's a good practice to consider what we think we're hearing from God based on what we know from scripture.

Another way that we can learn the will of God is based on circumstances. The Apostle Paul often moved from one city to another not because God told him, but because he was fleeing a stoning. Paul seems to believe that the circumstances indicate God's will.

When you look at Paul it's clear that he loved the scriptures, that the Holy Spirit was communicating to him, and that he was aware of what God was doing in his circumstances.

God desires to Guide us. He desires us to be in relationship with him. God can only guide us as far as we are willing to be in relationship with him, to study his character, his values, his principles in scripture. To listen to his Holy Spirit in prayer. To listen to the wisdom of a community of maturing Christians. And to pay attention to our external circumstances.

I pray this has been encouraging you to.