

## **“Is Your Life Too Noisy?”**

Romans 8:12-18, 26-27

*Series: Forgotten God Week 5 The Call to a Spirit-Led Life*

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Is your life too noisy?

A snowstorm forced me to face the sound of silence. At four p.m. the heavy snow of Winter Storm Quinn caused our lights to flicker and go out. Losing light, heat and refrigeration are bad enough. Twenty years ago those were my main concerns. Now, along with them, I worry about a fourth disaster: no internet. No Comcast, Netflix, Amazon, Dropbox, Google, Pandora, Facebook, Youtube, email, home phone, music. Just silence. My wife Lisa also worked at home that day. By 5 pm it started getting dark. At 6 pm we felt a chill and lit a fire. We couldn't cook anything - no electric stove, microwave or coffeemaker. So we roasted hot dogs on sticks over the fire. It was like traveling back in time to the pioneer days: Little House on the Pennsbury.

When dinner was done there was...silence. So we decided to try something. It's called talking. "Hi my name is Doug." "Mine's Lisa." "Nice to meet you. I have two kids, Peter and Kristin." "What a coincidence...so do I." We talked for a while. She asked me about my work. I asked about hers. But I have to confess something: after a while I missed the noise. So did she. She said, "Want to play a movie on my iPad?" Instead, we just turned in early. The next morning the lights, heat and refrigerator were back on - but not the internet. I started going through withdrawal. I desperately craved my fix of xfinity.

Is your life too noisy? Kids clamoring for your attention, dog wanting to go out, spouse asking you to do a task, parents telling you to do homework, internet and TV tempting you to buy things, cell phones buzzing with calls, texts, email. Some speak of the 24 hour news cycle. I call it the 24 hour noise cycle. The background sound is so continuous, you don't notice it until it's gone. "All I ask for is a little peace and quiet," you cry. But you only want "a little." Before you know it, you miss the noise. You crave your fix.

If you wonder why you don't hear the Holy Spirit, maybe your life is too noisy. Among the spiritual gifts Linda mentioned last week I don't think you'll find multitasking. It's hard enough to hold an uninterrupted conversation with a human let alone God. Here is the tragic truth: the noise is making you miss the most important call of your life: the call to a Spirit-led life. Jesus shows us how to answer the Spirit's call in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel.

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)

This is the start of Jesus' ministry. He is anointed by John to be the Messiah. Yet Jesus also models for us the Spirit-filled life of a believer. In this one scene you see the whole Trinity in action: The Son comes up out of the water, the Spirit descends like a dove and the Father gives

His blessing. Think about it for a minute: does the Son need to receive the Spirit? Does He wonder if His Father loves Him? No. He's God. He knows all this. Jesus is demonstrating how to begin the Christian life – a life led by the Spirit. This is why the whole Christian life can be summed up in two words: "Follow me." Watch Jesus and do what He does.

How does the Spirit-led life begin? **Fill Up With Your Father's Love.** The voice from heaven does not say to Jesus, "Nice of you to show up. Where have you been the last thirty years? How come you didn't go to college instead of wasting your time with woodworking? Why haven't you met a nice girl and given me grandchildren?" No. Yet that's what many hear from their parents. Probably the most common rejection comes from parents. A young man won admission to college. Instead of writing a letter of congratulations, his father penned this note:

Now it is a good thing to put this business very plainly before you. Do not think I am going to take the trouble of writing to you long letters after every folly and failure you commit and undergo. I am certain that if you cannot prevent yourself from leading the idle, useless, unprofitable life you had during your school days, you will become a mere social wastrel, one of the hundreds of the public school failures, and you will degenerate into a shabby, unhappy and futile existence.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Lord Randolph to his son Winston Churchill, the man who led England through the dark days of World War II. Throughout his life, Churchill ran an endless race to win his father's acceptance. Even if your parents loved you, rejection still strikes hard and deep.

- We're not going to play with you and you can't come to my party.
- I'm sorry but you didn't make the team.
- No, I don't want to go to the prom with you.
- We regret to inform you that we will not be admitting you to our college.
- I think it's time that we started seeing other people.
- Sorry but we went with someone else for the position.
- We're taking our business to another company.
- I don't love you. I don't think I ever loved you.

If you've received any rejection you need to know this: Love is waiting for you. What the Father says to His Son, He says to you: "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Now please notice something: the Father says He is pleased with His Son before He's done a single thing. Jesus has not yet cleansed a single leper, cast out a legion of demons, or fed a multitude from a kid's lunch box. If you are a performance-driven, people-pleasing or Type A plus personality please hear this: God is pleased with you and it's not due to what you do. God is love and He's simply in love with you. Nothing will make sense if you don't understand the starting point. The Apostle Paul says,

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Meacham, Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship. Random House, c. 2003 New York, New York.

received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. (Romans 8:14-16)

So much of life is bound and gagged by fear. You fear you’ll slip up, mess up, won’t measure up. You fear you’ll be let down, put down, pushed down. You fear you’ll be taken for granted, taken to task, taken for all you’ve got. Sometimes the darkness of whatever fear you face makes you want to cry out. So here’s what you should cry: Abba, Father, Dad. When my children cried out “Daddy!” in the night, I’d go to them. God your Father comes to you. And the cry for Abba that goes up from your heart comes from the Spirit of God that lives in there. You need to know this because what I say next might be frightening.

**Follow Where the Spirit Leads.** After Jesus’ baptism the Spirit does a strange thing:

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. (Mark 1:12-13)

Wait! That can’t be. I thought if I find God’s will for my life He will lead me to my destiny, to distinction, to delights, not the desert. Christians complain about going through dry times in their faith. We sometimes whine about the wilderness. Yet God’s greatest saints were sent to the desert: Abraham, Hagar, Moses, David, Elijah, Paul and Jesus. The whole nation of Israel spent forty years in the desert. Why does God send them there? To get a suntan? No. The desert defines and shapes their characters. It molds and makes them into servants of God.

Deserts are not noisy. Deserts have few distractions. Yet deserts are full of decisions – sometimes life or death decisions. In the desert, Satan tempted Jesus with decisions. Turn stones to bread. Jump off a tower. Grab the whole world. Your path of life is the result of a multitude of decisions. You would be completely different if you chose differently. This is why the Apostle Paul says the Spirit-led life is a series of decisions.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:5-9)

This is the choice which faces you and me every moment: do you follow the desires of the flesh or the desire of the Spirit? When Paul says “flesh” he doesn’t mean skin. He refers to self-centered desires. These cause a breakdown in our relationship with God and others. “Flesh” is sometimes translated as the “sinful nature.” Paul paints a very stark picture of what happens when we are led by the sinful nature. The flesh is hostile to God, it does not obey God’s law, it cannot obey God’s law, it cannot please God and it leads to death.

On the other hand, a life which follows the Spirit leads to life and peace. This sounds like an easy one. Do I want hostility and death or peace and life? Hmmm. We rarely face such

obvious decisions. It's the thousands of little decisions each day which, over time, gradually take us down one road or the other. Recently we attended a party at a friend's house in a new development in Collegeville. The house is so new it doesn't appear on GPS. Unfortunately, we didn't know this. So when we plugged in the house number and street name it came up. If I clicked on it I would have wound up in Delaware.

Where is your flesh leading you? Not to Delaware but to death. Trouble is: it doesn't seem so at first. In the beginning following the flesh feels pleasurable. I've never been a smoker but I'm told it's pleasurable to light up. We all know it leads to death – just not right away. Why is your life so noisy? There are countless voices around you and in you which tell you to please yourself. The seven deadly sins are examples of following the flesh.

Anger – the flesh says, “Avenge yourself” the Spirit says, “Make peace like Jesus”  
Lust – the flesh says, “Indulge yourself” the Spirit says, “Love like Jesus”  
Envy – the flesh says, “Covet for yourself” the Spirit says, “Be content like Jesus”  
Gluttony – the flesh says, “Gorge yourself” the Spirit says, “Be filled by Jesus”  
Sloth – the flesh says, “Pamper yourself” the Spirit says, “Serve like Jesus”  
Greed – the flesh says, “Grab more for yourself” the Spirit says, “Give like Jesus”  
Pride – the flesh says, “Promote yourself” the Spirit says, “Glorify Jesus”

When you follow the flesh in one or more of these areas it will eventually lead to death – the death of a relationship, a marriage, a family, a career, a church, a community, your health, your life. Following the Spirit does the opposite – it brings life. It grows the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. You have to decide who you will follow. Paul says,

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live (Romans 8:13)

Either selfish must die or your self will die. This means saying “No” to what selfishness demands and yes to the Spirit's direction. This happens in countless decisions throughout the day. It would be overwhelming except this fact: you have the power of the Spirit to help you.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)

The power that pushed over the boulder which sealed the tomb, the power which brought Jesus' dead body back to life, the power that defeated sin, death and the devil is the same power that lives in you. Rely on the Spirit's counsel, comfort and power to make the right decision. What if you fail or fall down? Fear not. Remember, your Father loves you. That's why Paul starts chapter 8 with this amazing announcement:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

It's like my gym Planet Fitness – you live in a judgment free-zone. You are in the family of God. You can try and fail and try again. God will not kick you out. That's grace. Starting on Easter we will begin a new series called "Grace: More Than We Deserve/Greater Than We Imagine." Come learn just how amazing grace is.

So with all the noise in life, how do you hear the Spirit? **Fall On Your Knees Like the Son.** After Jesus' baptism and temptation, the Spirit leads Him back to Galilee where He has a rapid fire day of ministry. He calls the disciples to follow Him, teaches in the synagogue, casts out a demon, heals Peter's mother-in-law, and cures all the diseases and drives out all the demons in town well into the night. The next morning you'd expect Him to sleep in.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:35-37)

"Come on back to Capernaum Jesus. Let's build a hospital, establish a business, start a megachurch. The crowds will come rolling in." All good stuff. All ego feeding. Jesus wants to go in the opposite direction.

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:38-39)

How did Jesus know that's the decision God wanted Him to make? He prayed. He shut off the noise, went off by Himself, got down on His knees, and listened. You say, "I don't know how to pray like that." You are right. But it's okay. You have a friend to help you. Paul says,

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The Holy Spirit knows what's in your heart: the agony and the ecstasy, the anxiety and the emptiness, the fears and the frustrations, the sighs, the moans and the groans. Sometimes you can't put these feelings into words let alone prayers. But the Spirit can. The Spirit reaches deep in your heart, down in your soul and brings it up to the throne of God. Now I know you can't kneel down in prayer whenever a problem comes up. So try this. Every time you are confronted with a decision that stirs up emotions – pause, pray and ask God, "What would please you?"

My life was noisy. The snow storms and several trips threw off my schedule. Holy Week and Easter plans are heating up. I thanked God when the power came back on at home and at Woodside. And then the Spirit spoke to me: "What about your neighbors who don't have power or heat?" You mean the Armentos? "No I mean your homeless neighbors who never have power or heat. What are you doing for them?" I did what I normally I do when I get these nudges from God. I ignored it and went on with my important agenda. Then Linda Marr gives a message

about how we need to use our gifts to serve others. “Like people who are homeless,” the Spirit whispers to me. I told Linda she did a good job but didn’t do anything about it. In my morning quiet time during the week I prayed, “Lord what is your will? Let me do your will.” And an email popped up, “Winter is still on. We need help with Code Blue.” I thought it was a good idea. But I need my sleep to get my vital work done. So I deleted it. “Lord,” I prayed the next day, “Please help me to walk in your steps.” Then a text came in: “Doug can you help us with an overnight shift at Code Blue?” Maybe I should do that, I thought, I looked at the website, but got distracted by the noise of other projects. Then I got a call, “We need your help to open the shelter. Can you make it?” I replied, “Sure. I was just going to sign up before you called.”

And when I arrived at the Code Blue church at 2:30 am who was there? Linda Marr. “Holy Spirit got to you too?” she asked. “Yep.” So I finished this sermon, sitting in the dark fellowship hall of another church. It’s not noisy. There’s no noise except the soft breathing of thirty neighbors who have a warm, safe place to stay...and the quiet call of the Holy Spirit.