

Intro

I once filled in a survey for a company called Adobe who do web design tools and creative digital arts software. I was asked to make a series of choices depending on price and products. I can guess at what my answers will be used for but can't be totally certain.

In the Christian life God asks us to make different choices. We can only guess the consequences of our decisions. What we do know is that it's better to obey God and stay in his will than it is to not be.

But it's not always that simple. God calls for faithfulness and obedience even when it seems the hardest thing to do, even when things seem harder having obeyed God than before. Many Bible characters and Christians can relate to this. I definitely can. You?

BIBLE READING(s)

Read Isaiah 6.1-8...

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

In this bit of the Bible we find Isaiah meeting with God in a pretty powerful way. It's pretty awesome as Isaiah saw God as none of us have. Isaiah thought he was going to die, convinced of what a sinner he was. God has that kind of impact on people when he moves in power.

In the 'revivals' in the UK and across the world (times and places where God suddenly moves in power), many people fall on the floor before God, becoming aware of their impurity.

Smith-Wigglesworth was an English evangelist. I once heard of a story where he walked into a train compartment (in the old-fashioned trains) and a man in the carriage fell on his knees before God, so great was the power of the Holy Spirit in Smith-Wigglesworth.

So from Isaiah 6 we can learn quite a lot..

1. People do have visions of God. It's OK. Some churches like to repress this but if you have a vision of God or of Jesus asking you to do something for him, that's cool. Be obedient, be faithful and in God's time he'll make it happen.

2. God is holy. In God's presence we become aware of our own failings and sin. If you feel very aware of your sinfulness, that's often a sign of God working in your life. Be open to God, turn away from your sin and ask the Holy Spirit to help you change.

3. The importance of God's Word. God speaks to us. He's given us his Word as the main ways he does this. This protects us, gives us guidance and equips us, as 2 Timothy 3.16-17 says. We are also called to preach the Gospel at all times (2 Tim 4.2).

Why is this significant? Because it's so important that the Bible is read out and studied in churches, in small groups and more. Without it, the church becomes lazy, powerless and fearful. If we don't even know our Bibles, how can you stand strong against the devil's evil? How do you say no to all the fake attractions of life if you don't read or speak the Bible? Whatever goes in to you comes out of you - so put the Bible into you!

God reminds us in Isaiah 6 of the importance of hearing God, knowing our place before him and then responding.

QUESTIONS

How do we hear from God? How do we know it's God?

Get people into groups with this. Be interactive. Get other leaders involved in each group. Help, guide but don't do all the work!

How do we hear from God? (some answers) - we hear from God by hearing his voice in our heads, by reading the Bible and by lines 'jumping out' at us, by an impression or deep feeling of something spiritual that we can't shake off, by what's in our hearts and how God's gifted us, by the ideas and suggestions of other Christians we respect, through visions, words, prophecies..

How do we know it's God? (some answers) - It is in line with the Bible, or is in the Bible. If it isn't either of these, don't go there - for real! Do other people think it's right? Is it in keeping with your gifts and skills? Does it confirm other words or prophecies you've had?

Do you feel a peace deep in your spirit - this is often the real key.

But let's look a little further into Isaiah 6, something people often don't do. Read through verses 9-13. Now go to Jonah (one of the Minor Prophet books). Read Jonah 1.1-3.

Why are we looking at these verses? Because sometimes God takes us at our word! Huh? Well, if you are going to be like Isaiah and say to God, 'Here I am, send me' then will you actually go ahead and do it?

Let's read again the verses in Isaiah 6.9-13. What does God say to Isaiah? He says people won't listen to Isaiah, their eyes will be shut, the people's minds will be made numb, that Isaiah should keep on preaching until the cities are destroyed, the people are gone, the land destroyed, and most things smashed in basically!

Your challenge is that God may call you to do something that you may not like!

Isaiah had to go and speak a message that would be unpopular, wouldn't be received and would see the destruction of his own people and their land. It was very hard but he remained faithful to God. What about you?

How will you respond to God's call, even when it's tough? I have had to go through some hard stuff and often can't see the wood for the trees. Yet, one line remains with me, the line given to me in my baptism 5 years ago: Colossians 4.17: 'Tell Archippus: See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.' This has helped me, as has Galatians 6.9 - 'We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time if we do not give up.'

STORIES

Do you have any stories that would fit well here?

Personal stories about being open to God or unexpected turns in life.

Here's one I have from some friends:

As a family they felt called to go to Uganda. They raised all the money, had all the arrangements sorted, including flights. The family was all prepared. The day before they were due to go, the lady had complications with her pregnancy. People in the church went round to pray. The baby lived and was fine - a healthy and cool lad. Yet it meant they could not go to Uganda, despite really wanting to. They didn't understand why this had happened. Didn't understand why God allowed

this. To this day I don't think any of us know. Yet the couple fully trusted in God and his purposes. They planned one thing yet God had stopped it.

A short while later, they found themselves working in Africa, but in a place called Namibia. This was an amazing time working with HIV and AIDS orphans and doing community work. It was great, but then they felt they needed to re-charge and return to the UK. They did and went to a fantastic church in the UK for a couple of years.

Then an opportunity opened up to go and work with a church. It was a great situation where the church was doing community and outreach work. The pastor from their UK church went out with them to pray, meet the leaders and those involved. It was the right thing to do, so the UK church 'sent' them out. Where did they go? Yep. Uganda.

Sometimes God calls us, gives us a dream, puts something in our heart, speaks to us from his Word. But his timing is always perfect and if we partner with God, he'll do everything he says he will (it's only us that get in the way of God). So if you ask God to send you - expect him to work things and work on you to prepare you :)