

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

Psalm 62:5-12

For God alone my soul waits in silence . . . power belongs to God and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work. (Psalm 62:5,11-12)

Decision Fatigue

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

Some of you may remember comedian Yakov Smirnoff. His comedy routine was based on his impressions of coming to the United States after fleeing the Soviet Union. Smirnoff observed that in the Soviet Union a person would have to wait in line at the meat market for two hours. When you got to the head of the line, there would be only one choice of meat. You could take it or leave it. Smirnoff was so impressed by the choices that we Americans have at the Supermarket and his tag line was always, "What a country!"

In one of his routines, Smirnoff talks about going down the aisle of the supermarket. He noticed that one could buy powdered milk. Just add water and you get instant milk. Wow! A little later on he noticed that you could buy powdered eggs. Just add water and you get instant eggs. Wow! He went a little further down the aisle and there he noticed baby power . . . What a country!

We Americans do love our choices but recent research shows that all these choices do not make us a happier people. In fact many of us are suffering from what might be termed, decision fatigue. The choices are wearing us out and we are worried that we will miss out on the best choices, and depressed because we do not have enough time or energy to really understand our choices.

If I want to buy a camera, should I get a 3, 4, or 5 megapixel camera? How much digital zoom? Should I care about battery life? What about weight? How about delay between shots. Should I get a point and shoot kind or one that allows the user to play around with the settings and controls? Should I be concerned about which camera will interface most easily with my current computer? What about printers? Photo-editing software? Which brands are the most reliable? Should I buy online or at a store? Which store? (Barry Schwartz "Choice overload burdens daily life." USA Today, January 4, 2004, <http://usatoday30.com>.)

At which point I usually say, "Forget it, I'm just going to use my phone." However, speaking of phones, which phone do you think I should get? Let's start with the important stuff. What color

should I get? How many minutes will I use a month? Do I need a texting plan? Should I get a smart one? Which one? From which company? Is the android better than the I-phone? How much of a data plan do I need?

Most of these decisions are not ultimately important. Yet they keep us anxious and off balance. Then there are the really big decisions. There was a time when if your last name was Baker, you worked in a bakery. If your last name was Smith, you did smithing. Potters made pots. Farmers worked in the fields.

Now Jeremy Carpenter might choose to build a house. He could also choose to join the Coast Guard, work for a cable company, or be a crime scene investigator. Someone counted and came up with over 2100 distinct occupations in our country. Young people not only have an overwhelming number of occupations to choose from. They are being pressured at earlier and earlier ages to make that decision.

So what are we to do? In our Old Testament Lesson the Psalmists has this advice, wait, pray, and obey. Then he adds that if you obey, God will repay.

Let's look at this one at a time. Wait. In verse 5 we read, "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him." We are urged to wait and to wait in silence before God. Part of our anxiety comes from sensory overload. When we get away from all of the external stimuli and simply wait in God's presence we begin to realize that not everything is important to God. Not every decision needs to be important to us. The great writer of Spiritual Meditations, Thomas Merton, once talked about going into a drug store and asking for a tube of toothpaste. The clerk asked him what kind he wanted. Merton replied, "I don't care."

He reports that the clerk was shocked. There were 21 different kinds of toothpaste each with a secret ingredient. Merton said that apparently he was supposed to care passionately about that. The clerk was shocked that he didn't care about the secret ingredients.

Waiting in God's presence helps us to clarify which decisions are really important. Waiting in silence in God's presence also helps us to get in tune with God's timing. The world often pushes us to make fast decisions. We are told that indecision leads to failure. That it is better to make the wrong decision and correct it later on, than to stew in indecision.

Of course there is some truth to that. However, waiting before God is not a matter of indecision. Waiting for God means waiting on God's timing. We may well be all anxious that God has not answered our prayers yet, or that God has not fixed some problem yet. However, as Christians, we believe and we trust that God's timing is always right. No matter what time God shows up, God is always right on time.

That brings me to my next point. We are not simply waiting before God in silence, we are also praying. In verse 8 the Psalmist writes, "Trust in him at all time, O people, pour out your heart before him; . . ." Researchers tell us that a rather large percentage of the people who call

themselves Christians, make decision after decision without ever praying for God's guidance. People decide to buy a new car. They pick a college to attend. They decide on an occupation in life. They decide on who they will marry. All of those decisions are being made without praying for guidance. Is it any wonder that we as a society make so many bad decisions?!

To avoid decision fatigue, we are to wait. We are to pray. We are also to obey. Part of that means that we go to God with the small decisions and the big decisions. Many Christians seem to believe that they should leave the big things to God and take care of the little things themselves. That is sinking thinking.

How will we ever learn to trust God with the big things in our lives, if we will not first trust him with the small things? The answer is that we won't. Our trust in God's love and power grows over time as we see him guide and answer our day to day prayers.

Here's the thing. God is infinite. You can't burn him out or wear out your welcome. Unlike human beings, there is no way we will ever get on God's nerves by coming to him too often. God cares about all of your life. Not just the big things. Not just the religious kind of things. God cares about everything you care about and more.

There was a funny movie that I saw one time that starred Burt Reynolds as a guy who had decided that he was going to kill himself. So he went down to beach and started swimming out into the ocean. He thought he would just keep swimming until he was too tired to make it back then he would drown.

Wouldn't you know it, once he was way out there in the ocean and tired out, he changed his mind and decided that he wanted to live after all. As he started to swim back toward the land, Reynolds' character started to pray. "God if you help me make it back alive, I'm going to be in church every Sunday. I will tithe all of my income. I will read the Bible and go to Bible Study."

As he got a little bit closer to the shore, he prayed, "O God if you help me make it back to land, I'll be in church most of the time. I'll read the Bible sometimes. I'll give you money."

He continued swimming and prayed again, "God if you help me make it back to land alive, I'll be in church on special occasions. I'll pray sometimes. I give some money."

Finally he staggers up on the beach. "O God," he prayed, "You saved me big time and I'm really grateful. I'll never bother you again."

It was funny in the movie. Yet, there are some people who really believe that God doesn't want them to bother him. Scripture is clear, that God wants to be involved with us. God wants us to live in his presence and follow his will. I'm not talking once in awhile, or when it is convenient. God wants to love and obey him all the time.

Now here's the thing if you are obedient to God, that will cut down on the number of choices you have to make. Some choices simply are not in line with the will of God as it is expressed in scripture. That is a good thing. Research tells us that having boundaries in our lives makes us more peaceful, and happier than those who don't have them.

To avoid decision fatigue we are to wait in silence before God, pray, obey, and then God will repay. In verses 11-12 the Psalmist proclaims, "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this; that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work."

This is not a tit for tat sort of thing where God adds up how good you are and then doles out your reward. Rather it is an affirmation that God is ultimately in control. That God created the world and us to live in a loving relationship with him and with each other. So when we align our lives with God's design, we live into the kingdom of God. As we do that we experience more of God's love, God's peace, and God's mercy each day.

So if someone asks you what the sermon was about today, tell them it was about how to avoid decision fatigue. Instead of allowing decisions to overwhelm you and steal your peace and joy. Wait, pray, obey and God will repay.

Amen.

