

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Assistant Pastor Fred Steven's Message of October 4, 2009
"Does God Tell You What To Do?"**

[Today's message explores the implications to this very personal question – does God tell you what to do? If he does, is it worth it to follow his directions?]

[Topics: God's Direction; Spiritual Journey; Serve Yourself or Serve God; Cost of Following God]

Excerpt: Let's begin today's message with a picture of a wave at the surf and the slogan below that says: "Success: Life is a wave. Just ride it, Baby." Isn't that a beautiful picture? And doesn't that bring a great image to mind about life – riding this beautiful wave?

Is it exciting? Yes. Is it wet? Yes. Is it a little dangerous? Yes. Life is like all these things together. And coupled with this great photo, it gives us a wonderfully positive image of what a life full of zest, fun, energy, and beauty is like. And who here wouldn't like a life like that, all the time, every day, forever? And that's what God has in mind for us.

You know as we progress through life it's important we should encourage each other. And to encourage each other, we need to share things together about our lives. This picture was put together to encourage us. Now Jesus gave us a lot of encouragement as well.

In **John 10:10**, he said, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** That's the same kind of zest, energy, beauty – a challenged, great fun life we just talked about. His encouragement is so like that wave photo. Jesus came to give us a successful life step by step as we move forward. That doesn't mean every moment feels successful, but we should keep in mind where is it going?

When Jesus' disciples came to realize who he was and began to accept the huge implications this had for their lives, they became very excited. They began to share this excitement with one another. For example, **Luke 24:32–35**, talks about when the resurrected Jesus shared his thoughts with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

"They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' 33) They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34) and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' 35) Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."

So they had this story to tell, this experience of their life and they shared it and encouraged each other with it. So today Fred has come, as part of his message, to share and to ask you to share, as well. Just like you, God has put Fred on a journey. We are all on a journey individually and yet all together. There are a lot of lessons and a lot of challenges. And it's a little scary, but pretty exciting. Hopefully there will be value for you along the way. But you must be willing to share, too.

So here's the first question: "Does God tell you what to do?" Notice the question didn't ask, "Does God tell us what to do?" It's a personal question. "Does God tell you what to do?"

There are many answers to this question. Here are some responses from the audience. "God suggests to us what we should do." "Sometimes he gives us some very specific instructions and some times we have choices." "The Scriptures tells us what to do." "God nudges us through the Spirit."

These are all right answers. Are they the only answers? Do you think there's more? What if you asked the guy walking down the street and ask him this question: "Does God tell you what to do?" He might say, "No! God doesn't tell me what to do." And do you know what, somebody in this room might also say, "No!"

Is a "No" answer a good answer? Is it a valid answer? Yes, because each one of us on our journey is at a place where we are at. And God hasn't messed up or missed any one of us. We haven't dropped off his radar. He knows where we are at. And it's a journey and God is bringing us along.

You may be one of those persons who would say that God tells me what to do every morning. Or you may be someone who says that God told me what to do 20 years ago, and I'm still doing it. Someone else could say I turn to the Scriptures and God tells me what to do.

Now, the Israelites received an amazing promise recorded in **Isaiah 30:20-21**. **"Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. 21) Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"**

Right, left. You know it's kind of like that TomTom or Garmin GPS system that so many people have in their cars. And it says left turn, right turn, or stay straight on 134. God's promise is similar to this.

Now all these promises God gave are fulfilled how? They are fulfilled in who – Jesus Christ. Think about the implications that "your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

We are, therefore, the recipients of this blessing. We have an amazing opportunity to have God personally directing us. Remember this was a personal question: "Does God tell you what to do?"

With this opportunity to have God personally directing us – turn right, turn left – there is also a second question. Do you really want him to tell you what to do? Some of you are nodding yes. As Rita just said, "she wants to want him to tell me what to do."

Others may be saying, "I do not want God telling me what to do. I want to run my own life." Again this is a valid answer. Again God knows where you are at. Again, God wants to lead us all forward.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote in **Jeremiah 10:23**, "**I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.**"

I think all of us naturally react to this statement differently. We don't want God telling us every step of the way. We just want him telling us – which door to go through and we'll get there on our own. We want God to show us the general direction to go in life, and we'll get there!

But God says differently. In **Deuteronomy 30**, God told the Children of Israel, I set before you today, blessings and cursings – that is life and death. You choose the direction and then I will tell you step by step how to get there. This is a reverse of how we, as humans, naturally think. But God tells us he wants to be involved in our daily walk, our daily life.

You know that's kind of exciting. And it's also kind of scary.

Now let's read the account in **Matthew 4:3-4**, when Jesus was tempted by Satan himself. "**The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'**"

For the longest time, Fred thought that Jesus was tempted with food, with bread. But Satan tempted him with rocks. Oh, Jesus was hungry. He had been fasting. But the tempting wasn't about food.

In essence, Satan told Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, use your abilities to serve yourself." Wow! Do you realize that there are implications to that no matter if we are young or if we are old? We have talents, physical abilities, skills and mental abilities.

And the temptation is that Satan wants us to use these talents and abilities and skills to serve ourselves. Jesus responded in verse 4. "**Jesus answered, 'It is written: man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'**"

Jesus responded to Satan by saying that he will let the Father tell him step by step what to do. Jesus said he would do the Father's will. But he didn't say "Son of Man" but rather "man." The intention that God has for us is to help us step by step each and every day. That's kind of challenging for us. That may kind of new to many of us.

Note this from **Psalm 32:8**. "**I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.**" Even though God wants to direct us, probably most of us, at one time or another, have said, "I don't want God telling me what to do."

The Israelites said this in **Exodus 20:18-19**. "**When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'**"

The presence of God on that mountain was very scary. Now as we go by the mountains in our lives, we often want to say the same thing. "God, don't tell me directly what to do. Let me go ask somebody and get some advice because I don't want to do what the Bible tells me to do." If God told us what to do, it could be very scary. That's an interesting lesson from these Scriptures.

Here's another interesting lesson found in the gospel of John chapter nine. It's the story of a man who was born blind from birth. **John 9:3-4, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is today, we must do the work of him who sent me.'"**

So Jesus, to summarize the story a little bit, proceeded to make mud with his spit and put it on the man's eyes. Then he told him what to do. **John 9:7, "'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing."** Wow! What an amazing miracle.

To summarize the story again. The man came back home seeing and his neighbors disputed whether or not he was the same blind guy! He was brought to the religious leaders and was questioned about what happened. He told his story again. He said Jesus put mud on his eyes, he washed, and now he could see. He had done just what Jesus told him to do.

The Jewish leaders still didn't believe the story, and sent for the man's parents. They asked them how was it that now he can see? The parents identified him as their son but said that he was old enough to speak for himself.

John 9:22, "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue."

Again the leaders put the blind man in the hot seat. They asked him again to explain how Jesus had given him his sight.

John 9:27-35, "He answered, 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?' 28) Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29) We know that God spoke to Moses, but as far as this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from. "'

30) "The man answered, 'Now that his remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31) We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32) Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of man born blind. 33) If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' 34) To this they replied, 'you were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out."

All this man had done was to follow God's specific, direct instructions to him. "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam." And now he had been thrown out of their presence and said he was steeped in sin from birth. Wow! It cost him a lot. He was also thrown out of the synagogue as well.

So, this brings up a real interesting question again. Do we really want to pay the cost of having God tell us what to do step by step? This blind man thought it was worth it. **John 9:35, "Jesus heard that they have thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'"** That's an important question for all of us.

36) "Who is he, sir?' the man asked. 'Tell me so that I may believe in him.' 37) Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.' 38) Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshiped him."

That's a powerful story and a powerful example as to how God might work and the cost that might be involved in doing what God says to do. So now, wherever we are on our spiritual journey – just beginning, recently coming to commit, working along the way, growing in understanding, having overcome major problems and hurdles, having learned deep and difficult lessons, having corrected from backsliding (life is messy) – God wants to carry you forward.

Wherever we are at, we are in the process of worshipping God; we are in the process of learning to have a relationship with him. You and I have relationships with Jesus. He's involved in our lives whether we always want to admit it or not. Jesus might have brought you here today. He might have kept you here these last 30 years.

And when you build a relationship or friendship, it takes time – it takes a lifetime like the relationships with husbands and wives and children with parents. Those relationships always need attention; they always need to improve. They're always getting better. They always take some effort and may cause some pain.

But growing that relationship with others is always worth it, right? What do they normally talk about at our funerals? They talk about relationships they had with us. They may mention about what we did for a living, but mostly they mention how we smiled and how much time we spent together. Right? So growing those relationships are important.

What about then growing our relationship with God? It doesn't stop when our hearts stop. That's just a time out. God has every intention to give us that full and abundant life. He's taking us on a journey. We need to and should spend all of our life deepening our walk with God.

Jeremiah 29:11-13, "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and the future.'" Notice that God's plans are for a lifetime.

12) "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. 13) You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God truly does want us to seek him with our heart.

It's time for a joke. There's a joke about a tightrope walker who supposedly stretched a cable across Niagara Falls and successfully walked across it several times. He gained great fame for doing this and many people felt he was the greatest acrobat of his day. People would gather at the falls to cheer, applaud, and praise this man for he was the greatest! One ardent fan was especially vocal and called out, "I believe in you!"

The acrobat heard this comment and came over. He said, "Today I intend to traverse the cable pushing a wheelbarrow in front of me! Do you believe I can do it?" The very excited fan responded, "I believe!"

"Then you, my friend," announced the acrobat, "will be the one to ride in the wheelbarrow!"

God says, "You will seek and find me. I have plans to prosper you." Yes, God wants to do all these things. But sometimes guess what we need to do? We need to get into the wheelbarrow.

This is Fred's story. Over a year ago, I petitioned God for a different job and I pledged to follow his directions. He has given me several specific directions, several nudges, and a number of opportunities along the way. As a result, I am currently unemployed without income, without unemployment payments. And I'm learning a lot.

I have learned a lot of things on many subjects. I've begun some formal training in a new line of work. I don't yet know where this is leading, but I'm in the wheelbarrow. Many days this journey across the tightrope is pretty scary. Many times I'm tempted to give up. But I don't really want to hop out of the wheelbarrow and walk the tightrope on my own.

I believe my story will have a happy ending, but I don't know how difficult it will get or how long it might take. I do know that I've learned a lot and that my personal walk with God has changed. And I like the change!

I don't want God's help; I need God's will. I don't want him to help me with my plans. I'm learning to listen to every word from the mouth of God and let him do his plans. Day by day. And step by step.

Now, here's the concluding question for us: What would life be like for each and every one of us, if wherever we're at, we allow God to take us to the next step? And, however, we are walking in our spiritual walk, we let God to give us directions as to what to do? What would life be like? It would be both challenging and scary.

What would it be like for us as a group – New Hope – if we all did this? If, as individuals and as a group, we let God give us our day by day directions? What would life be like if we stepped up to that and submitted ourselves to that? Eventually, there would be success beyond the trials.

God would move us forward. And we would be living an exciting life. And do you know what? It's not that we would be, it's that we are going to be. That's why we are here. God is moving and taking us forward. It's an opportunity – turn right, turn left; to listen and to let him lead us.

And as God leads us individually and collectively, we will draw together and have an increasing amount of community, an increasing amount of unity. Does that make sense? We going in this direction of the great promise he has made.

Jesus prayed for us in this regard – **John 17: 20-26.**

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. Listening, obeying every word. "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Remember the blind man? Things happened so that the world might see Jesus.

22) "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:" We are part of that great relationship called God. **23) "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."** God loves every one of us.

24) "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

25) "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me." We become witnesses of God – witnesses of Jesus in our lives.

A Christian friend of Fred encouraged him a couple of moths ago. She said, "What ever you go through and whatever happens, know that in the end, it's God who will get the glory."

26) "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Man does not live by bread alone. We live by the very word of God and Jesus is the Word of God. That bread from heaven comes to be in us. And how wonderful we get to celebrate that today. There's an old saying – you are what you eat. And when we take communion that's a valuable lesson to keep in mind.

So, we're going to come forward to take Communion. And as we do, let's think about letting him direct us – every step, right, left and the unity that comes as a result of letting him be in us, because he is for us and he is with us. And he wants to bring us to the Father.

Key Scripture: Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."

General Group Question: How does God tell you what to do? Does he use various methods or is he fairly consistent in communicating with you? Give several examples.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Do you agree that most of humanity doesn't want God telling us each and every step of the way but rather we prefer God to show us the general direction to go in life and we'll get there on our own? Is this how God views the situation? Why is there such a difference in view point?
2. Do you really want God telling you what to do? Briefly explain your answer.
3. Was the temptation of Jesus by Satan about satisfying physical hunger or about something far more important? Briefly explain what it was and its important to our spiritual journey.
4. Was the man born blind, who was healed by Jesus, willing to pay the cost of following what Jesus specifically told him what to do? Briefly explain the situation.

5. Is the building of deep relationships important? If it is, what efforts do we need to put into those relationships to improve them and to grow them?
6. As we walk with God on our spiritual journey, what is his primary goal for us individually and collectively as a church?
7. Does man live by bread alone or by every word of God? Why does it matter?

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