

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 30:21; Jeremiah 6:16

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Series: Walk This Way

SERMON: "Walk This Way"

Introduction

(Credit Mark Buchanan – God Walk)

In 2017 in California, wild fires swept through some residential areas, engulfing homes in flames. The fires moved so quickly, devouring block after block, residents sometimes had less than 15 minutes to grab what they needed and evacuate. How do you choose what to take with you, and what to leave behind?

A musician opted for the violin. A golfer grabbed his clubs. A bride-to-be remembered her dress. Many dived for the practical—toiletries and clothes. Others fumbled through boxes and old photo albums, desperate to save memories.

One woman grabbed diapers, wipes, and clothes for her kids, but nothing for herself. An 82-year-old woman grabbed her walker and—of all things—a hairbrush, but forgot her husband's thyroid medication.

One young mom sat with her kids on a blanket in the corner of the Community Center shelter. Her voice quivered as she went down a list of things that could currently be in flames: sonograms, her children's first teeth, the new bike her older son recently got for his seventh birthday, and the rest of his unopened presents.

One man died, refusing to leave something behind. "I'm not leaving without my truck," he told his nephew, who begged him to flee without the vehicle.

We look at those choices and we say, some were wise choices. Others were not wise at all. How do we choose wisely? How do we know if we have chosen wisely?

Commenting on the choices of the individual fleeing the flames of the wild fires, one person noted: **"We're so used to being in control and so used to making decisions all the time. But in situations like these, when our lives are reduced to what we can grab in a few minutes ... and we have to live with the consequences of our decisions, then we question ourselves...and our choices."**

This is the second message in a series I have called **"Walk This Way"**. A series where we deal with differing elements of our journey, or life with God.

If you remember, a few weeks ago we introduced the series and we talked about **"Learning to Walk"** with God. Many biblical writers encourage us to learn to walk with God. We emphasized the element of **"pace,"** How fast or slow we tend to move and live life. One author noted that God seems to most often move at a rather slow pace, by our standards – walking pace. A three mile an hour pace.

When we are constantly in a hurry, we tend to miss out on the intimate moments God desires to have with us. So, I encouraged us to take up the practice of literally going for walks with God. Leisurely, sauntering, relaxed walks. During which, we spend time in conversation with God – talking to God and listening to God.

How are you doing? Have you been able to slow down, at all. May be for a little while some days? I have not been doing very well. Fortunately, I was out of the office for a few days since then, and was better able to slow down and be more present with God.

1. Life is Full of Choices

Today we want to talk about **Making Decisions**. I have titled this message, **"Walk This Way"** Our emphasis is on the middle word **"This"**. **"Walk This Way."**

It implies there is a choice to be made. A choice between two options. Walk this way, not that way.

"Walk This way" is an invitation to travel on a path that leads to a good place.

Your life and my life are marked by a thousand little forks in the road. At each fork in the road we have to make a decision.

What shall we eat for dinner?

What time should I get up on Saturday?

Is it time to replace our old car?

Should we move to a different house?

Should we put mom in a nursing home?

Can we afford this vacation idea?

When should I have that hard conversation with my co-worker?

And it goes on and on. So many decisions.

What we discover as we walk with God, is that God offers to be our guide.

2. God Invites Us to The Good Way

It is not necessarily easy. It may not be comfortable. It may not be the way most others are going. But we can be confident it is a good way, because it is God's way.

I want to draw our attention to 2 great prophets – Jeremiah and Isaiah and some poems they wrote. 1st from the prophet **Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah is a prophet of Israel. He is the last prophet to preach before Israel is invaded from the north, and the people are sent into exile and captivity. The people have turned their backs on God. They have ignored God's laws. For one last time, God is pleading with the people to turn back to him, and listen to him. God's invitation is part of a warning.

Jeremiah 6:1-16

“Run for your lives, you people of Benjamin!

Get out of Jerusalem!

**A powerful army is coming from the north,
coming with disaster and destruction.**

¹⁰ To whom can I give warning?

Who will listen when I speak?

Their ears are closed,
and they cannot hear.
They scorn the word of the Lord.
They don't want to listen at all.

¹⁶ This is what the Lord says:
*“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.*”

The people have been making bad decision after bad decision. Decisions that will only lead to suffering, pain and heartache. But in his grace and mercy, God has not given up on them. God is inviting them to a good way, a way that leads to a good place – a place of rest for their souls.

Jeremiah says the good ways are ancient. They have been around for a while. They are well known to those who are old and wise.

My uncle Howard used to take me hunting up in Horse Valley. We would get out of the car and I would ask, “Which way should I go?” And he would point to an old logging trail in front of us, almost overgrown by now. He'd say, “Take this trail about a quarter of a mile and you will come to a fork. Take the trail to the right. Go several hundred yards and it will open out into a clearing. On the far side of the clearing is a small pine grove. There is a deer trail just on the other side of that pine grove. That is where you want to wait for the deer. That's where you will be successful in your hunt.”

That is the image I get in my head when I read Jeremiah, **“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it.”**

Jeremiah is saying, there is a good way to go about your life. Others have travelled that way already. It is an ancient way. You have to search for that way, and ask. But it is marked. You will find it if you search earnestly.

God is inviting you and me to the Good Way. God invites us saying: “Walk this Way.”

The prophet **Isaiah** has a different approach. The Israelites are in trouble. There is an approaching enemy and they have to decide where to go for help. They make a bad choice. They have chosen to put their trust in another nation, rather than in God. But God is patient with them and gracious to them anyway. Isaiah’s message is filled with far more hope and promise.

Isaiah 30:1- 21

**“What sorrow awaits my rebellious children,”
says the Lord.**

“You make plans that are contrary to mine.

**² For without consulting me,
you have gone down to Egypt for help.**

You have put your trust in Pharaoh’s protection.

You have tried to hide in his shade.

¹⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

**“Only in returning to me
and resting in me will you be saved.**

**¹⁸ So the Lord must wait for you to come to him
so he can show you his love and compassion.**

For the Lord is a faithful God.

Blessed are those who wait for his help.

He will be gracious if you ask for help.

He will surely respond to the sound of your cries.

Here is God’s invitation to the Israelites:

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.”

Jeremiah's message is filled with scathing rebuke. Isaiah's message is filled with gracious hope. But both of them reveal God's invitation to his people, to find and choose the Good Way to live life.

From the very beginning of humankind, if you go back to the Adam and Eve story, God created this world as a place where we will always have decisions to make. God created humans and gave us the freedom and the ability to make decisions about our lives. Life is not random nor pre-programmed for you. Life is not just fate – where whatever happens, happens.

Because God created us with freedom to choose, life is about making decisions.

But God also revealed that there are good decisions that lead to the good way, and rest for our souls. There are also bad decisions that lead to pain, heartache and sadness.

God's invitation to humans, to us, is to choose the Good Way. "Walk This Way."

(3. Finding the Good Way)

So how do we find this Good Way? Neither Jeremiah or Isaiah say exactly what or where the good way is.

Isaiah says we need intimate, almost moment by moment, maybe supernatural guidance to find the way. Isaiah refers to a voice.

Jeremiah says we need to stand and look and ask in order to find it. It is an ancient way. It has been around for a while.

My main way of looking, asking, finding and then walking in the ancient paths, the good ways, has been to cultivate a life in **Scripture**.

Before I was called to be a pastor, I was a science teacher. Everyday I had dozens of students who wanted to know the answers to the questions of physics and chemistry and biology. It was important to them, because they wanted to pass the exams that opened the doors to university and jobs.

I immersed myself in the science text books. To the point that when a student asked me a question about a particular science topic, I could almost point them to the page in the text book where they could discover the answer.

I remember thinking one day, “I wish I knew the answers to many of life’s questions that well.” And I believed, and still do, that the scriptures contain the information I’m looking for. And so, I made a commitment with myself to read my bible from cover to cover each year. I have not read my bible through every year since then. But I have read it through many times.

And that commitment has allowed me to begin to cultivate a life in the scripture. I want to be very familiar with the bible stories. I want to be very familiar with the way God interacts with people. I want to know well, the things that please God, and the things that displease him. I want to be familiar with his instructions, with his expectations of me. I want to be reminded of how much God loves me, and is faithful to me and is committed to my well-being.

I have come to love the Gospels and the stories of Jesus. I have come to love the Old Testament Laws and what they teach me about God. I have come to love the poetry and imagery we find in some of the books.

I have also discovered that I have to ask many questions as I read. I am trying to learn to ask more questions, and make fewer assumptions, that I already know the answers before I read. I read what many other authors and scholars have to say about the passages of scriptures, the ancient stories. Some things are confusing to me. I have discovered that some things I used to think about God, God has changed my mind about.

But when I ponder the questions of life, and want to find the good way, or make a good decision, a life cultivated in the scripture is indispensable. While Jeremiah does not say, “Read your bible.” His reference to the ancient ways includes being very familiar with the scriptures.

Isaiah writes about “**Hearing a voice.**” We can assume, quite reliably, he is referring to the voice of God. While Jeremiah tells us to find the ancient way – the commands and instructions of God. Isaiah tells us to **listen to a guide.**

Have you ever been to the Gettysburg battlefield? You can tour those on your own and it is very interesting. I am cheap enough that when I visit there, I usually figure I can give myself a good interesting tour.

Sometimes, while wondering around the battlefield, I have gotten close enough to one of those guided tours. I must confess that I often eve's drop on what the guide is saying. And wow, what difference it makes in what you learn. The guides know so much more than just the facts or information about the battle. They are familiar with some of the personal stories, the personalities of the people. To hear a good guide just opens up so much more of the story.

Well, Isaiah tells us that when we arrive at one of those forks in the road of life, one of those decisions – whether big or small, listen for the Guide.

There are many references in the Old Testament, that Isaiah would have been familiar with, of people 'hearing' the voice of God. The Lord spoke to Abraham. The Lord spoke to Moses. The Lord spoke audibly to little Samuel in the temple. He did not recognize God's voice at first, but came to recognize it well the longer he walked with God.

When we get to the New Testament, God continues to speak to people. God speaks through angels and dreams and visions. Jesus said:

[John 14:16-17](#) I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, *who leads into all truth*. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

There are many references to Holy Spirit communicating with the Jesus followers. Instructing them. Rebuking them. Directing people to go to one place or another.

It is my belief that Isaiah is referring to this same Holy Spirit. As we seek to discover the Good Way God invites everyone to take, not only do we have the scriptures to guide us, God supernaturally communicates with our spirits.

This is where taking an actual walk with God, can be most helpful. Taking a walk with God lends itself hearing God's voice well.

What forms does this communication take? While I have never heard any **audible voice** from God, I have heard credible testimony of some who have heard the audible voice of God.

God also speaks to us through our **own thoughts**. When you are driving down the road and suddenly a thought about someone pops into your head, and you get a sense that you should reach out to that person. I believe that is often God speaking to you.

God can also speak to us through what I will call an **impression**, or a gut feeling. Luke seems to be saying this in his story about Paul and a shipwreck.

Acts 27:9-10 The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.

¹⁰ "Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well."

In another translation Paul says, "**I perceive that this voyage will end in disaster...**" Paul had an impression about what would happen – it was God communicating with him.

Some of our 'gut' feelings, are actually Holy Spirit being the voice behind us saying, "Walk this Way." "Choose this option."

Sometimes we might think, "I just wish God would tell me the correct answer. Then I would know for sure."

Dallas Willard makes this observation:

"Jesus' aim in teaching is not to win arguments, but to achieve understanding or insight in his hearers...he presents matters in such a way that those who wish to know can find their way to...the appropriate conclusion as something they have discovered..."

Holy Spirit seems to teach the same way.

Holy Spirit's method, even in helping us make decisions, is not mostly, making the decision for us – so we are sure to get it right. But rather Holy Spirit wants us to become people who learn to know him so well, and become so much like, Jesus, that we will begin making decisions that will be the same as if God is making the decision himself.

That is a scary thought to me. And that thought leads me to another question? Is there any way I can be sure I am making the correct decision? I have come to believe that is the wrong question to ask. A better question about decision making might be, **“How can I know I have chosen the good way?”**

Does God give us any assistance in identifying the Good Way?

(4. Identifying the Good Way)

Certainly, being familiar with the character of God as revealed in the scripture is important. Being familiar with the commands or instructions of God is important. Being familiar with the stories in the bible that so often reveal what pleases and displeases God is important.

But perhaps we can summarize these identifying traits by referring to what we often call,

The Fruit of the Spirit

Jesus said he would send Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. This is not just knowing fact truth. This includes wisdom truth that informs how we live and make decisions, using good information. Paul addresses this with the Jesus followers in the churches in Galatia.

Galatians 5:16-26

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling,

jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.²⁶ Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

The Good Way God invites us to take, found by immersing ourselves in the scriptures, and listening to Holy Spirit, will result in seeing these Fruit of Holy Spirit in our lives. Things like, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control are all found consistently along the good path and in the one choosing the good path.

Taking the good path, not only ends in a good place – the quiet rest of God. Taking the good path transforms you along the way into a person that looks more and more like Jesus.

Walking this way becomes an outward expression of what we believe. We are walking this way when we choose:

Peace over hostility

Honesty over deception

Kindness over sarcasm

Trust over fear

Thankfulness over complaining

Forgiveness over retaliation.

Do you want to be confident that you are making good choices? Let me ask you:

Are you exhibiting more and more of the character of Jesus in your life?

Before we close there is one sobering reminder we need to make, because both Jeremiah and Isaiah point it out.

(5. A Sobering Reminder)

In Jeremiah's poem we read:

This is what the Lord says:

**“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.**

We stopped there earlier. But Jeremiah continues with his sad commentary.

**But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’
¹⁷ [The Lord said] I appointed watchmen over you and said,
‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’
But you said, ‘We will not listen.’**

I learned just last weekend, there are over 20 different bugle calls used by the military. They each communicate a different but important message to the troops. But they do no good if the troops do not listen to them.

Jeremiah pictures the advice of God as a bugle call. But the response of the people was, “We will not listen. We will not walk in the way that leads to rest for our souls.”

God's guiding does no good if we do not listen to it. One of the saddest stories in the gospels is in:

Matthew 19:16-22

Someone came to Jesus with this question: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

Jesus replied. “To answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸ “Which ones?” the man asked.

And Jesus replied: “You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁰ “I’ve obeyed all these commandments,” the young man replied. “What else must I do?”

²¹ Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²² But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Sadly, many hear what they are to do. But turn and walk away, because they do not like what they hear. How sad.

God’s invitation to “Walk this Way” is not mostly about knowing and following the rules – although they are important. It is not mostly about getting your theology and doctrine correct. Although good theology and good doctrine is necessary.

“Walk this Way” is an invitation to choose to listen to the voice of God, to understand the ancient words, and then to Follow Jesus, a person.

PRAY

Sermon Lab Questions

1. If your house was about to burn down, what do you think you would try to save?
2. Some decisions have major consequences, others have only minor consequences.
How do you make decisions with minor consequences?
How do you make decisions about major consequences?
3. Do you think most choices are already determined for us by God, or do we have a wide choice in most matters?
4. Do you have a favorite bible story or passage, that helps you when you have to make a big decision?
5. How do you “hear” God’s voice? Can anyone hear God’s voice?
6. I mentioned a few opposing characteristics between the Good Way and the Bad Way. Can you think of some other opposing characteristics we should be on the lookout for in our lives?

7. Will your decision make you more loving? [Philippians 1:9-11](#)

[And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.](#)