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Principles of Biblical Decision Making



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Principles of Biblical Decision Making

I. INTRODUCTION

There are few things that Christians struggle with more than knowing God's will. Sometimes it seems like God provides clear guidance to other people, but our personal search for clarity on hearing God's voice can be difficult, full of uncertainty, and downright confusing. What are we to do then? Give up? Pray harder? Just make a decision and hope for the best? With big decisions such as choosing a career, getting married, going to the mission field, making significant healthcare choices, planning financially and so on, we may feel the need to know "for sure" before we can move forward. Unfortunately, as hard as we try, "for sure" often seems like an impossible standard. Is "for sure" even the right goal? Is that what God asks us to do? To know "for sure" how our health or career will turn out 20 years from now? In a simple answer, no. He wants us to seek Him and His direction and then trust Him as we move forward in faith.

This document is designed to help think through the factors involved in making wise, biblically-based decisions. We will not provide a sure-fire way to know the "right" choice to make in every decision. There also isn't any quick and easy three-step-method for knowing the future or never making a mistake. We hope this document will bring out both the obvious and subtle factors that affect decision making. Our goal is to encourage a right relationship with God while seeking His guidance.

II. TAKING A STEP BACK BEFORE WE MOVE FORWARD

Many readers will want to rush right to the conclusion of the matter. . . . "OK, do I buy a car now or wait longer?" Should I homeschool my son?" "Should I accept this job offer?" However, we will start by backing up and looking at common assumptions about discerning God's will as we seek to make decisions. We will address the following important concepts.

- Faith and Godly Wisdom in Decision Making
- Balancing Faith and Godly Wisdom
- Using Scripture Accurately and In Context
- Freedom and Responsibility

A. Faith and Godly Wisdom in Decision Making.

As believers we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). In the context of this paper, we are referring to faith as "believing in, trusting in, and clinging to God." For example, we believe that His promises are true and that He will fulfill what He has committed to do in our lives as well as in the world (Phil. 1:6). This includes His ability to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. . ." (Eph. 3:20). However, it is important to note that walking by faith does not mean we feel absolutely certain about something or that we have a guarantee things will turn out like we plan. Faith is faith precisely because we don't have complete certainty or knowledge of the future. Rather, we believe in, trust in, and cling to God as He walks with us through life. In this context, faith is trusting God through the uncertainty. Heb. 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is God's design and desire that we hold to the certainty of His character and nature instead of having complete certainty in our life circumstances. Heb. 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Faith is trusting God through the uncertainty.

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In the context of this paper, we refer to godly wisdom as applying the mind of Christ (*1 Cor. 2:16*) to discern how to work through life. This kind of wisdom is the godly use of knowledge which will grow and develop as an individual walks with the Lord. Godly wisdom begins with the foundation of viewing God with reverential fear, as noted in *Prov. 9:10*, “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*” Godly wisdom is grounded on the specific teachings and principles of the Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It will help us learn from life experiences, good counsel, and sound reasoning processes in order to mature our judgment (*Heb. 5:14*). We seek to continue to grow in godly wisdom, but we realize we will not arrive at perfect wisdom or understanding this side of Heaven. While some may think godly wisdom is simply common sense, it often goes well beyond it. Godly wisdom is the opposite of foolishness and shows that one’s thinking has been made right by the Word of God. God willingly and freely gives wisdom to us when we ask in faith (*Jas. 1:5-6*). However, remember God said He will provide us with wisdom, not complete certainty or even the awareness of this wisdom. Many people ask God for wisdom, but they are really seeking to know something “for sure.”

We must also be mindful of and avoid worldly wisdom. Often worldly wisdom may make sense to our human nature, while godly wisdom may go against our human nature. For example, living in humility, being forgiving, showing grace and so on are not sensible from a secular standpoint. Because of this, godly wisdom is often rejected outright by unbelievers. Note how the Apostle Paul highlights the stark contrast between godly and worldly wisdom:

1 Cor. 1:18-20, “*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*”

Paul wanted his listeners to differentiate the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the world. This can be done through knowing God intimately, listening to His Word, and following the direction of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in *John 10:27*, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” We learn to know His voice through Scripture. The Word provides us with direction about God’s ways and “*is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).*” The Word also tells us that the Holy Spirit gives the believer spiritual discernment to understand godly wisdom apart from worldly wisdom.

1 Cor. 2:12-14, “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*”

By learning to hear God’s voice through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit living in us, we learn to love the things He loves and hate the things He hates. By cultivating this mind of Christ and seeking after Godly wisdom, we can walk wisely in all aspects of our life, including decision making.

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B. The Balance of Faith and Godly Wisdom.

Faith and godly wisdom are foundational elements of the Christian life. It is essential to recognize that Scripture never pits faith against godly wisdom in an “either-or” fashion. Rather, faith and godly wisdom are viewed as co-occurring and in harmony with each other. God is ultimately the source and focus of both and they can, and should, be used together in the decision-making process. In fact, while faith and godly wisdom are distinct in some ways, it is important to view them as highly interrelated. Consequently, the person who is strong in faith will walk in godly wisdom, and the person who is strong in godly wisdom will walk in faith.

Our Heavenly Father desires for us to walk in the “way of wisdom” and also promises that He will lead us in right paths. *Prov. 4:11-13, “I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.”* By faith, we trust Him to lead us. *Prov. 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”*

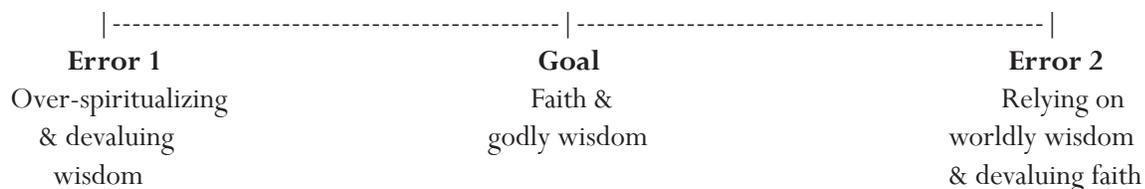
Faith and godly wisdom both flow from God and are designed to work in harmony. Unfortunately, human beings tend to move toward imbalance instead of fully incorporating both. God is aware of these tendencies and addresses them in *1 Corinthians* where Paul challenged the people to avoid relying too heavily on either human knowledge or supernatural signs.

1 Cor. 1:22-25, “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

Paul speaks of how both Jews and Greeks missed the opportunity to know Christ because of their expectations. The Jews demanded miraculous signs while the Greeks fell prey to the pride of human reasoning. Both groups allowed their assumptions to blind them to God’s plan. Likewise, we too must not limit God nor believe we can control how He should direct us. Note the errors listed below and think about which you tend toward.

1. Over-spiritualizing and devaluing godly wisdom – Some individuals tend to over-spiritualize and over-interpret coincidences and benign actions. They may have a tendency to look for signs or rely on their emotions as they make decisions. They may also force their own meaning on the Scripture they read.
2. Relying on worldly wisdom and devaluing walking by faith – Some people rely too heavily on logic, facts, knowledge, education, and personal experiences when making decisions. They may have difficulty walking by faith because it doesn’t always “make sense.”

Note: Some people tend toward going back and forth between the two extremes, while missing the middle which incorporates both faith and Godly wisdom together.



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In the book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis addressed the issue of the human tendency toward extremes and provided a solution:

“I feel a strong desire to tell you - and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me - which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs - pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them.”

C. Using Scripture Accurately and In Context.

The Bible contains all of the guidance necessary for us to find salvation and live a life that is pleasing to God (2 Pet. 1:2-4). When we read and follow the Word, we can be assured we are doing what God desires for our lives. Remember it is important to take the whole counsel of the Word together (Acts 20:27). The holy Word of God should not be used haphazardly or to prove our point. We must take from the Scripture what it actually says and not what we want it to say. We must not superimpose our own meanings onto it but must take it in context. When we are seeking guidance from the Word during a time of decision making, we may be especially prone to the errors of inserting our own meanings into what we read. We need to “rightly divide the word of truth” if we are to glean God’s guidance from it (2 Tim. 2:15).

Some helpful questions to ask when seeking guidance from the Word:

- To whom was this text originally written?
- Who was the author and for what purpose did he write?
- What does the text say?
- What words do I need to look up so I know the actual meaning of the words in this passage?
- How does this text fit in the context of my life today?

Some areas of caution to be aware of when reading the Bible, especially while seeking God’s direction:

- Reading too much meaning into vague Scriptures.
- Superimposing specific meanings onto Scriptures. For example, reading the word “go” in a verse and believing it automatically was an affirmative answer to the question, “Should I go to college?”
- Seeking Scripture to support a pre-conceived idea.
- Relying too heavily on any kind of “mystical” use of the Bible such as repeatedly flipping the Bible open for a specific answer.
- Over-emphasizing the need for signs or believing God must provide a sign.
- Basing a decision solely on one thing that opens in the Bible.
- Taking verses out of context.
- Not using godly wisdom or wise counsel.

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Some Notes about Signs:

We affirm God can speak to His children however He chooses. Some people report situations when they were given a sign to confirm or reinforce a decision. These situations are very memorable. Certainly there are examples of this in the Scripture including Gideon and the fleeces, Daniel and the interpretation of dreams, Paul receiving visions from God, the angel Gabriel visiting Joseph and Mary, etc. However, we must remember there are even more examples of times when miraculous signs like this did not occur and yet God was still present. We tend to emphasize the spectacular and miss the way God quietly works in the day to day. We must discern from these biblical examples whether these incidents should be considered unique or part of the normal, expected Christian experience in our lives.

We may find ourselves hoping for a dramatic sign to give us confidence in a big decision. However, it is more important to “walk by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7) through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit’s promptings, counsel, and our use of godly wisdom. Our object of faith must be God rather than a sign. A good principle is to seek wisdom from God rather than a sign. If it seems like a sign has been given, it must be tested against Scripture. Anything from God will not contradict Scripture. We should also stay open to the wise counsel of others and not rush to a conclusion when seeking to determine what God has told us.

Our object of faith must be God rather than a sign.

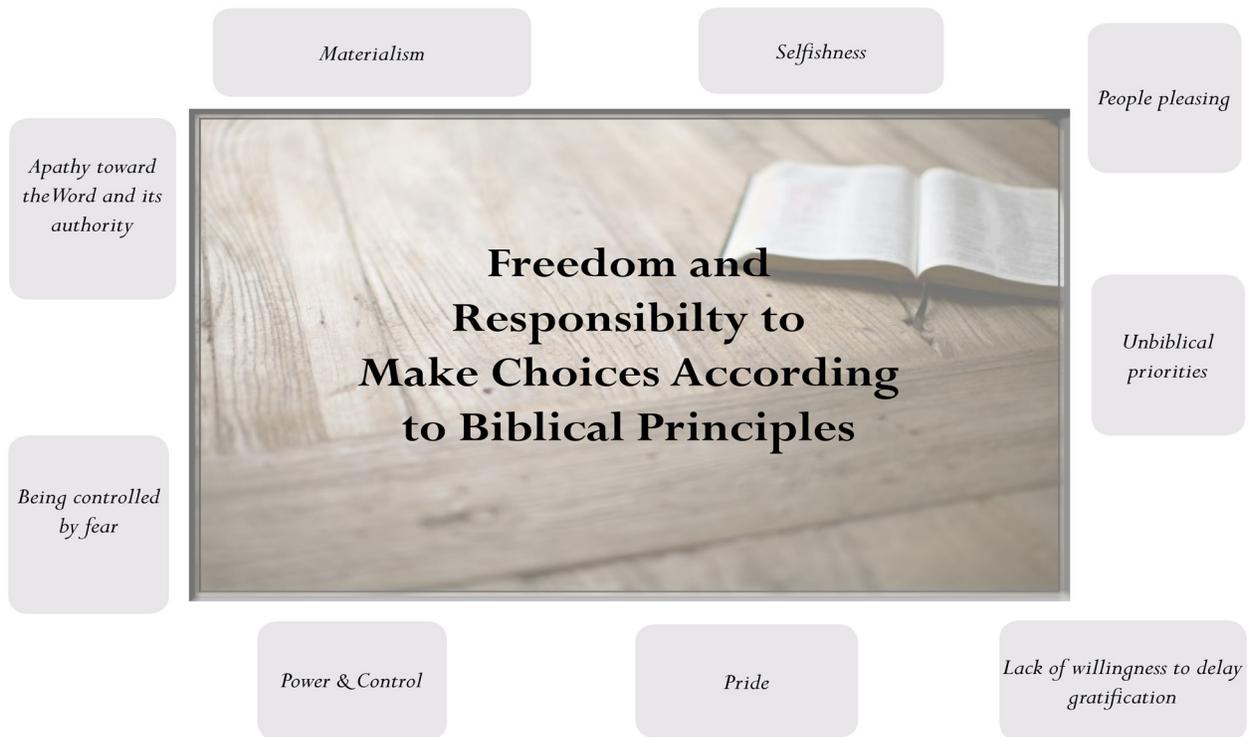
D. Freedom and Responsibility in Decision Making.

God has given us the freedom and responsibility to make wise decisions that are within the bounds of the Word. In His sovereignty, God has chosen to give human beings a free will, intellect, experiences, examples, and abilities with which to make decisions. God has given man dominion over creation and has asked us to be stewards of it. Sometimes Christians experience significant anguish when they try to identify God’s will in circumstances where God gives us the freedom of choice.

Conversely, we must not be cavalier about our choices; decisions have consequences, both positive and negative. As it says in Gal. 6:7-8, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” There are consequences for actions and decisions that can last long into the future. One of the most difficult areas of decision making is balancing freedom and responsibility.

In an effort to depict this balance, the following graphic shows how God has provided the believer with the responsibility to stay away from evil, yet has given us freedom to make choices once we are operating within the safe zone. Picture life as a “canvas.” We are commanded to keep our actions responsibly within the canvas of God’s principles from His Word and avoid unbiblical behaviors which are outside of the frame. Within the canvas, there is freedom to make many types of decisions. God crafts the decisions we make within His canvas into a beautiful “workmanship” (Eph. 2:10) for His glory. This visual can be used to show the balance between freedom and responsibility in decision making.

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E. Summary of Section II.

Because biblical decision making is an important and often challenging task, we must approach it with right thinking. It is critical to view walking by faith and using Godly wisdom as interrelated instead of viewing them as an “either-or” scenario. This distinction will help avoid the twin errors of over-spiritualizing or using worldly wisdom. Interpreting Scripture in context and not depending on signs allows us to rightly divide the Word. Finally, God has given us both the freedom to exercise choice and the responsibility of stewardship according to the tenets of His Word. We are called to balance these two aspects.

III. PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL DECISION MAKING

As we have discussed the proper lenses to use when viewing biblical decision making, we can move on to several key principles to keep in mind when making decisions. These principles, outlined in the graphic to the right, can provide a framework to help ensure our decisions are being made in a manner which reflects both wisdom and faith.

A. God’s Word as the Foundation.

God’s Word provides the foundation for all biblical decision making. Clearly, our life and all of our decisions need to be consistent with what God has revealed in the Word. The Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (*Ps. 119:105*). As Jesus challenged His listeners in *John 14:15*, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*”



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Through divine inspiration, God's Word was written exactly how He wanted. It is trustworthy and complete. He could have chosen to write it in any way He wanted. He didn't accidentally forget to add information He wanted us to have. This includes information we often wish was in the Bible ranging from when to buy a car, how to make decisions about marriage or a career, or the perfect method to raise teenagers! We do not know why God chose to put some things in the Bible and not others. However, it does seem He is much more interested in our reliance on Him and His Word and who we are becoming than in us feeling completely certain about our circumstances. God desires our faith and trust in Him and His Word throughout our lives over certainty and clarity. Therefore, consider the Bible as authoritative; diligently give attention to reading, meditating, and applying its teachings and principles.

2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Heb. 4:12, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The meaning of God's word never changes, and the depth of the Word is marvelously endless. This allows God's word to speak differently to us at different times even though the meaning has not changed. We change and our experiences change. Therefore, we will see meaning and application in God's Word which has always been there but appears new to us as we see it through a different lens of experience. Sometimes we read a passage for encouragement; other times, that same passage will admonish. We may receive a specific message for a certain situation in life or get some general direction or guidance from reading the Word. Sometimes we learn something new; other times, the Word reminds us of something previously learned. We must guard against letting our own preconceived ideas of what we wish or fear the Bible would say to distort the true message of the Word as we apply its principles accurately and in context.

Application: Consider how we view the Bible regarding decision making. Do we view it as holding the highest truth and forming the foundation for life? Or do we view it as a "cookbook" or "vending machine" to give us answers when we follow the correct formula? Make sure to spend adequate time reading and studying the Bible for the humble purpose of better understanding who God is and what His principles are.

B. Having an Accurate Concept of God.

Because of the many scriptures that delineate between the flesh and Spirit (*Rom. 8:1-14*), many wonder how to discern the difference for ourselves. Everyone is susceptible to not discerning the Spirit and the Word of God clearly due to the "cloudy" lenses from which we see the world and God. These lenses develop out of past experiences, our flesh, the impact of influential individuals in our lives, emotional issues, etc. For instance, someone may develop an inaccurate image of God and see Him as emotionally distant and disinterested in his or her life. Or, someone's image of God may be "the God of impossible expectations" leading them to see every Scripture passage as excessively condemning. A distorted God-image leads to difficulty trusting God and submitting to His Word. The key to combating a distorted God image is to test what we believe about God through the whole counsel of the Bible, counsel with others, and prayer. For more resources in this area, please see www.accounseling.org.

Application: It's important to spend some time meditating on how we "picture" or perceive God right now. How do we feel He feels toward us? Do we view Him as present and active? Distant or silent? Are these feelings about God consistent with Scripture? It may help to talk with a close friend or mentor about these perceptions of God and get their input on what they hear from us.

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C. Acknowledging God's Sovereignty.

God is sovereign. He is all-knowing (omniscient), all powerful (omnipotent), and present everywhere (omnipresent). As such, He is not bound by the limitations of time and other aspects of human finiteness. We can take comfort that His eternal purposes will be accomplished in our lives and in this world. Remember God is in control both when life is going smoothly and when it is confusing or turbulent. That includes times of uncertainty about decisions or other times when we lack clarity.

1 Chr. 29:11-13, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

Is. 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Is. 43:10-11, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour."

Application: Take 5-10 minutes and meditate on these three Scriptures. Consider writing down some of the thoughts that come to mind. What do these verses tell us about God's knowledge and power? What do they tell us about His knowledge of our life situation? What do these verses help us understand about God's perspective of life on Earth? Think about how we can remind ourselves of these truths in the days to come.

D. Walking with God.

God cares about our decisions and our life. He is aware, present, and involved. At times, however, this divine presence may not be clear or evident. It may feel as if we are diligently seeking and yet He remains silent. By faith we believe and know He is near, but the perception of His silence may be more persistent. Periods like this happen to every believer from time to time, and often it is not fully possible to know why. During these times self-examination in light of the Word is good. However, during difficult times of searching for direction, be aware general distress can occur which can easily lead to self-questioning, over-analyzing, and using scripture out of context. Seek guidance and counsel from spiritually mature people and do not try to go through these times alone.

We don't have to fear we are alone as we make decisions throughout life. As Jesus reminded His disciples in *Mat. 10:29-31*, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." God knows our needs, desires, and cares. Take comfort He knows our needs even before we ask (*Mat. 6:8*).

The Bible, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all in perfect harmony. The safest and most blessed place to be during times of decision making and uncertainty is walking with the Lord by submitting to Him, obeying the Holy Spirit, praying without ceasing, and reading the Word. As we become more acquainted with Jesus, we are comforted He will not leave us comfortless (*John 14:18*) and He will be with us both on the mountain top and in the valley. We can trust and depend on Him believing He will guide us as we seek Him.

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Jer. 29:11-13, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:"

Application: Take 5-10 minutes to meditate on these verses. What do they teach about God's care in times of decision making and uncertainty? What do they indicate about who God wants you to be? Think about how we can trust the promises in these verses even when we don't have clarity or certainty in life.

E. Praying for Direction.

Fervent prayer is a key to requesting wisdom from God and submitting our will to His. God is a loving heavenly Father who wants the best for us. His plans and purposes are for our good and the benefit of His kingdom. Therefore, while submitting our will to God can be a difficult task, it also can provide us with great peace and comfort. God is good and trustworthy. He is willing and ready to give us wisdom to deal with issues we face. As Paul earnestly prayed in *2 Cor. 12:7-10* to have his "thorn in the flesh" removed so should we earnestly bring our requests before God. We must also realize, as Paul did in this passage, that submitting our requests to the Lord means we are entrusting Him to answer as He knows best. Making adequate time for prayer can be a difficult challenge, but it must be a priority.

Jas. 1:5-6, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."

Mat. 7:7-8, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Application: We must all guard against viewing prayer to God in a manner similar to a "vending machine." We don't simply put in two prayers and out comes an answer. Sometimes God's answers are not what we would have chosen. Give some thought to how we can be intentional about praying in a manner that brings our requests to God with thanksgiving (*Phil. 4:6*) while also being humbly mindful that we don't always know what we need or what outcomes will be best in light of God's plan (*Rom. 8:26, 2 Cor. 12:9-10*).

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F. Seeking Wise Counsel.

The principle of seeking wise counsel is shown throughout the Bible. No one should make life-changing decisions without receiving Godly counsel. It is wise to think through who we can talk to when we need advice or direction (i.e. elder, parents, mentor).

Prov. 15:22, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."

Prov. 1:5, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:"

Prov. 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

Prov. 19:20-21, "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Wise counsel will help us seek God's best for our lives by looking at all sides of issues. Wise counselors turn their own will and agenda over to God as they help guide us. It is better to receive counsel from those who can help review pros/cons and strengths/weaknesses of our decisions rather than listening to those who simply tell us what we want to hear or criticize us. As *Prov. 27:6* shares, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." The Bible notes that choosing poor counselors can have disastrous consequences, so it is important to be intentional about whom we seek out (see the story of Rehoboam in *2 Chr. 10*).

Below are some characteristics of someone to seek out for guidance and wise counsel:

- Genuinely concerned for you and either knows or is willing to learn about your background.
- Known to be biblically sound, spiritually mature, and aware of their own blind spots.
- Skilled at listening and asking good questions.
- Somewhat experienced, knowledgeable, or trained in the area you are seeking guidance about (i.e. using an experienced professional when making career decisions).
- Exercises confidentiality and uses discretion.
- Exemplifies humility and gentleness, yet loves you enough to tell you the truth or where you may be interpreting situations in error (even if it hurts).
- Provides an honest opinion and is direct when necessary.
- Able to be objective in the situation.

Application: First, in light of the scriptures listed above, how have we done at seeking counsel when we previously faced decisions in life? Identifying the 3-5 closest confidants we seek counsel from and reviewing them in light of the list of characteristics can be beneficial. Are there any people on the list that we should try to talk with more often? Are there any individuals who have been counseling us which don't meet the criteria? What do we need to do differently?

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G. Trusting and Having a Surrendered Heart.

Sometime in life, we will experience a wholesome desire that goes unmet. For instance, we often wonder why a loved one who was ill had to die instead of be healed. Another example is we believe we are supposed to marry and even conclude we are ready to marry and yet it still hasn't happened. Often, it is impossible to know why. Our struggle to understand why God hasn't answered can lead to frustration and discouragement. This becomes the moment where trust in God is most crucial. Trust by definition is leaning on God and maintaining our faith in Him when we don't have clear understanding. We can take comfort in knowing that God understands the fact we don't understand. Thankfully, even in the midst of disappointment and hurt, we have the assurance of God's sustaining grace in our lives.

Ps. 62:8, "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us."

Jer. 17:7-8, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

Having a surrendered heart means accepting His will may be different from ours. It doesn't mean we were wrong in having our desires, but it does mean we should continually submit our hopes, dreams, and plans to Him. Most of us struggle with this to some degree. Do not be discouraged, but keep turning hopes, dreams, and plans over to God. We shouldn't hesitate to make our requests known to God; however, we must always remember to follow Christ's example in *Luke 22:42* and say, "not my will, but thine, be done."

Jas. 4:15, "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

Mat. 7:9-11, "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Application: Take a few minutes to think about life and the concept of being surrendered to God. What areas of life are easiest for us to trust God with? What areas are the most difficult to turn over to Him? For the issues we tend to struggle in turning over to God, we often must surrender and then surrender them again. Pray and thank God for understanding the challenges we face with surrendering an issue or a decision to Him. Then ask Him to grant grace to trust Him with this challenge. Seek to reach the point where you are surrendered and open to living with the potential consequences of your decision, whatever these consequences might be. Share this commitment with a spiritual mentor.

H. Waiting on God's Timing.

We must accept that 'waiting on the Lord' is often part of the decision-making process. Many times patient waiting is necessary as circumstances develop or change over time in order to know what to do next. God is working even when we do not see or understand it.

Principles of Biblical Decision Making

Ps. 27:14, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

Jas. 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Ps. 130:5, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope."

Is. 40:31, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Waiting on the Lord is not the same thing as doing nothing. When we reach a point in the decision-making process and don't know what to do, we can focus on the things we already know to be God's will because they are revealed in Scripture. For example, *Jas. 1:27* says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." So, while trusting and waiting on God we know one thing we can be doing is caring for the fatherless and widows and striving for purity.

Application: Identify an area or areas of life where our preferred timing and God's timing seem to be out of sync. Take a few minutes to reflect on the reality that God sees the beginning to the end of time. Talk to Him about issue(s) where His intervention is sought. Remember God is at work in ways that we see and notice and ways that we don't.

I. SUMMARY OF SECTION III.

As we approach biblical decision making, it is important to realize there is no set "formula" on how to properly make a perfect decision every time. There are, however, several key biblical principles which should be applied. Using God's Word as a foundation and having an accurate concept of God and His sovereignty are critical starting places. Walking with God daily, praying for His direction, and seeking wise counsel serve as key behaviors. Finally, trusting and waiting on God with a surrendered heart are vital attitudes which must be held throughout the process.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed a number of aspects of biblical decision making. We are encouraged to begin with right thinking toward biblical decision making: harmonizing the ideas of walking by faith and godly wisdom, using Scripture accurately, and exercising balance between the freedom God has given us and the responsibility He has placed upon us. Once our thinking is aligned with God, we are encouraged to walk through the key principles He lays out for us in His Word. Though there are no "one-size-fits-all" answers, we can have comfort knowing we have access to something even better. We have the promise of a Heavenly Father who loves us as His children and will walk alongside us through these decision making journeys. Knowing and appreciating this relationship is perhaps the key to the entire experience.

Ps. 138:8, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."