

Don't Follow Your Heart: Part 1

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There's a popular slogan in our culture today. It's simply this: follow your heart. This slogan is everywhere. (PIC-tshirts) Here are an assortment of *follow your heart* t shirts you can purchase online - some with free shipping. If you're looking for a show in the big city you can buy tickets for the (PIC-ice) *Disney on Ice: Follow your heart* tour. In Texas you can make an appointment at the *Follow your heart Counseling Center* (PIC) and here's a book I found called *Living the Braveheart Life: Finding the Courage to Follow your Heart* (PIC-book). Tons of musicians sing about following your heart and it's probably one of the most common pieces of advice for hurting people.

This is part of the air we breathe; we're so used to hearing it we don't even question what it means or if it's a good idea. But the slogan of following one's heart is more than a slogan; it's a strategy for living. If it was just slogan, if it was just something cute on a little girl's t shirt, if it was just a catchy title on a book, it really wouldn't be a big deal. But it's not just a slogan; it's counsel to live by.

Is it a bad life-strategy? Well, I guess it depends on what we mean. But when you have a book in the Bible like Jeremiah telling us 8 specific times the root cause of Judah's problem was that they followed their heart I would think that our little red flags would be waving quite vigorously about this philosophy for living.

So what does this slogan, this life-strategy, mean? How is it used in our world today? What would you say? What do you think people mean when they say *follow your heart*? Here's what I think people mean.

- *Believe in yourself OR trust yourself*
- *Follow your dreams*
- *Don't second guess yourself OR don't let others second guess you.*

I'm guessing you all have heard stuff like that. Do you see any common word or idea in those phrases? I see one. It's the word "you" or "your". I believe at the center of this slogan is the commitment or belief in yourself. Your wisdom. Your desires. Your wishes and your dreams. I want to show you from Jeremiah how the exaltation of one's self, the commitment to oneself, is the very idea, the very strategy of living, condemned by God.

Here's the plan: today, we are going to do a couple of things. First of all, we're going to examine from Jeremiah what he means when he says the people followed their own evil heart. I'm hoping this is really practical. Secondly, Jeremiah often adds a word to describe this practice of following one's heart. Sometimes it's an adjective; other times it's an adverb, but the root word is "stubborn." We're going to examine why God throws in that word "stubborn." This sermon is just part 1; part 2 is next week. So, next Sunday we're going to focus on what

happens when we follow our own hearts, what happens, and we're also going to examine how our emotions are a part of this equation. But finally, I want to give you some hope and good news and how God promises to fix our heart problem. That's next Sunday.

There are two passages that summarize what following one's heart looks like from God's perspective. We're going to move from the ambiguous, the nebulous phrase of "following one's heart" to something really concrete, something we can examine.

The first passage is Jeremiah 7 so let's turn there (in both passages I want to get a running start so we can understand the context). As you'll see in our passage, Jeremiah is showing the nation of Judah how their rebellion started all the way back with their ancestors and how they are no different today (READ vs. 21-24). You can see what God wanted from the people. He says, "I didn't want sacrifices and I didn't want your offerings. I wanted you to obey my voice. I wanted to be your God and to have you walk in my ways." And do you know why God wanted this? Look at the end of vs. 23, "that it may be well with you." That's what God always wants for his people. He wants to do good to his people. He wants to bless them and blessing comes when they follow God's way.

But they didn't do that; instead, they followed their own hearts. But what does he say about that? What does that mean? Look at vs. 24, "But they did not obey or incline their ear, but *walked in their own counsels* and the stubbornness of their evil hearts and went backward and not forward." Did you see how God describes following one's own heart? He said they *walked in their own counsels*. A few other translations say they *walked in their own inclinations*, meaning, the people did what seemed natural and right and wise to them. They had this sense of what was right so they did that instead of obeying the voice of the Lord, instead of walking in his ways for their own good. Where did this sense of what was right come from? From themselves! So, part of following your own heart is trusting in, believing in your own wisdom and thoughts.

Keep that catalogued in your mind and let me show you one more reference on what it means to follow your heart. Turn with me to Jeremiah 18. This passage is one of those classic chapters that highlights the sovereignty of God. Sovereignty is a way of speaking of God's absolute rule over all of creation; sovereignty means God is in charge of everything. God highlights his sovereignty in this passage for the purpose of encouraging his people to return to him. Let's read this and see what the people do (READ Jer. 18:1-12).

God says, "I've got a plan for you. You're doing evil and I'm actually shaping disaster against you. But I'll change my plans if you return to me, Judah. Change your direction; change your plans." And what does Judah do? Vs. 12 says they act according to the stubbornness of their evil heart. But what is that? What does that look like? Vs. 12 tells us; the people say, "we will follow our own plans."

Do you ever say that to God, "God, I'm going to follow my own plan? I know you tell me that I'm your servant and I'm to give time, money, resources for your kingdom. I know you tell

me that I've been bought at a price and I'm to glorify you with my body. But I have my own plans for my retirement years, I have my own plans for my money. I know you tell me that I need the church of Jesus Christ, I know you tell me not to forsake gathering together with my brothers and sisters, but I have my own plans for the weekend. I know what your word says about marriage. But you don't know what it's like being married to him! God, if you knew how she treated me, you would make an exception. I think I'm going to follow my own plan for marriage. I know you say that I should work heartily at my job, even for supervisors who are unjust, but I've got my own plan."

The rubber really meets the road right here, doesn't it? Following your heart looks like you believe in or trust your own counsel, your own wisdom and it looks like you ignoring God's plan and following your own plan. Friends, this is one of the hardest things not to do. What plan is better than our own plan? Who is better, who is more qualified, to tell me what I should than *me*? Friends, we are so sure we are right; we are so sure our plans our the best or only plans.

Korby and I have been married now for almost 19 years. I can not tell you how many times we have had family projects or events to plan where I worked out all the details in my own mind and was convinced on what we should do. The last hurdle was to convince my wife about my plan. So, I'd explain to Korby what I think we should do. She'd give me that, "I'm not sure I'm following" look on her face. So I'd think, "Well, I better talk a little more slowly so she understands; I know this can be complicated for other people." And then she'd start poking holes in my plan. And I start getting a little defensive. Then she shares her ideas. And guess what I initially think about her plan? "Those are crazy! That's never going to work!" So, Korby starts to say to me, "I'll talk a little slower for you; I know this can be hard for you to understand." And after she talks slower and uses shorter sentences it dawns on me, "That's a pretty good plan." That's what the last 19 years of our marriage has looked like.

Friends, we so often think and feel (it's a feeling, isn't it? We're going to talk about that next week) that nobody could be as right about our own life than ourselves and that our plans for our life are always the best plans and they are not. And do know why our wisdom and our own plans are not the best for us? Jeremiah tells us why in Jeremiah 10:23-24 (READ).

Do you see what he says? It is not in us to know our way. The direction, the wisdom we need to live our life fruitfully and generously isn't inside of us. It's not found in here. Of course, this isn't the only place God's word tells us this.

- Prov. 3:5-6 ~ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
- Prov. 10:25 ~ There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death

Are you getting why the advice, the life strategy, of "look inside" and "follow your heart" is such a terrible suggestion and belief system? Don't believe in yourself, FBC. The way we must walk to flourish in life, to honor God and to good to our neighbors is not found in us; we don't know which way to go.

No wonder why vs. 24 says what it says: *Correct me*, O Lord. If you know you don't know what you should do, what do you want? Correction. Will someone please show me where to go? Will you please advise me on what is right and good? And who is Jeremiah looking for this correction? The Lord.

These things aren't hard to understand, are they? They're not complicated. Following your heart is trusting in your own wisdom and counsel and choosing to follow your plans rather than God's plan. That's not a good idea because, as God's word tells us, we don't have what's required inside of us to act or plan wisely. We all can understand that. What's hard is believing it. What is impossible without the grace of God is humbly believing and thinking that we don't have the wisdom, the insight, the knowledge, the inclinations to establish our own plans. We just think we know best. And God's word is telling us rather plainly - we don't.

But we don't give up on ourselves very easily or quickly, do we? I think that's why God uses the word *stubborn*. Get this: in every occurrence in Jeremiah where we're told that the people are following, have followed, won't stop following their own heart Jeremiah uses the word *stubborn* to describe their disposition. Every time. "They have stubbornly followed their own hearts." "Every one of you follows his stubborn, evil heart." "Everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart."

Calling someone stubborn usually isn't a compliment. If we say that or think that about someone, we're probably highlighting what we think is a character flaw. And we don't often think *we're* stubborn; other people are stubborn. They are stubborn; we are persistent and resolute (much more flattering terms, right?). Stubbornness is a way of describing someone's inability to change when they should. Persistence is about overcoming obstacles; being stubborn is about being your own obstacle. There's every good reason to change, but you won't... just because. That's being stubborn.

God is giving his people every good reason to change, to relent, to turn back to him.

- Disaster is coming because of your sin - turn!
- You've broken promise with your God - turn!
- I will heal you and restore you - turn!
- You're going the wrong way - turn!

And every time the people say, "No!" Just because. Because I know best! Because my plan is the right plan! It's my life; that mean's I'm doing things my way.

So, what should we do about this? How should hearing this message this morning change what I think, believe and do? Let me give you some suggestions.

First of all, believe it to be true. It's a miracle to believe this. To believe, to be convinced that my thoughts and wisdoms, my plans for my future or for my life are not the best for me is a

really not normal or natural. Like I have said several times; we just naturally think, “No one knows better than me what I should think and do!” But Jeremiah (and really, all of God’s word) is telling us the opposite. Do you believe this, my good friends?

What would you do if you believed this? Well, you would be much more suspicious of yourself, your motivations and your judgment. It means you won’t feel so sure of yourself. It would mean that you would want to hear the thoughts and opinions of others, especially those people you trust. Really, think of it: if you’re not willing to listen to other people who are challenging your conventional wisdom, chances are you are following your own heart and you don’t even know it. Here’s the deal: it’s a little easier to talk about this stuff today when we don’t feel challenged; when we don’t have something on the line. It’s in those moments of stress where what we are following and trusting really comes out.

Something else that we could do (should do) because of this truth is slow down a little. Are you like me? When something happens that feels stressful or challenges my plans or my thoughts, my mind immediately starts turning. And I’m usually trying to figure out ways to feel more sure of myself or to get my point across. I don’t naturally think, “I could use more information to determine if my judgment is wrong.” But if we would just slow down a tad and even become a little more aware of our emotional state where we might say, “I’m feeling anxious and defensive. But I don’t want to assume I know what I’m doing.” We want to speed up, but we probably should slow down.

God will help us, friends. He’s helped us already by telling us the truth. Now, he will help us more by enabling and empowering what he commands of us. Next week, we are going to talk about this a little more; we’re going to examine how our emotions play a role in following our hearts and we’re also going to see what happens to us when we follow our heart. But we’ll also see the best news of all, the promise of a new heart from God.

Key vs. Jeremiah 7:24

Questions for the week

- What was the most challenging thing you heard this morning?
- What was the most helpful word you heard this morning?
- When are you tempted to follow your heart?