

“Waiting to see where the Holy Spirit leads”

By Bob Young

(Sharing an article by Carey Nieuwhof, with editing and additions): <https://www.biblicalleadership.com/blogs/this-question-gives-answers-for-dreamers/>)

In an article from Carey Nieuwhof, he observes that in an earlier stage of his faith journey, he often waited for God’s confirmation or leading. Listen to his words: *Earlier on in my faith journey, I used to wait for "signs" from God and "confirmations" from God. It sounded very spiritual—do nothing unless God has told you to do it.*

Nieuwhof then points out two fallacies of this immature approach to Christian decision-making.

First, how does one decide when a decision is spiritual enough to wait for God and seek God’s direction? Nieuwhof observes that when we are hungry, we pop food in the microwave. When we leave our homes, we rarely pray about it. We just go. Why are some decisions “spiritual” and others not?

Second, regardless of how good it may sound to the spiritually indecisive person, the idea of waiting to see where God (or the Holy Spirit) leads is highly subjective. It is based on feelings. How do I know I have heard from God? What if God "says" nothing? Does that mean he is against it or that he is neutral? What if what I "heard" is not the voice of God at all? What if God or the Holy Spirit says two conflicting things to two different people involved in the decision?

I would add a third observation: waiting to hear from God or the Holy Spirit reflects a lack of confidence in the teaching and instruction of God’s Word.

Nieuwhof points us to a more objective way to know God’s will. He describes how he reoriented decision making around a more objective approach: what does the Bible say? Listen to Nieuwhof again, *I base it [decision-making] around a question that sounds something like this: Is what I am about to do the best application I know of God's Word applied to the present circumstances?*

I have grown to love that question. It covers those times we do not naturally pray about something but probably should (Is my diet at all a reflection of Scripture's teaching that my body is God's temple? Does my trip into town involve a faithful use of the resources God has entrusted me with?)

In a Bible class in a church, a brother who was teaching a class about the Holy Spirit began to veer into very subjective claims. Another brother challenged him, citing specific Bible passages that contradicted the teaching. The brother who was teaching responded, “The Holy Spirit led me to say those things.” To which the other brother responded, “Well, the Holy Spirit told me to speak what He has said in the Bible.”

To wait on God or the Spirit is highly subjective. How does one know for certain? Simply seeking what the Bible says is far more objective. God’s Word is true, regardless of our subjective state or feelings, our moods, our desires. God’s Word is objectively dependable. Rather than waiting on some subjective sense of what God or the Holy Spirit may or may not do, perhaps we should pray for wisdom about how to apply God’s Word to present circumstances. Perhaps we should seek wise counsel from mature Christians.

Nieuwhof concludes with humor. *Applying God’s Word is more objective and reliable than waiting for a "feeling" or interpreting the fact that the wind knocked over the umbrella in the back yard as a sign that God wants you to quit your job and move to Tibet.*