

How Do I Know...(Vince)

Intro:

Last week we started a series of messages all about knowing God's plan for our lives. One of the biggest question we pastors get is the one that sounds something like this: "What should I do with my life? How do I know if I'm doing what God wants me to do? I love it if God would just send a billboard and show me what I'm supposed to do with my life. Years ago, there was an advertising group called the Freeman Institute who took that last statement seriously and paid to have a bunch of billboards put up around the United States that had 17 different neat and catchy phrases on them and they were all signed by God. Do you remember those? Here's a list of what they said:

- "Follow Me." - God
- "Have You Read My #1 Best Seller? There Will Be A Test." - God
- "I Love You...I Love You...I Love You..." - God
- "Let's Meet At My House Sunday Before the Game" - God

Maybe you have seen one of these signs. In fact I still see some of these signs when I drive home to Reading. A sign that says "Are you going to Heaven or Hell? Call this number!" is one I see often. It isn't very helpful for someone who has a relationship with Christ. It probably isn't helpful for someone who doesn't.

If you are someone who has a relationship with Jesus, chances are you have wanted a "sign" from God for your life. We want to hear from God. We just wish the signs were more specific. I would much rather have a sign that says "Vince, I know It sounds crazy but be a dentist. Seriously, you are going to love it." Now that's helpful! Why can't it be that easy? How many of you want that kind of sign?

God has given you much more than a sign. He has given you a letter. The Bible. In this book are accounts of people being directed by God. God continually gives wisdom, instruction, inspiration, and direction. This book will call you to start great things. This book will call you to stop the things that hold you back.

If you are reading God's Word then you are seeing signs that God has made. God is calling you to faithfulness. If you are reading God's Word then God is calling you to love him, love others, and to instill that in people around you. He has even written that out!

For instance, love others as you love yourself. So, when you go into work and you see that person who is just hard to be around, you are called to apply that sign to your life. But that doesn't always happen.

There is a disconnect between the His sign and your soul.

Jeremiah 29

I want to turn to the Bible to the book of Jeremiah. The book is named after this guy named Jeremiah who had the same problem that we have. The people who were following God had gotten sign after sign after sign that they were off course with what God wanted. Look at some of the signs: they had

been conquered by the Babylonians. They were a people in exile in a foreign country. They were facing all kinds of troubles. They had gone off course and God's greatest desire was to bring them back on track and all they could say was: now what do we do, whoa is us.

And this guy, Jeremiah – who is a prophet – gets a word from God and writes it down in a letter to all of the people...and notice, this is for ALL of the people. I want to take a moment and just say this; if you think that there is something you've done or some way that you've lived or something your said or some action back long ago that can keep God from talking to you, this passage says that God's message is for everybody and last time I checked, that means you. And Jeremiah says that everyone is to hear this from God because everyone is someone in God's eyes.

There is no one outside of God's plan.

Never has been and never will be. So, if you're here today and you're just not sure about this faith thing or this Jesus guy or the idea that there is a Father in heaven who loves you more than you can imagine I want to ask you to hang in with me of just a bit more this morning. Because in this part of the Bible there is something that God wants to make known to you...that our Heavenly Father loves you and has a plan for your life.

In Jeremiah 29 it says this: ⁴ *This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem:* ⁵ *"Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens and eat the food they produce. ⁶ Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! ⁷ And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."*

If the people back then were looking for a sign – this is a pretty clear one. There are clear things that God was calling those people back then to be doing: build, plant, eat, marry, have children and grandchildren, work FOR the city and pray. These are good things, right. But, our Heavenly Father doesn't stop there. He goes on to say this:

¹⁰ *This is what the Lord says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

God tells them to not listen to all of the other voices who say they are talking for me...here is what I want you to do, here's how long you will be in the land – 70 years, that's pretty precise. And the last thing that is said in this passage are the words we repeated earlier today: *For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

No matter who you are, God has a plan for you.

God's Plan vs Your Plan

The question is, will you follow God's plan? Everyone of us will follow something. That is simply a fact.

You plan your NOW according to what you've planned for your THEN.

- A profession = A CEO.
- A purchase = A Home.
- A person = Your Magic Unicorn

- A place = Move to NYC
- A persona = Popular, Athlete, Carefree, Intelligent, Confident,
- A peace = A happy family, retirement

You will spend your money and time on your plan. You'll buy those season tickets, you'll rent that RV, you'll upgrade your tv, you'll volunteer at Habitat for Humanity, you'll create a college fund, you'll stay late at work, or you'll leave work early to be at the high school.

Sometimes, we will even drop those plans. Especially if they don't bring us the "warm fuzzies". Or, until something else gives us more happiness.

- "Your car is great, until you get your Harley."
- "I loved my first guitar, but you should see my 4th."
- "My house is great, but you should see the one in Florida."

This happens with Jesus too. We follow, we pray, we read, but then something happens. Maybe it got too hard. You experienced a trauma or something horrific and you just couldn't fit the pieces together. Maybe you started to get more excited about something else. You are working on a passion project and you find yourself wrapped up. Maybe the people who claim to follow Jesus have made it hard for you to see Jesus apart from them. Someone who represents Jesus says something or does something that leads to you quitting. I've seen it. In fact, I have lived it from time to time.

But trust this... the things you have planned for are not perfect. They won't satisfy. They can't bring joy beyond what they are!

Things will never go perfectly, but God has a perfect plan for your life.

Only God can offer a plan for your life that is the perfect fit for you.

Knowing God's Plan

I know this is tough. I know this is challenging. Most of us want all the details laid out like our Father does for the people Jeremiah is writing to way back then. There are some of us who want God to tell us exactly what job to take, what person to marry, how many kids to have. But, those are the choices God gives to us to make as followers of Jesus. We all have to make the more detailed choices and what God wants is that we do so in a way that is consistent with His word and the direction Jesus has given us on how to live.

I became a Christian in High School. The friends I made at my youth group were different from my friends at school. They were nicer, trustworthy, and accepting. Eventually, I learned it was because of their relationship with Jesus. These people believed Jesus sacrificed everything to make them apart of his family. For me, that was it. I began to follow Jesus, because I learned who he was and I saw it lived out by real people.

I got more involved in youth group. I would spend time with my youth pastor Greg. He gave me opportunities to run events, and to even teach. I helped with videos, events, and whatever else was needed. This place became my family.

During my senior year, I was in crisis mode. Apparently, I was supposed to have figured out the college I wanted to attend for the next few years and have a career in mind for the next 50 years of my life. I had no idea. I thought I would make a good doctor. I like figuring out problems and I love helping people (especially those in crisis). But then I realized I hated blood.

Greg and I sat in his office. I asked, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?! I DON'T WANT TO WASTE MY LIFE, I DON'T WANT TO MAKE THE WRONG CHOICE! WHAT IF I AM WRONG? WHAT IF THERE ARE 3 DOORS, I CHOOSE DOOR # 2 BUT IT WAS ACTUALLY DOOR#3?!

I wanted the billboard. I wanted that clean, easy, and convenient statement. He looked at me and said, "Do what you want." Um... no Greg. You do what God wants.

First, follow as much of God's plan as he allows you to know, then do what you want.

God Gives us Billboards: *Do your plans conflict with God's?*

- "Love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, and mind"
- "Delight in the Lord, he will give you the desires of your heart... be still in his presence and wait for him to act."
- "Go into all the world and make disciples"
- "When you are good to the poor and needy you are good to me."
- "Bad company corrupts good morals"
- "Clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires"

God Gives us Soundboards: *Communion and Community*

- Have you (honestly) prayed about it?
- What do your friends say?

Do What You Want: If your heart looks like God's plans, then your plans will look like God's heart.

That conversation wiped the board clean for me. I started over on my decision. I realized that my youth group was so amazing because Greg dedicated his life to creating the culture there. This place was safe for me. I realized that I had the most fun when I was making these events or having big life conversations with friends. So, I decided that is what I was going to do with my life. I was going to be for others what God had established for me.

Challenge to Follow

God has a plan for your life. God is perfect and so are his plans for your life. Have you said yes to a relationship with Jesus? Have you said yes to making God's plan your own? This morning, I want to give you an opportunity to take a step of faith. ***Inward belief is solidified by outward action.*** Will you believe that God is who he says he is? Faithful, loving, Lord over all, ultimate in ability and authority, loving you so much that he came in the form of Jesus, lived a perfect life, and paid for your sin by being killed on a cross, then rose to life to show his victory over sin and death, and now lives as King. Will you believe all he has promised? That he has a plan for you. That he wants a relationship with you. That he wants to work through you.

We are going to enter into a time of worship. But before we do, this is your chance to act out that thing you believe. If you are ready to commit your plans to God, from here on out, on the count of three I am going to ask you to stand. If you are ready to start those plans for the first time, or for the very last time, stand as a public statement. If someone near you has stood, please pray for them.

1,2,3!

Make it Happen!

Tomorrow many of you will wake up by the alarm and be at work. What can you do tomorrow to live your new plan?

Identify a burden, what can you do to change it?

Identify what God says. Read and pray.

Identify what your church thinks, ask your church family if the plan sounds like a good one.

Make a plan and set a date.