

Tea Tree Gully Community Church

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Making Decisions

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all you ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

One thing we will all have to do throughout life is make decisions. Every day we make choices and decisions about small things but from time to time we have to make a decision about something a bit bigger.

These bigger decisions can have some fairly major implications or consequences that follow on from our choice so it is important to get it right.

Bad decisions, unwise or ungodly decisions will always cause us unnecessary trouble and pain. They can cost us emotionally, spiritually, financially and in some cases even cost us our life.

We are going to look at some principles that we can use to help us make good, wise decisions. Some decisions have a clear right or wrong choice but there are other decisions that may have a number of acceptable options. Using biblical principles can help us determine what the best choice is for us.

First we will look at the story of Lot and Abram in Genesis 13. This is an account of a decision that had to be made and how two men approached this decision completely differently and led to vastly different outcomes.

Genesis 13: Abram and Lot separate.

Lot and Abram faced the same choice; where to settle themselves and their families.

Abram’s motivation for suggesting that they separate as a solution to their problem was to promote peace. He said to Lot “Let’s not have any quarreling between us”

Abram wanted to avoid current and ongoing conflict that arose from them all living together.

It was also a practical solution as the land could not support all the livestock, people and infrastructure. Abram was very wealthy. He had family, servants and herdsman, a large amount of livestock all needing to be fed and watered.

Let’s have a closer look at the differences between how Abram and Lot approached this decision.

ABRAM	LOT
Selfless	Selfish
Put his own needs/desires last	Put his own needs/desires first
Let Lot choose	Went after what he wanted
Generous	Greedy
Trusted his future to God	Based his future on what was appealing
Based in Faith-God will provide	Based in the natural- Moved to provide for himself
OUTCOME	OUTCOME
Stayed in God’s will for his life God blessed him with more than he gave up.	Positioned himself near Sodom (sin) Exposed himself and his family to temptation and the influence of a wicked environment.

The story didn’t end there for Lot. His choice had ongoing consequences for him and his family.

In the very next chapter (Genesis 14) we find Lot no longer living near Sodom but living in Sodom. There was a progression of being near sin to being in the midst of sin.

Four Kings went to war against the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot and all he owned was captured and carried off as spoils of war. Abram had to go after them to rescue Lot and his possessions from their hands.

After that Lot returned to Sodom and was living there when God decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Abraham (as he was now called) interceded for the sake of Lot and his family who were about to be swept up in the judgment on the city.

In the end, Lot and his family were given the opportunity to flee Sodom before it was destroyed. Lot's decision to live in Sodom eventually cost his wife her life (through her own disobedience) and also his married daughters and their husbands who did not heed Lot's warning that they had to flee.

This is not to imply that Lot was not a Godly man. The basis of Abraham's intercession was for the sake of the righteous living in the city with Abraham having Lot and his family in mind.

2 Peter 2: 7 says that Lot was "a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them (Sodom) day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)

When the two angels arrived at Sodom to warn Lot and destroy the city he was sitting in the gateway of the city which is a place of authority, a judicial center where legal proceedings were discussed and prosecuted. Lot it would seem, had some position of civic responsibility within Sodom.

He may have been dismayed by what he saw around him but his influence would seem to be limited as his family remained the only righteous people in the city. Even within his own family his son-in-laws didn't believe him when he warned them about the coming destruction of Sodom, they laughed at him. They stayed behind and perished with Lot's daughters. His wife disobeyed instructions not to look back when fleeing Sodom and became a pillar of salt. Later on his remaining daughters took advantage of him by getting pregnant by him when he was drunk to ensure their own future security.

Whilst Lot himself may have been a righteous man his legacy was not a great one. It is a good example of how the decisions and choices we make in life not only affect us but also our families and those around us. The consequences of bad choices are not always immediately obvious. Sometimes they don't become apparent for quite some time. (Lot's story played out over years).

Lot made a choice in the natural to go after what seemed good but did not see the spiritual danger he was putting himself and his family in by choosing the fertile but corrupt area of Sodom.

What does the Bible say about how we are to approach decisions?

First and foremost, we need to put God and his righteousness first in our lives.

Mat 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Bible teaches us how to repent and respond to God's plan for mankind, how to come to know him. It reveals God character to us and shows us how we can become Christ-like in our lives.

The key to this is putting God first, obeying Him, continuing to choose life not death as we walk with him.

We must avoid decisions that will detract from us putting God first in our lives and sidetrack us from his will and purpose for us.

What are some questions we can ask ourselves to help us make good decisions?

1. Does the Bible have a clear teaching on this?

Ps 119: 1-4 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong, they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

9 How can a young man keep his way pure? by living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

14-16 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Key words: rejoice, meditate, consider, delight (heart attitude is one of desire not duty)

24 Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Some decisions have a clear right or wrong, good vs evil choice based on what God's word tells us.

If a choice will lead us into a place of sin we know straight away that it is the wrong choice. Wrong choices may feel good for a while but they will cost us. Sin always costs us. This is not just about moral and ethical decisions but also

the responses we make in life. Choices that lead to un-forgiveness, bitterness, anger, rebellion, disobedience, pride all take us to a place of sin. Sin is not just what we do but can also be how we respond.

Not everything has a clear cut right or wrong answer though. Many decisions will have a number of acceptable options. So how can we work through a decision to bring us to a place of confidence that we have made the right choice?

2. Seek counsel and advice from spiritual leaders.

Proverbs 11:14 (MKJV) Where there is no wisdom (counsel guidance), the people fall; but in the multitude of wise men (counsellors) there is safety.

It is important to have people in your life that can speak into your life and give you Godly counsel and wisdom. Pastors, leaders and mature Godly friends can fill this role. Do not ignore or despise their advice. If it goes against what you would like to do, don't ignore it but take it on board. They may have a different perspective to you that is important to consider. Sometimes what we need is an outside, objective point of view from someone removed from the situation. This helps bring balance and perspective.

Godly wisdom is not personal opinion. It is not based on emotions or feelings, or preference. It is based on Truth and the revealed wisdom of the Holy Spirit. A mature Godly person will be able to put personal things aside when giving you advice.

The biggest reasons people don't seek counsel is because they are afraid that they will hear that what they would like to do is a bad idea. Or because of pride; the "It's my life, my decision, I don't need to ask anyone else" mindset even when we put the more spiritual spin on it of "I'll just pray about it myself, it's between me and God"

Seeking Godly counsel from those who are spiritually responsible for us is how we walk out humility and submission. The opposite of this is pride and independence.

Lastly, don't replace seeking Godly counsel from pastors and leaders by looking to counsel only from your peers/friends. Seek counsel upwards not sideways.

Authority Figures

Sometimes it is appropriate to seek advice from those who have positions of authority over us.

Young people – parents

Workplace – employers, managers, bosses

Secular decisions – may need to take advice from doctors, lawyers, accountants, financial advisors, police, government bodies etc.

Important to heed their advice but balance it with Godly wisdom and guidance for the best outcome.

3. How will this affect me spiritually?

Will this decision draw you nearer to God or further from Him?

Will it cause your spiritual growth to suffer?

Will this decision interfere with your ability to attend church or maintain Godly relationships?

Will it take you away from being a part of the life of the church –(lifegroups, ministry, service)

Will this decision take me permanently away from my current spiritual home?

Sometimes this happens and doesn't mean that the decision is therefore wrong, but the big question that needs to be asked here is whether that is God's will for you.

If the outcome of a decision will cause you harm spiritually, it is a sign that it is probably not the best choice.

4. How will this affect my family?

Decisions we make don't just affect us but also affect those around us and our family. (Lot is a good example of this)

If you are a young person:

How will my choice affect my parents (& siblings)?

Will my choice cause trouble or division in my family?

or

If you are a parent:

How will my choice affect my children?

As parents we need to consider how our decisions and choices affect our children. How we choose to behave and speak, the type of role model we are,

the example we set. What kind of career we pursue, how we balance work and family life.

Sometimes we need to make sacrifices and changes to decide to do what is best for our families and those we are responsible for.

Our choices determine the type of role model we become.

The idea that it is my choice my life my decision is really a lie. It is your life but you are not an island. Your choices always affect others around you.

An Illustration from my own family history that shows how the choice of an individual can have ongoing consequences for generations.

-Great grandfather was a street fighter (London very early 1900's)

-Earned money fighting in illegal fights running by bookies on street corners.

-Acton (West London) was a place of laundries (serviced Acton and wealthy nearby suburbs such as Kensington)

-Great Grandfather earned enough money street fighting to invest in a laundry The man he was supposed to invest with turned out to be a con man and ran off with his money and he lost the lot.

-One day he saw this man in his local pub and using his skills as a street fighter hit him so hard he went through the front window of the pub. He thought he had killed him. Was told he had and had better get out before police came.

- Great grandfather ran off and chose to disappear. Murder would have been a hanging offense back then. He thought the police were after him so he disappeared. His family never saw or heard from him again. (I don't know if his wife ever knew where he was, I've never been able to find any trace of him)

-The man didn't die, he was just badly injured.

-Great grandmother was left alone with 5 small children. My grandfather was the eldest and about 10.

-My great- grandmother and the youngest child were put in the workhouse and the two boys were placed in a Catholic boy's home and the two girls were placed in a Catholic girl's home. After a while my great-grandmother and the youngest child were allowed to leave the workhouse because she had a job in a laundry but could only afford to support one child so the other children stayed in the homes.

-My grandfather and his brother were treated terribly in that Catholic run home. The nuns that ran that place were evil in the way they treated those children.

- When the First World War broke out in 1914 my grandfather lied about his age to enlist most likely to escape the orphanage. He was sent to France as a stretcher bearer at the age of 15. He saw things no 15 year old should have to see as did many of his generation.

The effects of his upbringing and the war had an effect on my grandfather for the rest of his life. He became a gambler like his father before him and an alcoholic. (Died before I was born)

After his experiences in the Catholic boys' home he hated all things to do with the Catholic Church and he hated God because they represented God to him. He changed his religion from Catholic to Church of England.

Back in those days people were attached to a local parish of their religion, welfare was organized through the parish, you were married, christened and buried in your local parish church.

My family were Catholic until this point (My ancestry can be traced back to County Clare Ireland- Irish Catholics who came to England during famine years in Ireland)

My grandfather was married in the Church of England and all his children were Christened and married in Church of England.

His religion was in name only it didn't go further than weddings, christenings and funerals. He turned his back on God.

The effects of that decision are obvious in the 3 generations of family that has come after him.

A tragic story of how the decisions of one individual can effect generations.

Am I paying attention to the risks associated with this?

Pro 27:12 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

“Danger’ can mean more than life and death /safety but also risk, real potential problems, difficulties or implications.

The wise man pays attention to these things. Sometimes we get so absorbed by an idea that we fail to see the risks associated with it. This is where an outside voice can be important. Seeking advice or counsel from others.

Others can sometimes see clearer the risks we overlook.

Dave Ramsey a business man who wrote a book “Entreleadership” wrote that any time he has made a business decision that went against his wife’s advice it has cost him at least \$10,000.

It is a sign of wisdom to be cautious. We shouldn’t be fearful but we should be cautious. Impulsive decisions are often those that don’t turn out so well.

Are the doors of circumstance open here?

God will often direct us by opening and closing doors ahead of us. It is wise to pay attention to this. We should not force open doors that are shut. When we make things happen in our own strength it never ends well.

When making a decision however, we can make the mistake of putting too much faith in circumstances coming together.

We think if everything is falling into place then it must be the right thing to do.

There are a couple of problems with this approach.

1. Not everything God leads us to do is smooth sailing and all seamlessly falls into place. Sometimes he requires us to take a step of faith when not everything is sorted out. Circumstances should act as a confirmation of what God has told you through other ways.

(Ken & Sandra move to Adelaide, Melbourne house sale fell through)

(Door of circumstance that was open was suddenly closed)

Your own desire plus circumstances falling into place makes a pretty shaky foundation for a decision

2. “Praying that if God is not in it He will stop it” in other words, he will order our circumstances to prevent us from following through.

The problem with this is that we forget that God created us with a free will and that He doesn’t override our will. God sees our hearts and the true motivations of our hearts. We often justify our true motivations by reasoning with our

minds. We put our decision making process across in such a way that we can justify our choice in all sorts of ways that seem perfectly reasonable but never acknowledge the true motivation of our hearts.

We can't fool God. He sees through all that. He will order our circumstances for us if we include him fully in our decision making. When the true motivation of our hearts is to be obedient to Him and remain in His will for our lives for whatever that may mean.

Don't forget that God will not override your will. Sometimes he lets us have what we want not because that is what He wants for us but to teach us. Sometimes we hanker after something so much he lets us have it, and that usually where the trip around the mountain starts. And we will keep going around that mountain until we learn what it is He wants to teach us.

Is the timing right?

We need to pay attention to right timing in our decisions. It can be quite practical such as the right time to buy a house, move jobs, or purchase something.

None of these choices may be wrong but timing is important for the best outcome.

The worst thing we can do when making decisions is be impulsive. It is wise to slow down, seek advice and input, pray and submit the idea to God. Giving the idea more time to develop helps you make a better choice.

This can apply to practical decisions such as significant purchases, life decisions but also to more spiritual decisions especially those around ministry.

If God speaks to you or gives you a dream or desire to do something for Him, don't act impulsively on that. Pray into it, don't quickly run with the initial seed of an idea but allow God to develop it. Pay close attention to God's timing for you, sometimes God requires immediate obedience but often He speaks ahead of time. Don't assume that because he has given you a dream or desire or idea that He means you need to act on it tomorrow.

Am I willing to let God say no?

This is so important!

We need to be completely submitted to God's plan for our lives. When we place our own desires above God's plan for us disaster will follow. It will never end well.

Again this is heart level stuff, not based on what seems good or right, or reasonable but on what God want us to do.

If our hearts are really set on 'Yes' being the answer we won't hear God say 'No'

We need to be truly willing to go whichever way God speaks. And He knows our hearts, we can't fool God, but we can and do fool ourselves on this.

Do I have total peace about my decision?

This is the ultimate test of whether our decision is the right one.

Presupposing that you have worked through all the other points and fully included God in the process of making your decision you can expect to experience His peace about your decision.

If you don't have total peace something is not right.

It may be you made the wrong choice or it may be the right choice but in the wrong timing.

Sometimes everything can seem right in the natural but we still lack peace.

God gives us His peace as a protection and guide. Seek His peace and be wary of going ahead with decisions without it.

In life we face a multitude of choices and decisions. These questions may not apply to every decision we make. Some they will, others maybe one or two of them will apply.

The key is to learn to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in everything you do in life. When you learn to include him in the smaller decisions you will learn how to include him in major life decisions.

The keys are

1. Put God first in your life, desire to stay in his will for you
2. Include Him fully in your decision making
3. Look for His peace or the absence of it.