

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S APPROACH TO MAKING DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION

Each day is filled with a rash of decisions. YOU have to decide what time to get up, what to put on, what to eat, etc. However, it is the more important and bigger decisions that are really important — buying a car, going to college, being baptized, getting married, etc.

Unwise decisions can cause a great deal of unhappiness and frustration. They can sometimes take years to straighten out. To make right choices and wise decisions is not a matter of luck or chance. It is a matter of knowing and applying the keys that God has revealed.

Before delving into the mechanics of decision-making, let us first examine some overall spiritual principles. Unless God is a partner in every facet of your life, you will surely go wrong in the end.

Solomon admonished: "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" (Prov. 3:5-6). By contrast, however, "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him He will be found of you; BUT IF YE FORSAKE HIM, HE WILL FORSAKE YOU" (I Chron. 15:2).

How vital it is to keep God at the center and seek His divine guidance in the whole of your life. The moment you break away from Him in a spirit of pride, self-sufficiency, or independence, you are on the road to disaster.

I. OVERALL PRINCIPLES:

A. NINE POINTS

1. Link every decision in your daily life to the Kingdom of God.
 - a. Keep your eye on the day of Christ's coming the day of the glorious resurrection.
 - b. Measure and weigh the value of every decision against the backdrop of the judgment.
 - c. Ask yourself, "Will this decision help me to grow, overcome and build character?"
 - d. Will it add to the quality of my spiritual life or detract from it?
 - e. Make sure every decision leads you in the direction of God's Kingdom.
2. Continually walk with God and keep in tune with His Spirit.
 - a. When God is in all your thoughts and you are tuned into His wave-length, your chances of making a right decision have increased a hundredfold.
 - b. You have the benefit of God's direct intervention leading you to see the right answer.
 - c. God's Spirit will work to inspire your mind with clarity of thought and understanding.
 - d. Eph. 1:16-19 — "*Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: THE EYES OF YOUR UNDERSTANDING BEING ENLIGHTENED; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.*"
3. Fill Your mind with the total Word of God.
 - a. The Bible is a complete book touching on every facet of human life and conduct.
 - b. It contains truths and principles that answer any problem you may encounter.
 - c. The more of God's word you have mastered, the more apt you will make the right decision.
 - d. The key is to so fill your mind with God's word that when called on to make a decision, the appropriate scriptures will leap into your mind.
 - e. 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.*"

4. Make "Thy will, not mine be done" a constant way of life.
 - a. In truly seeking God's will in all your undertakings, you stir His heart to guide and direct you.
 - b. Your chances of succeeding are multiplied many fold when you earnestly look to Him to show you what is right.
 - c. Ps. 37:4-5 — *"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee THE DESIRES OF THINE HEART. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS."*
5. Have the courage to accept God's answer.
 - a. The wheels of God grind slowly — He doesn't always answer immediately or give you what you want.
 - b. He sees a bigger picture in your life than you do and knows what's best in the end.
 - c. Be patient and content in your circumstances until all the pieces fall into place.
 - d. A temporary "no" from God may be compared to the example of a plane sitting on a runway awaiting takeoff. God is the traffic controller in the tower who sees the dangers all around not visible to the pilot in the plane. Only when it is clear and safe for takeoff will God give approval.
 - e. Don't be discouraged with the "holding patterns" you may encounter in life — be confident that God is imminently in charge!
 - f. Prov. 16:3 — *"Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established."*
6. Realize that God requires you to make decisions in order to grow and build character.
 - a. Learning how to think by using the Bible and incorporating God's mind is essential to spiritual maturity.
 - b. God does not want you to be a spiritual robot, dullard or simpleton.
 - c. God has endowed you with the power to choose He requires you to use it, but according to His will.
 - d. Realize that decision-making and its consequences ultimately rests with you.
 - e. Don't expect someone to tell you what to do as when you were a child.
 - f. Be willing to face your problems and decisions squarely.
 1. You can't be an ostrich and expect a decision to take care of itself.
 2. Realize that you can't sit on the fence either — vacillating back and forth.
 3. You must take positive action.
 - g. James 1:6, 8 — *"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. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."*
 - h. Deut. 30:19 — *"I call heaven and this day against you, that I have earth to record set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."*
7. Realize that decision-making requires action and follow-through.
 - a. You must, with God's help, learn to control and regulate your life.
 - b. Growth demands affirmative action and discipline.
 - c. Set your will toward a pre-set goal and forge ahead until you reach it.
 - d. Allow no barrier, roadblock or temporary failure to stand in the way or discourage you.
 - e. Luke 9:62 — *"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*
8. Learn and heed if you make an occasional wrong decision.
 - a. Possibly you didn't have all the facts and judged the situation prematurely.
 - b. Perhaps emotions or personal drive, ambition and desire influenced you.
 - c. Maybe you deceived yourself into thinking you knew God's will in the matter when in reality your motives were self-seeking.
 - d. Whatever the circumstance, glean wisdom from the experience and profit from it.
9. Trust in God with all your heart and He will bless YOU in the end.
 - a. If you lean on Him in perfect faith, He will prevent you from making a fatal mistake.
 - b. He will in most cases make a wrong decision turn out right.
 - c. The key is to pray and wait patiently until you're confident of His will.
 - d. Don't carnally convince yourself you're right — prepare, pray and persevere.
 - e. Remember the example of Job, who after much suffering, was bountifully blessed in the end.
 - f. Rom 8:28 — *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

II. THE SYSTEMATIC METHOD OF SOLVING PROBLEMS AND MAKING DECISIONS.

A. TEN PROCEDURES

1. When faced with a decision, the first thing to do is to go to God in prayer.
 - a. This should always be your first desire and motivation.
 - b. Never try to go it alone — look to God to help and guide you.
 - c. Consider Him your invisible, earthly counselor and companion in all your earthly ventures.
 - d. Expect Him to intervene to show you His will — seek to please Him first.
 - e. Remember: *"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths"* (Prov. 3:6).
2. Identify the problem and write it down on paper.
 - a. Your exact problem may be vague and fuzzy until you boil it down and put it in clear focus.
 - b. Writing it down forces you to think clearly, succinctly and precisely.
 - c. Is it a simple problem or one with two or three parts? If they are related — show how!
 - d. Define! Identify! Simplify!
 - e. Get a handle on what it is you're asked to decide.
3. List the obstacles that are preventing you from solving it.
 - a. This requires honest searching — but have the courage to do it.
 - b. First, list the known and obvious factors.
 - c. Then search deeper for hidden reasons.
 - d. Are you trying to shirk responsibility? or afraid to face reality?
 - e. Are you simply procrastinating or are there valid reasons for the delay?
 - f. Are you mentally lazy and loathe to exert the energy?
 - g. Make this effort a real challenge and don't despair until you've exhausted every reason or possibility.
4. List the advantages and positive benefits in solving the problem.
 - a. Be realistic — don't put down dreamy-eyed hopes or possibilities.
 - b. Don't delude yourself with wishful thinking or imagined blessings — be certain they're based on fact.
 - c. On the other hand, don't allow doubt and fear to blind you to the advantages and assets that are true and real.
 - d. The key is to make sure your list is well thought out and valid.
 - e. Writing down all the positive benefits will motivate you to action.
5. Search out and list as many possible solutions as you can think of.
 - a. Spend enough time to think this through.
 - b. As in all the above steps, you've got to apply your mind and dig down deep.
 - c. The more possibilities or options you uncover, the closer you will come to finding the right answer.
 - d. A clear solution will begin to emerge when you examine all the facts.
6. Try to see the end result of each solution.
 - a. Look beyond the temporary benefits or rewards — consider the impact or end result.
 - b. Envision what it would be like to achieve the solution — see yourself having arrived and winning the victory.
 - c. In other words, as far as possible, capture a complete overview.
 - d. Retrace your steps until you have considered all avenues and see the problem in its entirety.
7. Throughout this exercise, let the Bible be your guide.
 - a. In addition to looking to God, think on His Word.
 - b. Search for and meditate on Bible principles that will give you wisdom and insight.
 - c. Think of all the scriptures that would apply in this given situation.
 - d. Examine your motives — are you honest with God and yourself?
 - e. Are you really putting His will and word first? or looking for a reason to justify your action?
8. If you are making a major decision, seek expert advice.
 - a. If the decision involves a spiritual matter, go to God's true servants for help.
 - b. Don't spare — open up and tell the complete story.
 - c. The advice they give you will be in proportion to the facts you give them.

- d. In other areas of life, you may want to consult the experts who are skilled in their special fields of endeavor.
 - e. Again the key is to clearly establish the pros and cons before moving ahead.
9. In formulating an answer ask yourself, "How would Jesus Christ decide?"
- a. Christ always put His Father's will first.
 - b. This does not mean to imply that your decisions must always be negative or that God's will is usually contrary to what you desire.
 - c. It does mean, however, that you have dutifully weighed and considered Christ's example and tried to determine the course He would take.
 - d. If your basic motive is pure and God-fearing, the majority of your decisions will have God's blessings.
 - e. Decide the way you sincerely think Christ would and you'll be right most of the time.
10. Step out in faith and make the decision.
- a. Having gone through the above steps, gotten the facts, prayed to God and slept on the matter, it's time to decide.
 - b. You've done all you can — your perspective is hopefully clear.
 - c. What's left is decisive action and follow-through.
 - d. Stick with it — don't falter or give in to despair.
 - e. You may have to adjust your plans along the way when unforeseen problems arise.
 - f. Keep looking to God and He will see you through.

Note: Credit is to be shared with the Earl Nightingale Program (No. 100) for some of the above points Section II.

III. HOW YOU CAN KNOW GOD'S WILL

In order to make a right decision, we should strive to know the will of God. Eph 5:17 states that we can know what God's will is. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the WILL of the Lord is."

Rest assured that God's will is always right and best for us regardless of the way circumstances appear.

We must remember that God can see the overall picture. He knows what the future holds and can direct our lives accordingly. We must always trust Him with the outcome even though we might choose a different way.

Knowing then that we should base our decisions on God's will, how can we know what His will is?

A. WAYS THAT GOD REVEALS HIS WILL

1. The primary way God reveals His will is through His Word, the Bible.

- a. The Bible is God's revelation to man His instruction book for us.
- b. The whole Word of God is His will for all of mankind.
- c. God gives us hundreds of promises in the Bible and among them is His commitment to guide and direct us in making wise decisions.
- d. His Word contains many principles that are designed to aid us in the decision making process.

e. Examples:

1. What should you do as a young baptized member if you are seriously contemplating marriage to someone who is unconverted?

II Cor. 6:14 — "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

2. What should you do if a friend wants to borrow money from you to invest in a business venture?

Prov. 22:26 — "Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts."

Prov. 6:1-2 — "My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth."

3. Suppose you, a young woman, have been offered a job as a model at a fashionable department store, but one of the items you must model is a bikini. Should you take it?

1 Tim. 2:9-10 — "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety: not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. "

4. Maybe you've been offered the opportunity to get into the acting field. Should you accept it?

What kind of parts will you be asked to play? Will cursing and profaning God's name ever be part of your lines? Will the Sabbath be a problem? What about sexual overtones or involvement with someone else's mate? Will your life and mind become so absorbed in a fairy tale, makebelieve world (a pretense of being something you are not) that you violate the principle of the ninth commandment? Ex. 20:16.

2. Another way that we can know God's will is by counseling with His ministers.

a. One of the main jobs of the ministry is to counsel and advise.

Eph. 4:11-12 — "And he gave some, apostles; some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

b. Because of their training and experience, the ministry has a better overview of the Bible and how it applies in a practical way.

c. Because they are older spiritually, the ministry can glean principles from the Bible revealing God's will in most situations.

3. By getting all the facts and using common sense, you can, in most cases, determine God's will.

a. The facts usually speak for themselves and show you what route to take.

b. The key is to be sure that you've taken enough time to thoroughly do your homework.

c. Example: You've been wanting to purchase an expensive stereo unit for your home. A major department store is liquidating its stock and is selling a top name brand at 50% off. But you've just learned that your wife is pregnant and the hospital bill will deplete your reserves. In spite of the fact that it's an excellent buy, common sense shows that you should wait.

4. God may open doors to reveal His will.

a. When we have been diligently praying about a decision, God will often intervene to show us the answer.

b. This might involve an exciting new job with higher pay, travel opportunity, or a business breakthrough, etc.

c. "The key is to fervently pray and trust Him in faith.

Matt. 7:7 — "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU:"

d. God may even open several doors, but leaves it to us to decide which option to take.

e. The point to be emphasized is that God will often show us His will by directly creating a new opportunity and leading us to it.

5. God may use natural circumstances to show us what we should do.

a. This He may achieve through the natural course of events.

b. Example: Perhaps you are a college student trying to decide whether to go home for the summer. You've been offered a very good job, but you are in doubt whether it's wise to take part of your savings for the plane ticket. You pray about the matter and ask God to help you decide. You're still debating the question when one day at lunch, you happen to sit down next to a friend from your local church area. He is planning to drive home for the summer, and invites you to go along. God has used a normal circumstance to answer your prayer and help you make the decision.

6. God reveals His will through direct revelation or inspiration.

a. Sometimes when we are praying and thinking through a problem, the answer suddenly becomes clear in our mind.

b. God has used His Holy Spirit to bring the answer to light.

c. At other times, God may flash the solution into our mind when we're least expecting it.

d. The important thing is to be certain that we're on God's wave-length so that He can effectively work in our lives.

7. God can put certain doubts in our minds to prevent us from making a wrong decision.
 - a. We may think we have arrived at a right conclusion, but for no apparent reason we keep having nagging doubts.
 - b. This could be God's way of warning us of a danger or mistake that only He can perceive.
 - c. When this happens we should reconsider or evaluate the situation until our doubts are resolved.
 - d. Example: An uneasy feeling keeps haunting you about a cross-country automobile trip you had planned to make with some friends. You declined to go only to learn that they were involved in a serious accident.
8. Sometimes God reveals His will only after we have prayed continually over a long period.
 - a. God may test our faith and our patience to see if we're for real.
 - b. He may also want to determine our true motives for asking.
 - c. We must be persistent until God answers.
Luke 18:1-7 — the example of the importuning widow.
Ps. 37:7 — "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him;*"
Ps. 40:1 — "*I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.* "
9. Sometimes we are forced into making an emergency decision on without a clear knowledge of God's will.
 - a. In such a circumstance our only safe stand is to ask, "How would Christ decide?"
 - b. Rom. 14:23 — "*...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*"
 - c. When this kind of situation arises, we must decide in faith and look to God for His guidance, deliverance and protection.
 - d. Usually, at some point during the crisis, God's will is made clear.
10. God at other times reveals His will by eliminating all other options.
 - a. God closes some doors but opens others.
 - b. He intervenes in circumstances to bring His will about.
 - c. Example: You have applied for two different jobs and been accepted for both. Each offers equal advantages. It is a difficult decision. Then one of the employers calls to inform you that the company can no longer offer you the job because of budgetary cuts. Clearly, God has shown you the right answer.

B. GOD'S OVERALL WILL ULTIMATELY TO BE MADE KNOWN

1. In 95% of the cases we can know what God's will is — if we trust Him in perfect faith and have patience.
2. There are rare instances, however, where God's dealings are not always clear. Example: Allowing a church member to die prematurely, permitting a serious accident that impairs one's health for life, permitting one's house and furnishings to be burned, etc.
3. Because God has perfect character and cannot sin, we must conclude that everything He allows is for a purpose.
4. He is in total control of all laws and has all power over Satan — nothing can hinder or thwart His plan.
5. In these few perplexing cases, we must believe in God's great wisdom and commit our lives to Him in complete surrender.
6. Ultimately, some day we will understand.
7. Heb. 13:5 — "*...for He hath said, I will never, leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"
8. Matt. 28:20 — "*...and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end.*"

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