



## SHOULD I FOLLOW MY HEART?

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The popular yet toxic expression, “follow your heart,” is one that has become pervasive in American discourse and culture. We can easily understand the essential meaning of this phrase: That whatever we feel, want, or desire should be at the helm of our decision-making, self-concept, and prioritization. Yet, from both a psychological and spiritual perspective, we quickly see that this principle often leads people farther from their goals and intentions. Jon Bloom, author and pastor, describes it this way:

*It's a statement of faith in one of the great pop-cultural myths of the Western world—a gospel proclaimed in many of our stories, movies, and songs. Essentially, it's a belief that your heart is a compass inside of you that will direct you to your own true north if you just have the courage to follow it. It says that your heart is a true guide that will lead you to true happiness if you just have the courage to listen to it. The creed says that you are lost and your heart will save you.<sup>1</sup>*

Scripture is deeply rooted in a notion completely contrary to this one. The foundational commands that God gives Israel to set them apart in holiness are the framework for the intricate, specific, and compassionate commands Paul gives to the Church throughout the New Testament. And if we are capable of thinking even slightly below the surface of commands and obedience, we see that God's commands and laws are not intended to hamper our pleasure or frustrate our desires, but rather to lead us into true life and freedom in holiness by exposing our absolute depravity to be saved and redeemed by God alone.

Interestingly enough, clinical counseling seems to operate out of a vaguely similar conceptualization. Trauma-focused therapy, which is a rapidly growing approach in the clinical world, is based off the premise that changing thinking, behavioral, and reaction patterns can literally change a person's experience. Kurt Thompson, a Christian neuroscientist, puts it this way:

*While it's true that established neural networks are most likely to fire, it's equally true that recent research demonstrates that our brains were created with beautiful and mysterious plasticity. That means our neurons can be redirected in ways that correlate with joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>2</sup>*

Ultimately, what Dr. Thompson is describing is not just trauma treatment, but therapy and arguably, discipleship, in the most general sense. As therapists work with a client to access the honest, vulnerable parts of their hearts in order to explore wounds, sin, and brokenness, they help a client to be able to experience forgiveness, hope, restoration, and change. In the same way, a Christian experiences brokenness and healing through God's loving grace, Word, and Spirit.

To bring this full circle, we must ask ourselves, “Should I follow my heart?” I believe the answer to this question lies in God's design for humankind – to be holy, known, loved, and authentic. While Scripture helps us understand the wicked, sinful nature of our hearts, the story of reconciliation helps us understand that brokenness and sin are literally capable of being healed through the changing of our thinking and beliefs, which ultimately influences our behavior, relationships, and faith in God. So while our broken hearts may not be our most reliable compass, God certainly is.

<sup>1</sup> Bloom, Jon. *Don't Follow Your Heart*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Kurt. *Anatomy of the Soul*, p. 87.