

Valley Living – part six
“The Valley of Decision”
Pastor Dale Campfield – Eastgate Community Church
July 26th, 2009

Intro:

Matt 28:19 *“Go and make disciples of all nations...”*

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration. To grow...which is expressed in our Connection Groups. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Sermon Series Title: Valley Living

Series Synopsis: We’ve RESET our assumptions of Jesus Christ; climbed the mountain learning about the teaching of Jesus Christ; now...we’ll deal with the place we live the most..... The Valley. It’s in the valley that we learn the lessons we need to learn that enable us to climb that next mountain. It’s in the valley experiences of life that God meets us in ways we need Him the most. It’s in the valleys of life that Jesus Christ truly becomes personal to us. Without the valley, there would be no mountain to climb.

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Part One: “Macho Man in a Macho Valley”

Part Two: Surviving Dark Valleys”

Part Three: Depression in the Valley”

Part Four: “Giant Killing in the Valley”

Part Five: “The Valley of Dry Bones”

Part Six: “The Valley of Decision”

Dr. Eric Klinger did a study at the University of Minnesota and he determined that **all of us face somewhere between 300 and 17,000 decisions every day**. Imagine! Seventeen thousand decisions! Now granted, a lot of those are subconscious. They're the kind of decisions a lot of us don't even think about. There are two ink pens on the desk. We decide to use the blue one. We decide what response we're going to give to a question. We decide what clothes to wear. We approach an intersection and the traffic light is yellow. We decide to... slow down (right?) and stop.

Some decisions are more complex and because they are the consequences of these decisions are more life altering.

Decisions are the building blocks of life. That your life really is the sum total, brick upon brick, of the choices and the decisions you've made. If your life is going well it's probably because you've made good choices. If your life is going poorly it may be the result of poor decisions you've made along the way.

When living in the valley, we have to make decisions. Often times, these decisions are at certain crossroads. Valleys bring about PIVOTAL DECISION TIMES. These points happen at particular changing points.

VALLEY DECISIONS WE'VE MADE

We had to make these decisions coming out of some of our valley experiences.

- Should we try and have another baby after Cali died?
- Should we continue on with our marriage?
- Should we move to Ohio?
- Should we buy a house instead of rent?
- Should we pastor Eastgate Community Church?

LIFE IS TOUGH..... AND DECISIONS STILL MUST BE MADE.....

HOW DO WE DO MAKE DECISIONS IN THE VALLEY?

1. Stay Calm

Don't Panic. It may feel like the world is coming to an end, but it's not. You may feel like there is nothing left and you are completely hopeless – but you are not. The Bible says that as long as we have breath – there is hope. If you're breathing; and you are, then there is hope. So don't panic.

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”

2. Don't Make a Quick Decision

If you feel pressured to make a decision – don't. I remember clearly my thoughts when the church situation happened. I was ready to move. My heart was so wounded I couldn't think clearly. My soul was at such a low point I remember thinking and began to plan for our move back to the West Coast. We almost did.

I can remember when buying a car for our daughter Linzi, this guy pressured us like crazy to buy it. It ran, but barely! And I almost bought it! But, wisdom prevailed and we walked away from the deal. Remember, God will always set you up for victory, not failure! Take your time in this decision. Relax

Proverbs 18:13

"It's stupid to decide before knowing the facts!"

3. Determine the Facts

You must get all of the facts before you make your decision. You don't go into lightly, but you count the cost as the Bible says. There is no contradiction between faith and fact, finding out all you can before you make a decision.

Proverbs 13:16

"Every prudent man acts out of knowledge."

Ninety percent of all new businesses fail within the first year. And of those that make it, 90% fail within the next five years. That's a Department of Labor statistic. Why? They're based on what I call, uneducated enthusiasm. They've got a great idea but they don't get the facts. That's why a lot of marriages fail -- they are based on uneducated enthusiasm -- love.

Ask yourself, "What do I need to know before I make this decision?"

4. Acknowledge Your Feelings

You're hurting; don't deny the hurt. Work through it. Get some help. Talk about it with someone you trust. You can't wear a mask and try to get through it life; it will eat you up from the inside out. So, be real. Acknowledge the pain, the hurt, the fear, the anger and deal with it.

Luke 12:1

"You can't keep your true self hidden forever; before long you'll be exposed. You can't hide behind a religious mask forever; sooner or later the mask will slip and your true face will be known."

5. Get Advice

Get some advice from those you love and trust. Cathi and I sought the advice from our Spiritual Fathers when it came to making the decision to pastor Eastgate or not. The Bible says there is wisdom in the counsel of many.

Talk to somebody who's made a similar decision, talk to friends who know your weaknesses, ask for advice.

Proverbs 24:6

"The more advise you get, the more likely you are to win."

Henry Ford, founder of Ford motor company, was asked, What's the secret of success. He said "Wise decisions." How do you learn to make wise decisions? "Experience." How do you get experience? "From making stupid decisions."

It is wise to learn from experience, but it is wiser to learn from the experience of others. Ask for advice. I don't have time to learn everything from personal experience. I don't have time to make all the mistakes in life and you don't either. Life is too short to learn everything by trial and error. I don't have to look at certain sins and know they're bad for me, I can see the results in other people's lives. You can learn from others' successes and you can learn from others' failures. If you're wise, you don't try to learn everything first hand, you learn from the experiences of others. The Bible says that we're given these stories in the Bible that we can learn from and grow. You learn to ask for advice.

Proverbs 20:28

"Get good advice and you will succeed."

The problem is that we would rather appear wise than be wise. We think if we ask we'll look like a dunce. But it's more important to be wise than appear wise. The Bible says, wise people ask for advice. If you can't ask for advice you've got an ego problem. The Bible says, "Arrogant people are stupid." They are stupid because they're unwilling to be teachable. If you can't learn you'll never succeed in life. All of us are ignorant, just on different subjects. That's why we need to ask each other and help each other out. The Bible says, "Wisdom and humility go together."

6. Pray for Guidance

Before you do anything else, get God's perspective on the issue.

Prov. 28:16

*"A man is foolish to trust himself. But those who use God's wisdom are safe."
How many of you ever made a stupid decision but when you made it, thought it was the best thing to do?*

We all get impressions -- but they are just that, impressions. They are not from God, they are from what you ate last night -- ideas that pop into your mind. You need something greater than simply intuition, gut feeling, "I think". You need absolute truth on which to base your decisions. You need God's guidance. "The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make."

Ask yourself, "What does God want? Not, What do I want?"

God speaks to us in many ways. His voice may speak to you through the Bible, maybe a sermon, possibly a conversation or some type of circumstance. When you hear His voice, obey. Obedience is a demonstration of faith. Obedience unlocks the key to all of God's blessings in life. God promises to reward you if you'll just follow His directions.

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL?

First, what is it not?

A. It's not a feeling.

This is the mystical approach to God's will and it appeals to all you right brain people. You're out there looking for a feeling, looking for a sensation, looking for that ocean of emotion, that quiver in your liver. You may be looking for a supernatural sign. You want God to just kind of touch your emotions, pull that heartstring so you'll know exactly what to do.

The technique for the feeling approach to God's will goes like this: Let your mind go blank. Get in neutral. Close your eyes. Just wait for the impression, the quiver, the emotion. The problem of course is that feelings are highly, *highly* unreliable. If you always just do what you feel like in life, you're going to be a failure. Feelings will guide you in the wrong way. Feelings can come from fatigue, from your hormones, from an event you've just experienced, something you read, something you saw, something you listened to, a movie, all kinds of stuff like that. They're very unreliable. How many of you have ever made a decision based on feeling and you discovered that it was dead, flat out wrong? We're all experts at knowing that feelings lie.

You say, "But it feels right," but that doesn't mean that it is right. Feelings lie. The Bible says so. Jeremiah 17:9 "*The heart is deceitful.*" That means my heart even plays tricks on me. I've stopped trying to figure out other people's motives because I couldn't figure out my own half the time. "*The heart is deceitful.*" It plays tricks on you.

You don't wait for a feeling when you're trying to figure out God's plan for your life.

B. It's not a formula.

This is the mechanical approach to God's will and this appeals to all you left brain people. You're so logical and rational. You've got it all figured out. You want to look for a formula. You want a recipe. You want a step by step procedure, a ritual. The truth is, most books written on how to know God's will are this second kind of formula approach -- Do this/do that. Presto and you've got a decision. Follow these 27 steps and you're guaranteed results.

But it doesn't work that way. We think it works that because we've been conditioned by TV. TV's conditioned us that every problem can be solved in 30 minutes with three commercials. So we want instant results. We want everything to be easy. We want it all to be in a simple formula so it will instantly change my life. All the best sellers are these 10 Easy Step type books. *Cooking for Dummies*, *An Idiot's Guide Building a Nuclear Reactor*, *Embalming Made Easy*. We want these simple step by step things for the most difficult things.

There's two problems with the formula approach to God's will. In the first place, the formulas often contradict. I have in my library twelve books on God's will. They all give a different formula. Often contradictory. It doesn't work because the formulas don't fit.

The deeper problem with this approach is that there's no room for failure, for mistakes. If God's will is a recipe, what if you leave out one ingredient? If you leave baking soda out of a recipe you've got the difference between a birthday cake and a pancake. There's a big difference there if you leave just one thing out. What if I have 52 Steps to Knowing God's Will and I leave out number 37?

God's will is not a closed system. It is dynamic. God's will is not always an issue of choosing A or B. In fact, many times God's will will be A to Z and any of them will be ok. It's your choice. God's will is not a matter of everything's

in black or white, either/or, A or B. God's will is much greater than that. Most Christians do not realize that there is far more freedom in God's will than you realize.

God solved a lot of your problems when He gave you a brain. Why would He give you a brain and not expect you to use it? It's not just this closed system. It's like the myth that there's only one right person in the world for me to marry. That's not in the Bible. There's not one place in the Bible that says there's only one right person for you to marry. Think about the logic of it. What if one person marries the wrong person? The whole chain breaks down. We're all in trouble. That breaks down on sheer logic.

Then there's the issue of "God has this recipe formula and yet I blew it ten years ago. I made this really stupid decision. I walked away from God. I didn't do the right thing. I'm paying for it still. For the rest of my life I must settle for second best because of the dumb decision I made 10-15-20 years ago. There's only one problem with that view. It's not biblical. Not one place in the Bible do you see the phrase "second best." It's not in the Bible. My Bible tells me that great believers often made enormous mistakes, major, enormous mistakes. And it doesn't say that God gave up on them. It does say that God doesn't give second bests. He does give a second chance. Aren't you grateful for that? I am. There's nothing in the Bible about second best. There's a lot in the Bible about second chance.

So God's will is not a feeling and God's will is not a formula. What is God's will?

C. It is a relationship.

It's not rules, it's relationship. It's not a life map, it's a life style. It's not an agenda of 52 things to do. It is an attitude of life. God says, "I want you to develop a relationship with Me." 1 Corinthians 1:9 *"God has invited you into this wonderful friendship with His Son, Jesus Christ."* Circle "friendship". God wants to be your friend. That is so mind blowing, it's amazing. God says I want you to have a relationship.

There is very little in the Bible about the technique of knowing God's will. Very little. But there are thousands and thousands of verses that talk about developing a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Why? Because that's the issue. God's will is a relationship. When you've got that down, the closer you get to Christ, the more intimate, the better you get to know Him, the less problem you're going to have with this issue.

When I first got married to Cathi, I needed a lot of guidance as a husband. Fortunately my wife was very eager to give it. "You need to do this ... that..." She was very up front about giving me guidance as a new husband.

Many, many years later I have to say this: I know my wife. I know her very well. She could be setting here and I know what she'd be thinking of what I just said. I can read her like a book and I can see things that are going to happen and I know exactly how she's going to react. Because I know my wife. I know her intimately. Because of that, she doesn't have to give me all these rules and regulations and guidance much any more because I already know. Sometimes I just watch her eyes. And I know exactly what she's thinking. She does the same with me. That's part of building an intimate relationship. The Bible says that God wants you to watch His eyes. He guides us with His eyes.

How do I know God's will? What is God's will? It's relationship. The key is, focus on God not guidance. The better you get to know Him, the less confusion you're going to have about what His will is. Get to know God and everything else becomes secondary.

7. Await Confirmation

When you feel like God's telling you something, await confirmation. It can come through the Bible, a conversation, reading a book, etc. Confirmation comes in ways that God designs for us and brings the confidence that we need that the decision is right.

Ephesians 5:15-17

"Be very wise how you live. Don't live like those who are not wise. Live wisely. I mean that you should use every chance you have for doing good because these are evil times. So don't be foolish with your lives. Learn what the Lord wants you to do."

8. Calculate the Cost

There is a price tag for every decision in life, even the seemingly most insignificant decision. Every time you give a minute of your life to anything, you're giving your life away. You'll never get that minute back. When you give your time to something, you're giving your life for it. You can always get more money, but you can't always get more time. You only have a certain number of days.

Every decision has a price tag. It will cost you time, money, energy, reputation, talents, resources. There's always an investment to be made.

Proverbs 20:25

"It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later consider his VOWS."

It is a trap to decide without deliberating, to make a promise without pondering it first, to make a commitment without first considering the cost of the commitment. It is OK when people pressure you to make a decision to say, "I'll get back to you." It is not as important that you make a quick decision, but that you make the right decision.

We even say this when people come to Eastgate to consider giving their lives to Christ. We don't always pressure people to give their lives to Christ the very first time they hear the message. We say to take the time to make the right decision. I'm convinced that if you sincerely consider it, the claims of Christ, the benefits that He offers if you give your life to Him, you'll make the right decision.

It says it's always a trap to make the decision without first considering the cost. One of the rules of life is that it's always easier to get in than to get out. It's easier to get into a relationship than get out. It's easier to get into debt than to get out. It's easier to fill your schedule than fulfill your schedule. Calculate the cost.

Jesus said that no man builds a tower without first figuring out how much it's going to cost. He said no king goes to war unless he counts the soldiers first to make sure he has enough to win.

H.L Hunt said, "There are only two keys to success in life. One, decide what you really want. And two, decide what you're willing to pay for it." There is a price tag with every decision.

9. Act on What You Already Know To Do

The truth is, you already know a lot of things God wants you to do. You already know a lot of what God wants you to do with your life. So why haven't you done it? God is not obligated to give you Step Two until you've already done Step One. Some of you keep saying, "I want to know God's will for my career/marriage." and God's says, "Let's get to the basics. Are you reading your Bible? Are you in a connection group? Are you tithing? Are you praying to Me? Basic things." You say, "But I want to know about..." God is not obligated for Step Two until first you start doing what you already know to be the revealed will of God for your life.

We always make excuses. "I'm intending to do those things... I'm going to get around to it one of these days."

James 4:17

"Anyone who knows the right thing to do but doesn't do it is sinning."

If I know the right thing to do and I'm not doing it, I'm sinning. *"Don't boast about tomorrow for you don't know what a day may bring forth."* Don't say you're going to do it tomorrow or next week.

10. Face your fears

It is fear that is at the root of all of your indecision. It is the fear that you will make a mistake, that you'll fail, that you'll embarrass yourself. It's the fear that you will make a commitment that you can't keep. It is the fear that somebody will laugh at me, reject me because of my commitment. It's always, always fear that keeps you and makes you be indecisive."

We don't like to admit that we're afraid so we make excuses. Moses said "I can't talk." Gideon said, "I'm too young." Abraham said, "I'm too old."

What's your excuse?

God has a dream for your life and Jesus Christ wants to be a part of your life. Some of you are saying "I don't have the time, I don't have the money, I don't have the experience, I don't have the education, I don't have the contacts, I don't have the resources, If only I were married, If only I were unmarried, If only I were older, or younger, in another country, in another year....." It's fear that's keeping you from making the decision that God wants you to make.

Eccl. 11:4

"If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done."

Perfectionism paralyzes potential. God has always used imperfect people in imperfect situations to get His will done. Always. If you're waiting for that perfect person to come along -- they're not coming. If you're waiting for that perfect situation, things to be just right, or certain things to get over before you really get committed to Christ -- it's not going to happen. The basic commitments of life must be made in the middle of the stuff of life. Life goes on.

What's the antidote to fear? Faith. Romans 8:31 "If God is for us, who can be against us?" You trust God and start moving. In spite of the problems, fears, doubts. The secret is that you move against your fear, do the thing you fear the most. If you know it's God's will and God's given you a dream, you make the decision and you move against the fear and you watch the Red Sea open up and you watch the manna be provided and you watch God do the miracle in that relationship, in that problem, your finances, whatever it is.

Last one, as you make decisions in the valley...

11. Don't Look Back

You can't second guess your decision. The decision is made, now you walk it out. But you walk it out with confidence that God is with you each step along the way!

Prov. 14:26

"Reverence for the Lord gives confidence and security."

Prov. 16:3

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed."

And as you do...

You watch... You wait... You'll See!