

Making Decisions

Scripture consistently emphasizes divine direction and human responsibility in decision making. In the opening chapters of Genesis, Adam and Eve are given the freedom to choose, and they were also held accountable for their decisions.

We make decisions every day, some estimates suggest that the average adult makes more than 28 to 35,000 conscious or partially conscious decisions daily. At times, the seriousness of a decision or the possible consequences is what makes our decisions difficult or overwhelming.

Some of the tactics people use are:

- **Compliance:** Selecting the most socially acceptable or comfortable choice. **Not advised**
- **Delegating:** Passing the decision to someone else. **Weak usually done out of avoidance.**
- **Balancing:** Weighing factors carefully before deciding, **better usually looks like a list of Pro's and Con's.**
- **Prioritizing and Reflecting:** Focusing on decisions with the greatest need, shortest timeframe or largest impact. **Practical and wise**
- But we must also learn to develop the ability to recover from poor decisions, this is essential to our:
 - physical health,
 - our families,
 - our satisfaction at work,
 - and our ability to serve God effectively.

So, this raises an important question: Do you stop and consider what God's Word says about the small, everyday decisions you make? One way we learn to make those decisions wisely is by knowing God through His word and understanding what pleases Him. God wants to hear from us so we pray.

Pray

If we are confused about whether or not we are hearing God, it is good to pray for wisdom (**James 1:5**). (It's good to pray for wisdom even when we don't think we're confused!) We should ask God to make His will known to us clearly.

When praying, we "must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind **James 1:6**. If we have no faith, we should not expect to receive anything from the Lord as **James 1:7** tells us.

God wants us to know His will, that is why He reveals it to us through Scripture. He wants us to seek wisdom through prayer, so we gain confidence in Him not ourselves when making decisions. Just as when **Solomon Prayed for Wisdom 1 Kings 3:9** Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people? God blessed him with what he asked for and so much more. Begin with prayer.

1Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
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If we should pray without ceasing or in all situations, we should certainly pray in times of decision-making.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Decision Making needs to involve seeking the will of God, meaning to genuinely trust in Him. When we determine how to best apply God's Word in our day-to-day choices, we find ourselves on the right path.

1 Corinthians 2:16 tells us:

1 Corinthians 2:16 “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

1. Yet each day, we must make decisions that affect not only our own lives but also the lives of those around us. So how do we apply biblical wisdom in real and practical ways that help us make our decisions?

Part of that is understanding our decision-making involves an act of our will, and our choices are influenced by our thoughts, our emotions, or both and ultimately will reflect the desires of our heart. **Psalm 119:30** tells us

Psalm 119:30 I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me.

Notice **I** have **chosen** the way of faithfulness, **I** set your rules **before me**. This is not by accident, it doesn't just happen it is a conscious choice we must make.

- Our attitude towards decision-making should be that of Jesus Himself who declared, “Not My will, but Yours be done” **Luke 22:42; Matthew 6:10**.

But let's face it, we live in a world filled with endless choices and possibilities. That is why God gives clear direction throughout Scripture on making decisions. It is up to each of us to make a decision that falls within God's moral standard.

- For example, we are not told exactly whom to marry, but Christians are commanded to marry fellow believers:

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? **15** What accord has Christ with Belial (*bel-ee'-al*)? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

Beyond the instructions not to marry an unbeliever we have a lot of freedom in our choice of spouse.

By the way this verse applies to business partners, friends or anyone else we attach ourselves to. It does not apply to family as we are born into them.

We are not told what profession to practice, but we are commanded to work and do so honestly

Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

- We are not told exactly where to live, but we are advised to keep Christian fellowship wherever we live: **1 Corinthians 15:33** Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- **Often**, we want God to give us specifics—where to work, where to live, whom to marry, what car to buy, etc. God allows us to make choices, but He also has ways of preventing wrong choices.

Paul, Timothy and Silas Act 16:6 went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, [miss-ee-ah] they attempted to go into Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them**. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas.

We have to be able to hear God, husbands through our wives, sometimes we hear God audibly but mostly we hear God through His word.

So realistically many of our decisions are simple, we just need to ask ourselves whether it is illegal or immoral.

- We should not be considering what the Bible forbids. For example, the Bible forbids stealing; since God has commanded us on the issue, we know it is *not* His will for us to be bank robbers—we don't need to waste our time praying about it.

Which brings us to another tool we have, common sense.

Common sense is sound judgment in practical matters. In **Proverbs 8:5** some translations speak of the need to develop “common sense,” which other translations simply call “prudence” or “discretion.” Biblically, common sense can be thought of as a combination of wisdom and judgment

Proverbs 8:12 “I, wisdom, dwell with judgment, and I find knowledge and discretion. **13** The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. **14** I have counsel and sound wisdom; I have insight; I have strength.

Wisdom is knowing what to do; sound judgment is knowing when and where to do it.

Wisdom allows us to see life the way God does.

- When we seek God's perspective, we can make decisions based upon their eternal significance rather than our own selfish interest.
- When we choose to make decisions based on wisdom alone, we are exercising common sense.

We must seek wisdom in order to know what issues are worth being tentative about (Proverbs 2:2–6). Social media blazes with scorching opinions on every subject, but many of those fueling the fires would benefit from being more hesitant. Our culture has substituted opinions for truth and passion for conviction. We need not have a hard and fast opinion on every subject, nor feel pressured to “take a side” especially when we lack all the information or education on an issue. Taking time to hear all sides of a matter is a mark of wisdom **Proverbs 18:17** The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

But when it comes to the basic tenets of the gospel or the infallibility of God's Word, we can't be indecisive. More information is available to us today than in all of history, so there is no excuse for a Christian to be ignorant about God's standards on the moral, civic, and relational topics of our day. Most spiritual indecisiveness is motivated by the fear of man, not a lack of knowledge. Ask yourself am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. **Galatians 1:10**

- Several places in Scripture show the folly of indecision. Lot's wife perished because of her inability to decide between Sodom and obedience to God **Genesis 19:26**.
- Jesus warned us that “no one can serve two masters” **Matthew 6:24**.
- God has given us His Word to instruct us in vital matters, but He leaves room for personal opinion and conviction in lesser matters as we strive to be pleasing to Him in all things.

We should be careful not to judge others for their decisions:

Romans 14:1–4 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. **2** One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. **3** Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. **4** Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

- When we live in ways that are true to the convictions based on God's word, we will not be shaken by every new idea or cultural whim **Matthew 7:24–27**. Indecisiveness about what God has declared to be true has no place in the life of a Christian.
- The mind of a healthy Christian is settled on the things that matter... and humbly teachable on the things that don't. We need to continue to study to show ourselves approved unto God **2 Timothy 2:15** so that we form godly convictions about even the "gray areas" of life when making decisions.

2. How we should not make decisions is the practice of casting lots it's mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. In spite of the many references to casting lots in the Old Testament, nothing is known about the actual lots themselves. They could have been sticks of various lengths, black and white stones, or some kind of dice; but their exact nature is unknown. The closest modern practice to casting lots is flipping a coin.

- The practice of casting lots occurs most often in connection with the division of the land under Joshua **chapters 14-21**.
- God allowed the Israelites to cast lots in order to determine various offices and functions in the temple **1 Chronicles 24:5, 31; 25:8-9; 26:13-14**.
- The sailors on Jonah's ship also cast lots to determine who had brought God's wrath upon their ship **Jonah 1:7**.
- NT The eleven apostles cast lots to determine who would replace Judas **Acts 1:26**.
- Casting lots eventually became a game people played and made wagers on as seen in the Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus' garments **Matthew 27:35**.

Now that we have the complete Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us, there is no reason to cast lots to make decisions.

3. Another way to avoid making decisions is by going with what our heart tells us. **Mark 7:20-23** And he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him. **21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

In these passages, we find that we don't want to be led by our wants and our fleshly desires that come from our innermost being. Sin does not just come about as a result of outside forces such as the environment we grew up in, we are born sinners, it comes from those hidden thoughts and intentions, and our secret desires that can only be controlled by our will, we must desire to do what is good.

Bottom line is that, in our fallen state, the desires of our hearts do not come from God. Jeremiah further confirms the nature of man's heart telling us: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? **Jeremiah 17:9**

- Several places in Scripture show the folly of indecision. Lot's wife perished because of her inability to decide between Sodom and obedience to God **Genesis 19:26**.
- God has given us His Word to instruct us in vital matters **Psalms 32:8** tells us I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. But God leaves room for personal opinion and conviction in lesser matters as we strive to be pleasing to Him in all things. Because Christianity is not reduced to a list of do's and don'ts.
- Another decision-making process to avoid is **Impulsiveness decisions**:

- Quickly choose the first available option.
- The desire for instant gratification is the enemy of common sense. Many people have become ensnared in trouble and heartache because they rejected a wise path and sought instead immediate satisfaction.
- The school of hard knocks educates many by learning from the consequences of such poor choices.
- Everyone makes bad decisions at some point. The difference between the wise and the foolish is that one learns from his mistakes and the other keeps repeating them.

4. So how do we recover from bad decisions that can lead to Regret is sorrow?

- Regret really is sorrow or remorse over something that has happened or that we have done. Regret can also be a sense of disappointment over what has not happened, such as regretting wasted years.
- To be human is to have regrets because making mistakes is pretty much a universal experience.
- The Bible gives us instructions that if we follow them the result will be fewer regrets.
- However, in God's grace and mercy, He has also provided a way to deal with regrets when we have not lived as wisely as He wants us to. **Psalm 51:10-12** states Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. **11** Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. **12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- a) In considering what the Bible says about regrets, we should start with the fact that in a couple of places we are told that God "regretted" an action He took.
 - The Hebrew root for the word "regret" actually means "to sigh."
 - Since we know God does not make mistakes, the concept of sighing is a more descriptive term for the kind of regret God experiences. **Genesis 6:7** it says that, after seeing the wickedness on the earth, God regretted making man.
 - This glimpse into God's character showing us that, even though He already knows we will sin, it still grieves Him when we choose it.
- b) Human regret is different from God's regret. Human regret occurs because we do make mistakes. As we age, we often look back on decisions made in youth and regret our choices.
 - However, those regrets usually fall into one of two categories. Our regrets arise from either foolish choices or sin choices, and each requires a different response.

1. Peter is one biblical example of someone who deeply regretted a foolish decision.

- Although Peter was committed to Jesus, his fear made him run away when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, and he later denied his Lord.
- His actions did not come from a desire to sin, but from impulse, spiritual immaturity, and fear. He deeply regretted his actions **Luke 22:62**.
- Jesus knew about Peter's regret and specifically asked to see him after His resurrection **Mark 16:7**. We learn that our regrets are not hidden from God and He desires to restore us when we return to Him. **Malachi 3:7; Jeremiah 24:7**.

2. Other regrets are due to sin choices that may have left scars and consequences. After a lifetime of selfish immorality, sometimes in their later years we can be so overwhelmed by regret we cannot experience joy. The pain of regret can drive us to decisions we would not otherwise make.

- Judas Iscariot is one such example in the Bible. After he realized that he had betrayed the Messiah, Judas was so filled with regret that he tried to undo his actions by returning the blood money.
- When that didn't work, he went out and killed himself (Matthew 27:3–5).

✓ Regret should not lead us to self-destruction; God wants to use it to lead us toward repentance.

- It's important to understand that regret is not the same as repentance. Esau deeply regretted his decision to sell his birthright, but he never repented of his sin **Hebrews 12:16–17**.
- Regret focuses on the action that has brought sorrow; repentance focuses on the one we have offended. **2 Corinthians 7:10** explains the difference between mere regret and true repentance: Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.
- Two men betrayed Jesus on the night He was crucified. Judas had worldly sorrow (regret), and his life was ended.
- Peter had godly sorrow (repentance), and his life was transformed. We have the same choices those men had when we face regret, we can let it consume our lives, or we can lay our fault at the feet of Jesus, turn from it, and let Him restore us **Psalms 23; 2 Corinthians 5:17**.

✠ Some practical considerations to keep in mind when making decisions include:

- **Pray:** Talk to God in prayer and earnestly wait for His answer.
- **Study the Word:** The Bible is called “God’s Word” for a reason—it is the primary way God speaks to us. It is also the way we learn about God’s character and His dealings with people throughout history.
- **seeking godly counsel:** **Proverbs 15:22 states**, without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed. Consulting trusted mentors, pastors, or spiritually mature friends.
- **Align Decisions with Scripture** Decisions should be consistent with biblical principles.
- considering the needs of others **1 John 3:17**,
- **Act with Faith and Responsibility** While God provides guidance, humans are responsible for their choices.
- **Give praise to God for your success.** When your decisions result in personal success, the temptation is to believe it is due to your own power, talent, or genius. However, it is God who blesses our efforts and gives strength. “A man can receive only what is given him from heaven” **John 3:27**.

5. Ask some key questions before making a decision:

- am I choosing to please myself, or do I choose to please the Lord?
- Am I making this decision out of joy or am I making this decision out of anger or fear.
- Will this decision divide the body of Christ or help us and others grow spiritually?
- Will this decision glorify God.
- Does this decision have to be made right now.
 - The love of God should motivate every decision we make **Matthew 22:37**.

- The glory of God should be the end or result of every decision we make **1 Corinthians 10:31**.

As we strive to become more like Christ, our minds will be transformed **Romans 12:2**, deepening our desire to glorify God and to know Him better; this ultimately clarifies the decision-making process.