

Voices of Ecclesia

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

Newsletter of Eden Baptist Church

Volume 5 • No. 2 • April 2008

Anatomy of a Decision: Finding God's Will

JON PRATT

How can one discern the Lord's will for his life? Everyone faces this huge question in regard to the major decisions of life (e.g. vocation, spouse, church home). A second tier of queries also has substantial ramifications in people's lives: Should I go to college? Where should I go to college? How many children should we have? Should we buy a house or rent? Should I accept this job promotion? Would it be wise to accept this job offer from another company? Should I serve the Lord in America or in a foreign country? Can I continue to care for my ailing spouse at home? At what age should I plan to retire? And many more questions could be listed.

Continued on page 2

Thursday Night Mealtime: A Peek into the Discipleship Bible Study

JOHN AND KELLY JOHNSON

We all like to eat, yes? There are some who get downright excited about mealtime. Food is the source of our physical nourishment. It's vital. Without it, we would slowly, painfully starve to death. We are thankful for God's blessing to Noah in Genesis 9 where he gives us ALL things for food, both plants and animals. (We're especially thankful for the meat!)

Just as food is vital to the physical body, so God's Word is to the believer. The Lord tells us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Deut. 8:3) We cannot get by on physical food alone. Born-again believers need a consistent intake of God's Word in order to develop spiritual maturity.

As infants in Christ, we had a craving for the spiritual food that would nourish our souls. We often listened to Christian radio and TV evangelists to hear what they had to say. Discerning what they said, however, was a different matter. We lacked the spiritual maturity to know

Continued on page 7

Anatomy of a Decision:
Finding God's Will
page 1

...

Thursday Night Mealtime
page 1

...

Standing before the Maker
of Victoria Falls
page 4

...

We'll Understand It Better
By and By
page 5

...

desiringgod.org
Web site Review
page 8

Common wisdom from our culture suggests that the answers to life's decisions lie within: "Go with your gut." "Let your conscience be your guide." If it feels good, do it." Or perhaps a less narcissistic counselor might ask, "What makes the most sense financially?" "What will accomplish the greatest good for the greatest number of people?" "Which decision will create the best atmosphere for peace and unity?"

Of course, the followers of Christ know that the worldviews represented by suggestions like these fail to consider the one and only source of true wisdom. For the One who created all things and who providentially rules this creation has provided a Book in which he reveals his perfect will. This Word is a lamp for one's feet and a light for one's path (Ps 119:105); this Word is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16); this Word gives the ability to understand the fear of the Lord and to find the knowledge of God (Prov 2:1-5).

While the Bible is the Christian's main resource when making decisions, God has provided another means by which believers can receive guidance: the Holy Spirit. Just before he returned to the Father after his earthly ministry, Jesus promised his followers that the Spirit would be sent to give guidance (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). This promise is further substantiated by Paul when he speaks of the fact that believers are led by the Spirit in their Christian walk (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18).

But this is the point at which the believer experiences consternation. What if the Bible does not directly address the decision I need to make? How can I discern the Spirit's leading in regard to my specific question? While true believers desire to do their Father's will (John 10:27), they can be tempted to follow fleshly desires that would entrap them and result in sinful actions (James 1:14-15). So the question remains for the believer, "How can I be sure that I am making the decision that best accords with the will of God?"

I suggest four criteria for Christians to consider when seeking to determine the Lord's will.

CONFORMING TO SCRIPTURE. God will never lead a Christian to make a decision contrary to his revealed Word. Thus, entering a dating relationship with an unbeliever is against God's will (2 Cor 6:14). Drinking alcohol to the point of inebriation is unacceptable (Eph 5:18). Joining a church that has women in positions of spiritual authority over men

violates Scripture (1 Tim 2:12). Regardless of the many scriptural justifications a person may consider in situations like these (e.g. I can witness to her if I date her; I can teach them what the Bible really means if I join with them), Christians must submit to what the Scriptures teach. Many foolish actions of Christians would be stopped right at this point if the Bible were used as the guide it was intended to be.

SEEKING WISE COUNSEL. In addition to the direction that the Word provides, Solomon reminds us that an abundance of counselors provides safety (Prov 11:14). And these are not to be just any counselors, but counselors who give wise instruction to seekers (Prov 1:2-7). Rarely will this type of wisdom for decision-making come from one's peers, especially during one's youth. Rather one should seek the advice of respected leaders from the past and present who personally know the individual and who can view the situation through biblically tinted lenses. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that we are to remember our leaders and to imitate their faith (Heb 13:7). One of the best ways for Christians to do this is to seek their counsel. After all, they "keep watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account" (Heb 13:17); they know you and desire your spiritual best.

This hunting for wise counsel does not stop when one reaches a certain age. In my recent decision to change ministries (if the reader will excuse this personal illustration) I contacted my dad, a former pastor with whom I had served at a previous church, several close friends, my siblings, my brother-in-law who had formerly served alongside me in a local church, and my fellow elders here at EBC. And I can gladly affirm that Solomon's words are very true indeed.

SPENDING TIME IN PRAYER. There is little question that God's people must seek him in prayer when considering any decision. Whether we look to the example of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:35-36) or Daniel and the prospect of facing lions (Dan 6:10) or Peter seeking guidance in ministry (Acts 10:9-16), the Bible is replete with example after example of God's servants seeking his face for guidance. No Christian can ignore the biblical mandates for seeking God's guidance in prayer whether by direct command (James 1:5) or by implication (Phil 1:9-10).

In considering the importance of prayer in decision making, two cautions are in order. First, one might

be tempted to think that prayer is an unnecessary or peripheral activity because of the mistaken assumption that prayer does not matter a whole lot in the big scheme of things (but see James 5:16b–18). Or it may be that people downplay prayer because they are afraid of how God may use prayer to impress upon them an answer they would rather not consider (e.g. Joshua and the Gibeonites – Josh 9). A second caution relates to using prayer to justify one’s decisions rather than to seek the Lord’s will. This type of justification might be shown when one excuses his foolish decision by saying, “I prayed about it,” as if this mantra should take away everyone’s objections. This error might also be demonstrated when someone chooses prayer as the only means by which he seeks to discern God’s direction while ignoring the other three criteria mentioned here.

DISCERNING GOD’S DIRECTION. One of the more subjective aspects of the decision-making process is trying to get a read on God’s direction through circumstances and human reason. We must be extremely careful not to misread this direction (once again wise counselors add eyes to our viewing). But we ought to take account of the practical realities of the situation in which God has placed us. Drawing up a list of positives and negatives often helps us to step away from the emotion of a decision in order to think more objectively about what is actually at stake.

There may also be the need to take small steps toward a particular decision in order to see if it is the one God has planned for us. This would appear to be the way that Jonathan approached his decision about attacking the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14:6: “Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.’” Apparently, God would have made it obvious to Jonathan that he did not want him to attack, but in this case Jonathan’s initiative was met with God’s open door and a great victory was achieved. Currently EBC is seeking to do this by investigating the possibilities of building out an existing structure. We believe that God will make his will clear to us as we come to the end of the designated time period. But even here this moving forward has not been a hasty, uninformed act because we do believe that God has given us a legitimate desire for a new facility. In all of this God expects his children to use the minds, abilities, and information he has provided. This certainly appears to be the attitude James commends in 4:13–15.

These four criteria should provide ample help in securing God’s direction in the decisions we face. Sometimes people make the error of thinking that finding God’s will is like searching for hidden treasure—a delusive dream that God dangles out in front of us to antagonize and irritate us. Others try to use Gideon’s fleece approach, asking God to send them some divine sign of his direction. Still others use some bizarre dream or unusual circumstance as evidence of God’s leading. Or there is the “God wouldn’t want me to actually enjoy doing his will” philosophy that finds it obligatory to choose the most undesirable path. None of these approaches is wise or biblical. God reminds his children that they can trust unswervingly in his direction (Prov 3:5–6) and that he will give them the desires of their hearts (Ps 37:4). And, indeed, it is often by his deliberate design that the uncertainty of the decision-making process causes us to fall more greatly in dependence on God and not ourselves.

Do you find yourself in the midst of a difficult decision? Follow God’s revealed will, seek the counsel of godly advisers, pray for a spirit of wisdom and discernment, and think through the circumstances that God has arranged. May God give us joy in seeking and finding his will along this earthly path to glory.

God reminds his children that they can trust unswervingly in his direction and that he will give them the desires of their hearts. And, indeed, it is often by his deliberate design that the uncertainty of the decision-making process causes us to fall more greatly in dependence on God and not ourselves.



Standing before the Maker of Victoria Falls

DAN MILLER

The thunderous roar of water was deafening as it pounded the rocks some 250 feet directly below where I stood wide-eyed and fairly quivering with excitement. I stood suspended in space before Zambia's Victoria Falls—a stunning 250-350 foot high water falls stretching an entire mile across its length. The waters of the mighty Zambezi River hurl angrily over this precipice into a gorge measuring a mere 400 feet in width. The converging waters detonate with such force as they pour into this narrow chasm the spray can rise over one mile into the air and be seen from 25 miles away. The mist is so heavy and the sound so cacophonous, I confess I felt Victoria Falls more than I actually saw its splendor. (The picture above was taken at a drier season than when I visited the falls).

Had I attempted to get as close as I stood to the falls by riding over it in a raft, I would have plunged 300 feet and been crushed to death. Had I tried to wade across the river exploding through the gorge below, I would have been torn limb from limb and swept away by the raging waters. There was only one way I could stand so close to Victoria Falls and live to tell about it: I trusted the single, narrow walking bridge that spans the gorge and puts one face-to-face with the falls.

This experience serves, in my mind, as a faint reflection of my future accounting before God. It is the consistent testimony of the New Testament authors that every soul will someday stand before the all-powerful Creator of the universe whose moral perfections will flow freely like a thunderous waterfall, sweeping away every sinner to eternal judgment.

I realize this is by no means a commonly held opinion in our day. Even many who readily identify themselves as Christians dismiss such warnings as the vestige of a bygone age—religion long ago evolving past such unconscionable scare tactics. Yet I would argue that neither the most resolute opponent of the Bible, nor the Christian most readily embarrassed by its more strident passages, is helped in the least by pretending the biblical authors did not consistently and passionately issue such warnings. Read Romans 2:1-11; 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12; Hebrews 9:27; 2 Peter 2:4-9; Revelation 20:11-15; and you will have to agree. Pull the thread of pending divine judgment from the biblical storyline and the message unravels; retain it, and you at least permit yourself to understand the worldview that informed the New Testament authors.

If the vision of these authors is to be honestly deciphered (to say nothing of trusted), we must recognize that they believed all people are sinners, fall short of the glory of God, violate his law, and serve false idols to his defamation. In consequence, all will stand against the raging power of God's absolute holiness with less self-sufficiency than they would possess in an attempt to swim over Victoria Falls (Romans 1:18-32; 3:10-20).

The Bible never mutes the gravity of human frailty in the face of the awesome power of God's holy nature. As God cannot change his nature to be anything other than all-powerful and perfectly holy, sinners have no hope of withstanding his judgment. No hope, that is, except one.

One solid bridge spans the chasm of God's judgment—one way is provided for sinners to stand face-to-face with God and not die. That way is Jesus Christ who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus does not point the way to God. He does not merely teach us about truth. He does not help us live a better life. Jesus is himself the singular Bridge on which one may stand in God's presence and live.

In more specific terms, Jesus came from God, perfectly fulfilled God's law, suffered the wrath of God in the place of sinners when he died on the cross, and rose from the grave in victory over death which is the penalty of sin. Those who trust the work of Jesus to pay the penalty of their sins and trust in his resurrection, receive the gift of Jesus' righteous standing before God (Romans 3:21-26; 6:23). The one who thus believes, Jesus promised, "does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24b).

We can enter eternity in our own strength and attempt to wade across the fulminating flow of God's pristine righteousness, or we can stand before our Maker secure in Jesus and filled with awe and wonder before a glory that defies earthly explanation and fills us with eternal joy. We may either dismiss such notions or trust the Bridge. Eternity will reveal whether there is any terror or splendor to be realized in our choice. The voices of the Apostles ring in urgent concert insisting there most certainly is. I trust those voices. I have planted my feet firmly on the Bridge of Jesus. With keen anticipation I await the day I will stand safe in Christ in a state of incomparable awe and wonder before the glorious presence of the Almighty Maker of Victoria Falls. I fairly quiver with excitement at the thought. How about you?

VE

We'll Understand It Better By and By

CHARLES ALBERT TINDLEY 1851-1933

BARBARA BRINK

The country was just ten years away from civil war when Charles Tindley was born in Berlin, Maryland. His mother was a free woman but his father was a slave, so Charles grew up working alongside slaves until after the war and emancipation. He was not formally educated but had a desire to excel, and as a young man he taught himself to read and write.

At the age of seventeen he married a girl named Daisy Henry. They moved north to Philadelphia to find work and he got a job as a hod carrier, toting supplies for builders. His dream was to be a minister, but he had no real education. He needed to be able to continue supporting his ever-growing family while he studied, and so he took local night classes and studied correspondence courses from Boston Theological Seminary. He also taught himself New Testament Greek and found a rabbi who would tutor him in Hebrew. He worked as the janitor for the Bainbridge Street Methodist Church until he took his final exam and became a Methodist minister.

In 1902, after pastoring several other churches, Charles was asked to pastor the church he had served in as janitor twenty-five years earlier. It was a small congregation of less than 200 members, but with the gifts God bestowed upon Charles it began to grow. Membership was a diverse mix of blacks and whites, but mostly poor folk.

Daisy and he had eight children and times were hard. They scraped to get by, but Charles had the kind of faith that never doubted God's care for them. A story is told that when there was no food in the house for supper, he asked his wife to go ahead and set the table. "Why bother?" she asked, knowing full well there was nothing to feed their children. Charles insisted, "Set the table and we'll pray." When they finished praying, there was a knock on the door. A man from their congregation brought them dinner. He claimed his family had cooked too much.

God gave Charles the special gift of ministering to folks' needs. He was known as the people's pastor because of his

Continued on next page

loving care for individuals. He was not only the leader of a large congregation but was actively involved in establishing a soup kitchen and clothing ministry for the poor.

Charles composed music and words to over 50 gospel hymns in his lifetime. He didn't know how to write music out by hand, but he dictated the tunes and lyrics to a transcriber. His hymns were written from the soul of a man who lived through slavery, civil war, poverty, and prejudice, and yet they were filled with hope of heaven, trust in God's sovereignty, and joy of friendship with the Savior. Tindley's well-known hymn, *Some Day*, gives a glimpse into his heart and where he put his hope.

*Burdens now may crush me down
Disappointments all around
Troubles speak in mournful sigh
Sorrow through a tear stained eye
There is a world where pleasure reigns
No mourning soul shall roam its plains
And to that land of peace and glory
I want to go some day*

(Refrain)

*I do not know how long 'twill be
Nor what the future holds for me
But this I know, if Jesus leads me
I shall get home some day*

During sermons, Charles would often break out into song, his soul so full of God's love and mercy he felt the need to share his joy. The congregation would happily join him on the refrain.

He wrote, *We'll Understand it Better By and By* while in the midst of church financial problems and crippling poverty all around. A man known as a constant worrier came to Charles one day to share his troubles. Charles listened for a while and then said, "My advice to you is

put all your troubles in a sack, take'em to the Lord, and leave'em there." He later wrote the hymn—

*Leave it there, leave it there
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there
If you trust and never doubt, He will surely bring you out
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there*

Charles Tindley's Gospel hymns were conceived in a nation often torn apart by hate, oppression, and poverty. But he sang with a fire and passion for God that only comes through trial and tribulation. Years of heartache, pain, and disappointment forged a strong hope in the promises of a better place, an eternal reward, and a blessed Savior. You only have to listen to these moving hymns of faith to recognize God's refining process in the life of a man known as one of the founding fathers of Gospel music.

Many gospel musicians over the years have credited Charles Tindley as their inspiration. Thomas A Dorsey, after hearing Tindley's hymns was convicted to change his life and write Gospel music. In 1932 when Dorsey's wife died in childbirth he sat down at the piano and penned, *Precious Lord, Take my Hand*, one of the most beloved hymns of all time. Although Gospel music has definitely morphed into something quite different in the present day, Charles Tindley's hymns still resonate with hurting individuals who need a Savior.

Charles died in 1933 at the age of 82. His church had grown to over ten thousand members, but the country was suffering through the great depression and a headstone was not a priority. He was buried in an unmarked grave. In spite of the circumstances he left behind, I'm sure he was singing as he went—

*O courage, my soul, and let us journey on
For tho' the night is dark, it won't be very long
O thanks be to God, the morning light appears
And the storm is passing over, Hallelujah!*

(VE)



Charles Albert Tindley

**Born: July 7, 1851 in
Berlin, Maryland**

**Died: July 26, 1933 (age 82)
in Philadelphia, Penn.**

Minister and composer

Editor's note: For a listing of Tindley's hymns and a piano recording of some of his more famous songs such as *Nothing Between my Soul and My Savior* visit www.cyberhymnal.org

what was nutritious and what was just “junk food.” Contrary to popular belief, not everything that you hear on TV and radio is true. We heard many things and knew just enough to make us dangerous (you know the type)!

In 1996 Pastor Miller began a Bible study with a newly-saved couple (Brandon & Jennifer Fish) who came with an insatiable desire to learn God’s Word. They brought others to the study with them, and it grew from there. It has continued from that time and is known today as the Discipleship Bible Study, which meets on Thursday evenings.

We started attending the study in the fall of 1999. Like Brandon and Jennifer, we also had a desire to know more about God’s Word. At that time there were about six new believers in the study. Can you imagine the questions coming from that many new believers who all listened to TV and radio evangelists?! Pastor Miller’s patience was amazing. He spent much time undoing and correcting all the unbiblical teaching we had heard over the airwaves. Over time we grew more discerning and were not swayed by such false teachings (Eph. 4:14).

The format of the study is very informal. Before beginning with the prepared study notes, Pastor allows for time to field questions. Some questions may come from our own personal study, conversations with others, a recent sermon, or clarification from the previous week’s lesson. This opening portion of the study provides a great opportunity to get lingering thoughts clarified.

The way in which Pastor has designed the study allows participants to grasp the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. The focus is not to study for the sake of knowledge alone, but rather the aim is that the understanding and application of Scripture will bring about growth and maturity in our relationship with Christ and with others. Some of the topics in the study include the Word of God (what the Bible is and how we got it, the purpose of it, and how we can understand it.), creation and the fall of man, salvation, results of salvation, security in salvation, spiritual living, and the church (what it is and how it functions).

The chapter about the church was instrumental in helping us to see how we fit into the body of believers and how



we are to use our God-given strengths and abilities for edification of the body and glorification of God (1 Cor 12).

Pastor Miller wisely understands the importance of providing a solid foundation for new believers. As we reflect back to our infant years, we can see how critical these doctrinal truths have been. Although we did not realize it at the time, our participation in this Bible study has proven to be crucial in establishing a strong foundation and setting the course for our continued growth.

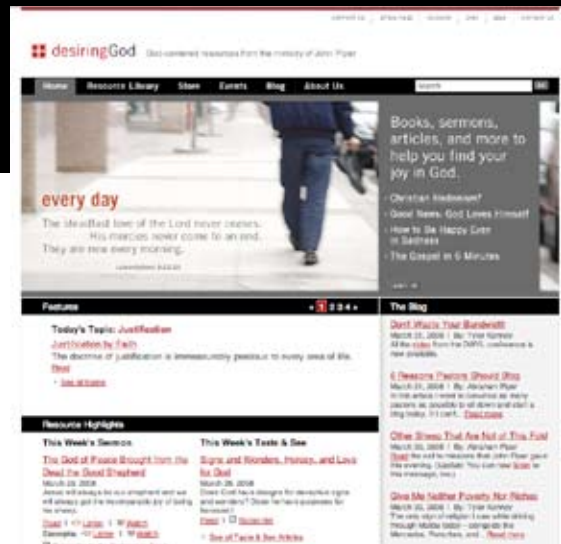
It has been nine years since we began Thursday night mealtime at Eden, and we continue to attend the study – it’s that good! The Discipleship Bible Study is not JUST for new believers. It builds up and nourishes believers at all stages and ages. God has used this study to deepen our understanding of his Word and its principles and doctrines. It is also exciting to see others learning and growing in Christ as God opens their eyes to see his amazing love.

The dynamics of the group change depending on who is attending. It is never dull because God’s Word is never dull. Remember the story of how Brad Jamison worked to teach the kids in Sunday School about the incomprehensibility of God? If we studied every minute for the rest of our lives, we could never fathom the depths of God’s wisdom.

We are blessed to have elders who shepherd the flock of God by teaching us and pointing us to the only words that give life, which provide nourishment for our souls. If you desire spiritual growth and have never attended the study, we encourage you to do so. It has been life-changing for us! See you at the dinner table!

www.desiringgod.org

A WEB REVIEW BY RICH MOLDENHAUER



The purpose of the Desiring God website is to “spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.” The goal of Desiring God is to see God’s Word reach and influence the entire world. The website was built to help people set their affections on God and make God an integral part of every aspect of life. Allow me to provide an overview of this very helpful website.

SERMONS & MESSAGES

The sermons (by John Piper) available on the website go back to 1980. These sermons can be searched for by title, occasion, date, series, and topic. Also available are the many messages given by various speakers from the Desiring God National Conference and the Bethlehem Pastor’s Conference that have been held annually for several years. John Piper has also spoken in numerous venues on a variety of topics; these are also available. The great thing about this website is that anyone can read, listen to or download these sermons or messages for free.

BOOKS & ARTICLES

Most of the books that John Piper has written are available to read on the website. Some of these are even available for download to your computer. Study guides to some of the books, many articles, and poems written by Piper are also accessible. A reference guide section is provided which points in the direction of many valuable reference tools. Some of these tools are even available to use on the website. A number of blogs are offered on the website that deal with a variety of topics. Again, all are provided free of charge.

STORE

If you are interested in a copy of a sermon on a CD or hard copy of a book seen on the website you can go to the store and order a copy. Most of the items for sale relate to John Piper or the Desiring God organization. The prices are very reasonable.

BROWSING TOOLS

Have you ever been to a website and searched and searched and never found what you were looking for? Or have you spent way too much time on a site before finally finding the information you wanted? This will not happen at the Desiring God website. The browsing tool on the website is one of the best I have seen. You can search by topic, language, author, title and Scripture passage. These browsing tools enable you to find what you are looking for right away.

FEEDS & PODCASTS

Desiring God offers much for those on the cutting edge of technology. You can subscribe to audio or video podcasts. Once you subscribe a sermon file or sermon excerpt can be automatically downloaded to your computer every Monday. Every weekday morning a podcast from the daily radio program can be downloaded to your computer. This enables you to watch or listen to the podcasts at your convenience.

You can also subscribe to a feed. Once subscribed you will be notified when new content has been posted. Blogs, radio programs, sermons and “Taste and See” articles are also made available to subscribers.

In a day when many Christian organizations are seeking to make money in every possible way, Desiring God has succeeded in providing numerous resources at a very low cost, and in many cases they do so for free. Believe me, searching through this website will be well worth your time and effort.

Vox Ecclesia™ is a bi-monthly newsletter designed to edify the people of Eden Baptist Church. Subscriptions available for \$6.00 per year.



Contributors to this Issue: Dan Miller, Th.M., Senior Pastor of Eden Baptist Church; Jon Pratt, Ph.D., Associate Pastor of Eden Baptist Church; John and Kelly Johnson, members of Eden Baptist Church; Barbara Brink, member of Eden Baptist Church; Rich Moldenhauer, M. Div., deacon of Eden Baptist Church

Jon Pratt, editor; Dan Miller, assistant editor, Rebecca Rosemeier, graphic designer

*A ministry of Eden Baptist Church, 12540 Glenhurst Ave, Savage, MN 55378
952.890.5856 www.edenbaptist.org*