

Making Wise Decisions

Proverbs 3:5-6

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January 26-27, 2019

An HR manager advertised a job opening. A large group of applicants showed up in the waiting room. The first man was ushered into her office, and she began explaining the job to him: *“We need someone who can make fast decisions, someone who can think quickly on his feet. Can you show me that you’re capable of doing that?”*

Without a word, the young man immediately stood up, stuck his head out the door, and announced to the waiting applicants, *“Okay, you guys. You can all go home...the job’s just been filled!”*

How are you at making quick decisions? Are you good at deciding what to do? Do you ever get frustrated as you try to figure out God’s will for your life?

I like what Dilbert once said, *“Informed decision-making comes from a long tradition of guessing and then blaming others for inadequate results.”*

If you want to learn more about making wise decisions, I recommend a book by Ray Pritchard called, *“The Road Best Traveled.”* There is a link on “Sermon Extras.” Here’s a summary: *“God wants you to know His will more than you want to know it and He takes personal responsibility to see that you discover it.”*

After reading through the Book of Proverbs, I put together a list of 10 questions to help us make wise decisions.

10 Questions to Help Make Wise Decisions

1. What does the Bible say? *To know the will of God, we must know the Word of God.* While many of us struggle to discern what God wants us to do in specific situations, much of what He desires is *already* revealed in the Bible. For instance, just from what we’ve learned in Proverbs this past month, God’s will is for us to revere Him and draw near to Him. It’s also God’s will we monitor our mouths in order to launch life instead of delivering death to people. Last weekend we looked at principles from Proverbs for husbands, wives, parents, grandparents, children, teens and young adults.

We were also challenged to stand up and speak up for the preborn. Sadly, on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade this past Tuesday, New York passed a bill legalizing abortion up until the birth of a baby and then lit up One World Trade Center in pink to celebrate the “Reproductive Health Act.” When the bill was signed people applauded and cheered.

My friend Ben Lovelady is the pastor of First Baptist in Silvis. Listen to what he wrote this week in light of this news.

*A celebration we throw
For upholding Roe
While some heartbeats slow*

*To a sudden shaky stop
Hear their cries we'll not
Blood running with no clot*

*The subtle turns we take
Neglecting what's at stake
A wreckage of life we make*

*A semantic game
To deflect the fame
From the unborn's claim*

*Life, liberty, and pursuit
Of happiness we assume
For all, except in the womb*

*The subtle turns we take
Neglecting what's at stake
A wreckage of life we make*

On the same day the governor of New York signed this bill into law, the governor of Illinois signed an executive order demanding abortion be included in the medical benefits of state employees and then said these words: “*On the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, I'm proud to declare under my administration, the State of Illinois will be the most progressive state in the nation when it comes to guaranteeing the right to choose for every single woman.*”

Unbelievably, on the same day, an Iowa state judge struck down the state's fetal heartbeat law, declaring it unconstitutional.

When I read about all of this, Isaiah 5:20 came to mind: ***“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness...”***

The first thing to do when faced with a decision is to ask what commands or prohibitions from the Bible apply to the decision you need to make. Proverbs 13:13: ***“He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded.”*** What parameters, promises or principles has God set forth in Scripture? Most of the situations we face are already dealt with in the Word of God. Proverbs 30:5: ***“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”***

God has already revealed His general will for us in His Word. I wonder what God thinks when we plead with Him to reveal His will when we're not living out the will He's already revealed to us. Warren Wiersbe writes: *“The will of God isn't a curiosity for us to study, it's a command for us to obey; God isn't obligated to reveal His will unless we're willing to do it.”* Which leads to a question, *Do I just want a view of God's will, or am I committed to do God's will?*

Here then are some clear statements from God's Word regarding God's will for us (there's a lot more).

- ✓ **Practice justice, be kind and walk humbly.** Micah 6:8: ***“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”***
- ✓ **Don't be conformed but be transformed.** Romans 12:2: ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”***
- ✓ **Don't marry a spiritually mismatched mate.** 2 Corinthians 6:14: ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***
- ✓ **Walk wisely and use your time well.** Ephesians 5:15-17: ***“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”***

- ✓ **Be set apart and abstain from immorality.** 1 Thessalonians 4:3: *“For this is the **will of God**, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”*
- ✓ **Be thankful in all that happens.** 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the **will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**”*
- ✓ **Give what God has given to you.** Proverbs 3:9-10: *“**Honor the Lord with your wealth** and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”* BTW, I was scrolling through Facebook and saw something an Edgewood member posted: *“Something must be wrong - two pieces of mail, both checks that I wasn’t expecting - Grow Time donation this week taken care of!”* When I called to celebrate with her, she said, *“I made a pledge to Grow Time and things are kind of tight. This allowed me to meet my commitment for the next two months.”*
- ✓ **Do good even when bad is done to you.** 1 Peter 2:15: *“For this is the **will of God**, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”*
- ✓ **Delight to do the will of God.** 1 Peter 4:2: *“So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the **will of God.**”*
- ✓ **Repent and receive Christ.** 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish**, but that all should reach repentance.”*

Before leaving this point, be careful about claiming God “told you” to do something that is in direct contradiction to what the Bible teaches. Actually, unless you’re quoting a verse you should be very cautious about saying “God told you” to do anything. Do you really mean God spoke audibly to you? Related to this, sometimes I hear people say, *“God gave me new revelation.”* This is so dangerous!

The Bible alone is inspired, inerrant, authoritative and COMPLETE. If God said it in Scripture, that settles it. Don’t put words in His mouth that are not from His Word. Revelation 22:18-19: *“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”*

We’re spending some significant time on this first point because it’s so important. I came across a graphic called, “The Wisdom Pyramid” by Brett McCracken that is

spot on. It's on "Sermon Extras" if you'd like to do some further study. Do you remember the old food pyramid, which shows how a healthy body depends on a balanced diet, with the right proportions of healthy food vs. junk food?

In a culture bombarded by a glut of information but so little wisdom, we need healthier habits in order to grow in wisdom. The foundation is the Bible. The next layer up is the church. The next level is nature and beauty, followed by books. The next one up is the internet and the smallest category is social media. Unfortunately, many of us have this reversed.

2. Have I persisted in prayer? If we want to know how to make wise decisions, it's imperative to persist in prayer. Proverbs 19:2: ***"Whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way."*** In our hyper-connected culture of immediate gratification and instant answers, God's way is for us to slow down and pray. Proverbs 21:5: ***"The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty."***

Most of the bad decisions I make are the result of not taking the necessary time to lay things out before the Lord. Here's a principle: When possible, choose to pray and ponder for at least a day before making a decision.

Aaron Rock gives a helpful correction: *"Sometimes prayer can be an excuse for indecision, lack of obedience to God's revealed Word, or a substitute for courage...when you pray, pray for...his power, and pray to demonstrate your dependence upon him. But don't ask him to do what you are supposed to do. Pray and obey, pray and do not delay to do what he has commissioned you to do...I do not pray that God would bless my marriage if I fail to love and lead my wife. I do not pray for my kids to follow Jesus if I am a passive father. I do not pray for God to provide finances for our church if I do not give."*

Here's a good prayer to pray from Proverbs 30:7-9: ***"Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."***

3. Do I have all the facts? When faced with a decision, it's good to gather all the information you can. Proverbs 18:13, 17: ***"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame...the one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him."*** I've found it helpful to simply write

down as much as I can. In the past, I've created two columns on a sheet of paper so I can visually see the pros and cons of an opportunity or decision I'm facing.

4. What are my motives? According to Proverbs 16:2, it's important to monitor our motives: ***“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.”*** Do you have any blind spots? Is there a sin you haven't confessed? Is Jesus occupying first place in your life? Are you willing to do His will, no matter what it is? Proverbs 3:7: ***“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.”***

It's easy to do what sounds best or feels good only to end up in the ditch. Proverbs 16:25: ***“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”*** You might want to pray something like this, *“God, this makes a lot of sense to me and I'm excited about it [or fearful of it], but I want to know what you want me to do.”*

Charles Stanley encourages us to bring our desires into a neutral position so we can accept whatever God desires for us. Have you ever wanted something so badly you were not really open to the possibility of God saying no? A friend told me this week that simply asking, *“What are my motives? Why does this opportunity make me feel so good?”* helped him to slow down and discern the way of wisdom.

5. What do wise people think? When seeking God's will, it's wise to seek out the wisdom of the wise. Proverbs tells us 13 different times to do this. Here's a handful:

- Proverbs 11:14: ***“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”***
- Proverbs 12:15: ***“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”***
- Proverbs 18:1: ***“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.”***
- Proverbs 19:20 is especially helpful to those who are younger: ***“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”***

6. How is my past affecting me? Be careful about falling into past patterns or allowing an unholy habit to affect you. Proverbs 26:11: ***“Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.”*** A fool is one who keeps returning to his foul folly. It's time to stop allowing our dysfunction to determine the decisions we make. Be mindful of triggers that propel you back into past patterns. If you

want to experience freedom from this, I recommend Celebrate Recovery on Friday nights.

We often hear the phrase, “*just follow your heart.*” This might make for a good Disney movie, but Jeremiah 17:9 says it’s a dangerous way to live: “***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?***” Here’s another statement, which has become a common cliché but is nevertheless true: “*The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.*” Proverbs 27:12 says, “***The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.***”

7. Will this affect my integrity or jeopardize my witness? When faced with a decision, consider whether it will compromise your integrity or cause others to think less of Christ. Ponder these verses:

- Proverbs 10:9: “***Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.***”
- Proverbs 20:7: “***The righteous who walks in his integrity - blessed are his children after him!***”
- Proverbs 22:1: “***A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.***”
- Proverbs 11:30: “***The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.***” A wise witness seeks to win souls not wipe them out.

8. How will this decision enable me to revere and draw near to God? Proverbs 9:10: “***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.***” Psalms 25:12: “***Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.***” It might help to state it this way: “*God’s will for my life is to know Him and make Him known.*” One of the battle cries of the Reformation was this: *Soli Deo Gloria*, to the glory of God alone! 1 Corinthians 10:31: “***So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.***”

I fear many of us have bought into the belief that God wants us to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. This is a dangerous deception. God is committed to our holiness, not our happiness. And, in order for holiness to happen, sometimes He takes us through some pretty tough times. The last part of Proverbs 6:23 makes this clear: “***...and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.***”

Incidentally, we'll begin a new series next weekend from the Book of James called, "Faith Works." We'll learn that trials and temptations are designed to draw us closer to Christ. BTW, the February Bible Reading Plan is called, "Working Through Life's Struggles" and will take us through the Books of James and Job.

9. What next step does God want me to take? God does not reveal what's coming next week or next month or next year, but instead urges us to take the next step. Proverbs 6:23: "***For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light...***" The image is not of a spotlight filling the entire room but of a man who is out in the dark, walking along a dangerous trail. The only light he has is an old oil lamp that gives just enough illumination to reveal the terrain right in front of him. After he takes one step, the light provides guidance for his next step.

God led the Israelites for four decades by sending the cloud by day and the fire by night. One reason God doesn't reveal our entire future is because He wants us to trust Him moment by moment as we take one step of faith at a time. What's your next wise step?

10. Have I surrendered to God's sovereignty? It's been said if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans! I need to be good with whatever God says is for my benefit. Proverbs 16:9 says God will accomplish His way and His will according to His purposes: "***The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.***" Proverbs 21:1: "***The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.***"

With All Your Heart

John Ortberg believes there's a simple reason God put Proverbs in the Bible – because we're all prone to make dumb decisions! Turn to Proverbs 3:5-6, one of the most famous and familiar passages in the entire Bible: "***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.***"

This passage gives us two key responsibilities. We're called to *lean* on the Lord and *learn* to love Him with everything we have. When we do, He promises to *lead* us. Our task is to lean and learn. When we do, the Lord will lead us. We could say it like this: *When we lean on the Lord and learn from Him, He will lead us.*

We often make knowing God's will all about location (where should I be?) or vocation (what should I do?) when God is more about our transformation (who

should I be?). Ray Pritchard writes: *“The question is not where are you going to go, but what kind of person are you going to be wherever you go.”*

Finding God’s will is less about knowing a roadmap and more about growing in relationship with Him. Even after asking these ten questions, we could still be confused. What do we do then? Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us: *When we lean on the Lord and learn from Him, He will lead us.*

Lean on the Lord

The word **“trust”** literally means, *“to lean with the whole body.”* To trust in the Lord is to rest your full weight on Him for deliverance and for direction. The title **“Lord”** is “Yahweh” or “Jehovah,” and focuses on God’s covenant-making and promise-keeping character. We’re called to trust the Unchanging One who can be counted on. Proverbs 29:25: *“...whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.”*

Notice we’re called to total trust and complete commitment: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.”** The word **“all”** means, *“each, every, everything, the entire whole”* and is used in Leviticus 6:22 to refer to an offering to be burned in its entirety. God doesn’t want half-baked sacrifices or half-hearted devotion.

The personal pronoun **“your”** is used four times in these two verses and is emphatic. The word **“heart”** refers to more than just the place where feelings come from. In the Old Testament, the heart was considered the center of one’s inner nature – our feelings, our thoughts, and our decisions.

Verse 5 continues: **“and do not lean on your own understanding.”** To **“lean”** means to rest upon something for partial support when we’re unsteady, like a cane. **“Understanding”** refers to *“insight or comprehension.”*

Most of us think we can figure things out on our own. But, if we’re serious about making wise decisions, we must fight against the internal inclination to trust what we think is best. Proverbs 28:26 brings us up short: **“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.”**

When we lean on the Lord and learn from Him, He will lead us.

Learn from the Lord

First, we're to *lean on the Lord*. Second, we're to *learn from the Lord*. In "**all your ways**" is a command and means, "*in everything you do, in every detail of your life.*"

The word "**acknowledge**" carries with it the idea of intimate communion and is used to describe the marriage relationship. We could translate it this way: "*In everything you do, make sure you know the Lord intimately.*" It's the kind of knowing that only comes from personal experience.

We could state it simply: *The will of God for your life is to know God and to give Him glory.*

He Will Lead Us

Our responsibility is to *lean* and to *learn*. The last part of verse 6 tells us the Lord will then *lead* us: "**...and He will make straight your paths.**" The word "**make**" denotes intensity. God is committed to pull out all the stops and go to work when we lean on Him and learn to love Him.

In ancient Israel, people generally traveled to their destination by foot. Hilly and rocky terrain made the going difficult. Roads zigzagged between hills, making the journey even longer. The path into the gym for our services may zigzag a few times!

The word "**straight**" is the idea of making our paths plain. Solomon is telling us life is like a journey that goes up into the mountains one day and swerves into the swamp the next. Sometimes the road is washed out or filled with perilous potholes. When we give God first place and trust Him totally, He will make our paths plain. Proverbs 16:3: "**Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.**"

Decisions in This Room

A couple weeks ago, I gathered the staff in the sanctuary and later that night the deacons. I encouraged our leaders to spread out in the room and reflect on all the spiritual decisions that have been made right here over the past 40+ years. As God brought people to our minds we prayed for them and shared some of their stories.

I give God glory for all those who have gathered right here, who have grown, given and gone with the gospel! Consider all the gospel preaching and glorious

worship that has taken place in this place. How about all the baptisms, and weddings and funerals? Think of all the missionaries sent out.

I can't wait for this room to be renovated so we can continue to celebrate God's grace in this place! *As we lean on the Lord and learn from Him, He will continue to lead us.*

Just a reminder beginning next weekend we'll be meeting in the gym. As we prepare to enter ministry in the mess, let's dedicate this project to the Lord in prayer. I'm going to pray for unity, for safety, for our witness to the craftsmen who will be working and for us to continue to live on mission for His glory and the good of those around us. After we pray, we're going to sing, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

Prayer of Dedication

Closing Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness

New Members

5:00 pm – Elissa Debrey

10:45 am – Shalom Warrington