

Decision Making and the Will of God

Acts 1:12-26

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September 28-29, 2019

Play WHBF Story About Ruth Darr

Ruth has been a member here for about six years and has invited many people to gather with her. I can think of at least 5 people at Edgewood today because of her.

Shortly after this story aired on WHBF, Ray's mom Michelle sent me a link to the video along with a note. I have her permission to read it – *“This is my son & one of your members. She has helped Ray so much when his grandma passed away. She is who he talks to when he feels down. I'm going thru treatment with cancer tumors and we are a close [k]nit family...I'm so blessed to add her [to our family]!!”*

We put Ray and Michelle's names up on the wall in the worship center in the hopes that we can add them to our faith family.

Ruth is living on mission by BLESSing those she comes in contact with. Many of you are doing the same by following this simple acrostic (we have additional bookmarks available in the lobby).

Begin with prayer
Listen for hurts and needs
Eat together
Serve in practical ways
Share the story of Jesus

Have you ever stopped to think about how many decisions you make every day?

Some decisions are really easy like the one I made when a friend asked if I wanted some free Packers tickets for the game Thursday night. When I called my dad to see if he wanted to go with me, he immediately replied, *“Let's do it.”* When I asked if he needed to check with my mom and his calendar, he said, *“Why? I'm going to the Packers game!”*

Last weekend we learned this from Acts 1:6-11: *We're called to witness where we are, but not stay where we are.* We celebrated how God uses Edgewood to get the gospel out to our community, to our counties, to our country and to the continents.

I wanted to clarify the percent we give to missions at Edgewood. In the past I've mentioned this amount has been 11% and last weekend I mentioned it was 9%. This varies each year depending on the special missions projects we undertake. For instance, the year we raised over \$50,000 for the mobile ultrasound van, the percentage of money given to missions was higher. Two years ago we sent over \$16,000 to Samaritan's Purse for hurricane relief. This past December we dedicated 10% of the one-time Grow Time offerings to three of our Go Team partners. This year we have had a couple partners transition from support and are actively looking to add additional ones. Related to this, just this week we sent one-time gifts to two of our partners, which will raise the percent we give this year.

As we continue in our "On Mission" journey through the Book of Acts, our topic today is "Decision Making and the Will of God" from Acts 1:12-26.

Here's what we're going to discover: *We must pray and plan, as we trust God's providence.* I see four details from this passage that will help us make wise decisions.

1. Obey immediately. After Jesus commissioned these first followers to be His witnesses, they watched as He ascended into Heaven. Since they were told to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit we see in verse 12 they immediately obeyed: ***"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away."*** A "Sabbath day's journey" is a technical term referring to a bit more than a half-mile, which was the distance the tribes would have to travel for worship at the tabernacle while they were in the wilderness.

Luke 24:52 gives us a sense of their mood: ***"And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."*** Olivet, also called the Mount of Olives, is significant in the Scriptures. In Ezekiel 11:23-24 the glory of God departed from the temple and eventually ascended back to heaven from the Mount of Olives: ***"And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city...then the vision that I had seen went up from me."*** Just moments earlier, the disciples witnessed the Glorious One ascend into heaven from this same mountain.

The Mount of Olives is where Jesus agonized in prayer. As we anticipate the second coming of Christ, Zechariah 14:4 describes what and where this will happen: ***“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.”***

Immediate obedience is the most important part of our discipleship. How are you doing at obeying? Is there something you’ve been putting off? Remember this: *Delayed obedience is disobedience.*

Some of us may be seeking to know God’s will about something while not obeying the will of God we already know. For instance, the Bible is clear God’s will is our sanctification and sexual purity according to 1 Thessalonians 4:3: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”*** God wants us to gather, to grow, to give and to go with the gospel. Let’s be like David who declared in Psalm 40:8: ***“I delight to do your will, O my God.”***

2. Pray with perseverance. The second detail to help us make wise decisions is to pray with perseverance. Check out verses 13-14: ***“And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”*** Notice they went up to ***“the”*** upper room. This means it was a specific place they had gathered in before. It’s possible this was where they celebrated the Last Supper as seen in Luke 22:12 and where they congregated Easter evening while huddling in fear.

We’re told the eleven disciples gathered with the women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Jesus broke down gender barriers because there were so many faithful women following Him they were referred to as ***“the women.”*** We know some of their names from other accounts – Mary Magdalene, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Salome. Matthew 27:55 tells us there were ***“many women.”*** These ministry patrons provided from their financial resources to fund this mobile ministry team. Would you also notice Jesus had brothers who were now believers?

Let me point out that Mary, the mother of Jesus, also gathered for prayer and worship. After experiencing a sword piercing her soul when Jesus was crucified, she is now a joyful witness of the resurrection of Christ. Here are a few things we see:

- Mary is listed *among* the women, not *above* them.
- Mary is praying *with* these followers, they are not praying *to* her.
- Mary had other children after Jesus was born.
- Contrary to Catholic belief, there's no evidence of Mary's assumption into heaven.
- This is the last time she is listed in the Bible and we are never told to pray to her and she is never given the title of "Co-Redemptrix" or "Queen of Heaven" or "Mother of God" in any passage of Scripture.

Notice "**all**" of them are in "**one accord.**" This means they were unanimously united as they lived on mission for the glory of God. This is in contrast to the time they were likely in this same room, the night before Jesus was crucified when [Luke 22:24](#) tells us the disciples were disputing about who was the greatest. Thankfully things have changed because they are now living out [Psalm 133:1](#): "**Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!**" I'm so grateful for the sweet unity God has given us at Edgewood!

As they gathered they "**were devoting themselves to prayer.**" This means they were "**adhering firmly, cleaving faithfully and continuing steadfastly.**" In reading through Acts it becomes clear these followers were able to make such a deep and lasting impact because they were deeply devoted to God, to each other, and to reaching the lost around them. We see this in [Acts 2:46](#): "**And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**"

As they waited to become witnesses, they were living out the call of [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#) to "**pray continually**" and of [Romans 12:12](#) to be "**constant in prayer.**" If you're seeking to make a decision, make sure you are seeking the Lord in prayer and do so in concert with others. They knew they would never be able to witness without His power.

We must pray and plan, as we trust God's providence.

3. Stay in Scripture. After *obeying* immediately and *praying* with perseverance, these first followers were known for *staying* in the Scriptures. Look at verses 15-17: ***“In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ‘Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’”***

I love how Peter, who had failed so publicly by denying Christ, is now reinstated as a leader. He’s living out the commission given him by Christ to feed His lambs and strengthen His sheep. After addressing them as brothers, he quickly goes to the Bible: ***“The Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand...”*** He recognizes the Bible as inspired, containing prophecies that must be fulfilled.

No doubt they were all wondering why Judas would sell Jesus out, especially since he was one of the trusted twelve. Just like God used the mistakes of individuals in the Old Testament for His purposes, He will use what Judas did to accomplish His plans.

When you’re faced with any situation, ask this question, *“What does the Bible say?”* Our October Bible reading plan will focus on the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. These readings will help you follow God more faithfully as you seek His wisdom.

Next, Peter summarized what Judas did in verses 18-19. I should tell you ahead of time it’s a bit graphic: ***“(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)”***

Judas didn’t personally purchase this property but his blood money was used to acquire this field of blood according to Matthew 27:5-8: ***“And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.”***

Some have wondered if this is a contradiction because Matthew describes Judas hanging himself and Luke tells us he fell headlong. Actually, the accounts are complementary since it's likely the rope or branch he used broke, causing him to fall headlong.

Are you aware there are approximately 123 suicides every day in our country? This is an increase of 33% since 1999. There are people here grieving from the suicide of a family member or friend. I was rocked to hear popular pastor Jarrid Wilson committed suicide earlier this month, just hours after conducting the funeral of someone who had taken her life.

Perhaps you are contemplating ending your life right now. Please hold on to these three truths:

- **There is hope.** The Bible says hope gets the last word.
- **There is love.** On your worst day, God still loves you more than you can imagine.
- **There is community.** We are here to help.

Whatever you're going through, remember this: *suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary situation.* God never wants us to end our lives prematurely. With the help of God and others, you can get through whatever you're facing. Please come up and talk to me or another pastor after the service.

In verse 20, Peter pinpoints two passages from Psalms which show how Judas fulfilled prophecy and how they must fill his vacant position: ***“For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and ‘Let another take his office.’”***

Back in John 13:18 on the night of the Passover, Jesus informed His disciples that one of them would betray Him by quoting Psalm 41:9: ***“He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me.”*** This psalm of David was written after Ahithophel who was David's counselor, betrayed him by joining the rebellion led by David's son Absalom (see 2 Samuel 17). When Ahithophel realized the revolt would fail, he went home and hanged himself. Both Judas and Ahithophel had trusted positions; both betrayed their leader and both men hanged themselves.

By staying in the Scriptures, Peter gives them a framework to understand what happened and what they should do now. The Bible gives both an explanation of what happened and how to move forward.

Brothers and sisters, during a time of waiting, make sure you stay in the Scriptures.

The plan for making decisions is to *obey, pray and stay in the Scriptures*. That leads to the fourth directive – *God will make a way!*

4. God will make a way. I want to acknowledge the help I received from another pastor’s insight into verses 21-26. These verses help us to see the process the first church went through to make decisions.

- **Describe the need.** In verses 21-22 Peter establishes the importance of replacing Judas: *“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”* Since Jesus had chosen 12 apostles and had promised they would one day sit on 12 thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28), it was important to fill this office. On top of that, Peter had just quoted from Psalm 109:8 which predicts someone would replace Judas.

Peter then lists three qualifications for a true apostle.

1. He must have been with Christ from the beginning.
2. The apostles must know him.
3. Since the resurrection is the heart of the Christian faith, he must be a first-hand witness of Jesus being alive. Christianity is true because it is based on true facts of history.

Incidentally, I believe there are no “apostles” today because it is no longer possible to meet these three qualifications.

- **Delineate the options.** Two men are nominated in verse 23: *“And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.”* One man has three first names (like me) but that’s all we know about him. We don’t know anything about Matthias either (except that’s the name of Pastor Dan and Beth’s grandson). The early church historian

Eusebius says these men were among the 70 whom Jesus sent out two by two in [Luke 10:1-17](#) but we can't know this for sure. We only know they met the three requirements Peter listed.

- **Declare through prayer.** When we're unsure what to say, it's time to pray. We see this in [verses 24-25](#): ***“And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’”*** This is the first recorded prayer of the new church. Note how short it is (37 words in English) and how it's centered on God's sovereignty. Because God had already chosen one of these two men, they wanted to know whom He wanted for the job. It's as if they're praying: *“God please show us what you know so we know how we should go.”*

During the civil war someone asked President Lincoln, *“Do you think God is on our side?”* He answered, *“I don't know. I haven't thought about that. But I'm very anxious to know whether we are on His side.”* One pastor writes: There are really only two prayers in the universe: *“My will be done”* or *“Thy will be done.”*

- **Decide what is best.** What the church does next is a bit surprising in [verse 26](#): ***“And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”*** The casting of lots was done in the Old Testament to determine God's will in certain situations. In [1 Chronicles 24:5](#) the casting of lots was a means of choosing temple servants. In [Joshua 14:2](#) lots were used to apportion land lots. In [Leviticus 16:8](#), lots were cast on the Day of Atonement to determine which one of two goats would become the sin offering.

In the New Testament we read in [Luke 1:9](#) that Zechariah was chosen by lot to ***“enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.”*** We also read of Roman soldiers casting lots to determine who would get the clothing of Jesus in [John 19:24](#): ***“So they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.’ This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’”***

It's likely the names of Joseph and Matthias were written on small rocks and put in a jar. After the container was shaken, it was tipped over and whatever

name came out first would be the one God had chosen. This makes me think of two things. First, I wonder if Joseph demanded a recount? Second, Matthias didn't have very big shoes to fill, did he? Anything he did would be better than what Judas did.

This was an example of how these first followers trusted the sovereignty of God as stated in Proverbs 16:33: ***“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”*** Incidentally, this is the last time in the Bible lots were used to determine God's will. Now that we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we don't make decisions this way.

In January we started off the New Year with a message called, “Making Wise Decisions.” We walked through Proverbs and listed 10 questions to consider. I found it helpful to review these questions again.

1. What does the Bible say? (Proverbs 30:5)
2. Have I persisted in prayer? (Proverbs 19:2)
3. Do I have all the facts? (Proverbs 18:13)
4. What are my motives? (Proverbs 16:2)
5. What do wise people think? (Proverbs 11:14)
6. How is my past affecting me? (Proverbs 26:11)
7. How will this affect my integrity and jeopardize my witness? (Proverbs 10:9)
8. How will this decision enable me to revere and draw near to God? (Proverbs 9:10)
9. What next steps does the Lord want me to take? (Proverbs 6:23)
10. Have I surrendered to God's sovereignty? (Proverbs 16:9)

We profited from unpacking Proverbs 3:5-6 as it relates to making decisions: ***“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.”***

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. His job is to 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?). *The question is not where are you going to go, but what kind of person are you going to be when you get there.*

Finding God's will is less about knowing a roadmap and more about growing in relationship with Him.

*When we obey, pray and stay, God will make a way!
We must pray and plan and then trust God's providence!*

Invitation

Over the course of one's lifetime, the average person will make 773,618 decisions and come to regret 143,262 of them. That's around 20%.

The most important decision you'll ever make is to receive a gift you don't deserve...and when you do, you'll never regret it!

If you have not yet repented and received Christ, today is your decision day. Listen to these sobering words from Joel 3:14: ***"Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."*** Interestingly, this prophecy of judgment is set in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, also known as the Kidron Valley, which is at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

John 1:12 says, ***"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*** Once you repent and receive, you will become a member of God's family.

This week Carl Davis and I had a conversation with one of the sub contractors who travels across the country installing seating in churches and other venues. Carl is the superintendent with Aspen. As we were chatting with him, this young man mentioned he believes in life on other planets. I listened and then steered the conversation to Genesis 1. He quickly discounted this and said he didn't believe the Bible.

Then I noticed he was wearing a big cross around his neck and told him he must have some faith because he was publicly identifying with Christ. He then held up the cross and said, *"Oh, this? This doesn't mean anything to me."* I asked him

why he wears it and he said, “*A man has to believe in something.*” Just then we were interrupted and I had to step away to take an important phone call.

Later I talked to Carl and he told me the conversation continued when the young man shared that he knows there’s something “out there” because he came within seconds of making a decision that would have sent him to jail. He knew there was something, or someone, who held him back. Carl was then able to share that it was God who kept him from doing this and shared the gospel with him. We’ve added his name up on the wall in the worship center and are praying that he chooses to follow Christ.

Friend, everything in Christianity centers on this truth - God the Father sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross as our substitute. His death was the full and final sacrifice for our sins, thus satisfying the righteous wrath of our holy God. After Jesus died, He was buried and on the third day He rose again. He ascended into Heaven and when He returns His feet will land on the Mount of Olives.

If you’re ready to be saved so you don’t come into judgment, please pray this prayer with me right now. I want to give you the opportunity to come up front afterwards if you decide to follow Christ.

INVITATION

Lord, I admit I am a sinner and deserve Your just judgment. I repent from how I’ve been living and turn to You. I believe Jesus died in my place on the cross and rose again on the third day and now I receive Him into my life. Please save me from my sins and from Your righteous wrath. I want to be born again so I place all my trust in You and You alone. If there’s anything in my life You don’t like, please get rid of it. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I invite you to come down front if you decided to follow Christ. Let’s stand and sing, “I Will Follow.”

Closing Song: “I Will Follow”