

# The Basics of Decision Making

Proverbs, selected passages  
September 28, 2008

Intro:

Our main question today is pretty simple yet deep, a question that I think all of us have asked and constantly live out everyday. It's simply this: How do we make decisions in life, how do we make decisions if there is a God out there who cares and is involved in our lives? Does he actually speak to us through some sort of strong gut feeling? Do we present to Him certain "tests" to see if He'll speak that way? Do we wait for signs?

There's a lot to think about, so I'd like to just jump in today and think about it from two perspectives. First, from God's angle: how Does he direct our lives? And second, from our angle: how do we understand His direction and make decisions in life? Regardless of where we are in the Spiritual Journey, I think there will be something here for you...

## How Does God Direct Our Lives?

Typically Bible Scholars and pastors talk about three aspects of this, three "wills" of God.

### *Sovereign Will*

This refers to the predetermined plan God has for everything in the universe. It has been defined as certain, exhaustive, perfect, and secret. Isa. 46:9-10

### *Moral Will*

This refers to the revealed commands and principles God has for life, as revealed in the Bible, touching on pretty much every aspect of our life. One example of this in the Bible is 1 Thess. 5:16-18.

### *Individual Will*

This is typically defined as God's detailed plan, for our lives, one that he expects us to know and one that he will reveal it to us if we ask. It may surprise you to realize that there is much controversy over this idea of God having an individual will for us. Not in the sense that there is one, as it is part of his sovereignty- that God, because he is all knowing and all powerful, governs and has plans even our individual lives. The question and controversy is: are we expected to fully know this individual plan? Seek it? And will He reveal it? Let's spend some time on this, given that this is where most of our questions lie, I believe.

There is a view out there known as the traditional view that says we should, and He will reveal it.

Another view, the wisdom view, that says- well, we aren't called by God to know it or discover it- it's a part of the sovereign will. But we are exhorted to submit to the sovereign will, discover, follow and be changed by the moral, and from there make good choices.

How should we think through these two views?

### *Key #1: What does the Bible Say?*

The Bible, when it uses the word's "God's will," seems to refer to sovereign and moral- it's hard to read the "individual" in it, given the worldview of the NT and the context of the verses.

Verses to consider: Romans 12:1-3; Col. 1:1, 9, 4:12; Eph. 5:10, 17; I Thess. 4:3, 17.

For example: Jer. 29:11-13.

Note: 1) it's speaking to a nation, 2) it is referring to blessings outlined in the covenant, 3) it can be understood as sovereign will, 4) the people are called to seek God, not the will.

And also, as we will see, the book of Proverbs takes this perspective.

### *Key #2: realize that both probably need to listen to each other.*

I think the "wisdom view" has some more weight. But proponents tend to be a little less open to God's use of visions, dreams, and so on. This is a problem, I believe. The wisdom view needs to be a little more embracing of God's usage of these means without falling to some of the extremes of the traditional view.

The "traditional view" has some good things to say, but it can go over board for sure. I knew a friend who would literally wait for God's guidance through an impression on his heart as to what socks he should wear, and there would be guilt and doubt about if he wore the wrong pair for that day. This caused him actual anxiety, anxiety that should not have been there, based on the fact the Bible does not ask him to expect God's communication in that way and be worried in that way about God's will!

And let me just note, this is especially freeing if you're not the feeling/emotional type, but the more analytical type (referring to the Myers Brigg Personality type), and if you feel like you don't hear God's voice a whole lot- that's ok with a number of things in your life! God asks you to use your minds, to use discernment- we'll talk about that.

Key #3: Read up, do some study. Ask your community group leader if that can be a topic for your group, do a further study. I've included some key titles for further research.

[www.gfriesen.net/](http://www.gfriesen.net/)

Step by Step, James C. Petty

Traditional View: Experiencing God, by Blackaby

## **How Do We Discover What God Wants, How Do We Make Decisions?**

Proverbs has a lot to say about this, actually, given that it is wisdom literature. Before we jump in, though, a few notes on how to properly read and interpret Proverbs.

### **Interpretive Keys for Proverbs and Wisdom Literature:**

#### *Read Proverbs as a Collection*

The book expresses various truths about a given topic throughout the book; the truths are not all clumped together, and the truths at time seem at odds or in tension with each other, given that life situations are complex and unique, requiring different responses at different times- many aspects of life cannot be fit in an equation.

#### *Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not necessarily theoretically accurate*

In addition, it should be noted that proverbs uses a lot of poetic devices, and needs to be interpreted accurately.

#### *Proverbs need to be interpreted in light of God, His sovereignty, and eternity, not just in terms of this mortal life.*

At times, these truths do not seem true. This is what the book of Job is all about: there was a general wisdom principle that righteous people would get blessed by God. But Job was experiencing the curses of life! Surely he did something wrong, so all his friends thought. But that was not the case. Some of the promises of Proverbs do not see light in this life, but perhaps in the next.

Basics for Decision Making from Proverbs:

### **Live with Character and Live the Moral Will of God**

*The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. (12:5)*

Note: there's a need to be righteous, and to be just.

#### *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law. (29:18)*

The more popular version of this verse is: where there is no vision, people perish. But this is a better translation.

Revelation: could be general term for vision, but is also used of the work of the prophets of the Bible, who brought God's truth to bear on particular situations. So where God's truth is not brought to bear, people go wild- it's talking about God's moral will, God word of revelation, the Bible. This is confirmed as the verse continues- blessed is the person who keeps the Law- referring to the Torah.

See also: 6:18, 12:5, 12:20, 12:22, 14:22, 15:26, 16:2, 16:3, 29:18

So the conclusion here: you need to be in pursuit of God's character as revealed in the Bible if you want to experience His guidance the best- you need to pursue the moral will.

For those of who are exploring who Jesus is, and who have not decided about following him, I would say that your first order of business with this point is to make a decision to follow Jesus. Get to know him, and make that choice of following Him in your life. Don't worry about the other "rules" of the Bible- they don't quite apply to you until you've embraced with the main thing. And be ready when you do, because God will guide you in some ways you never would have imagined... believe me!

For those of us who follow Jesus, this can seem a bit basic, but we need to be careful. Sometimes we expect God to guide us, but we're consciously holding on to unforgiveness, or having sex with a boyfriend and girlfriend, or being dishonest with money or our boss at work, and the list goes on and on. Now, God is gracious and forgives all that of course. And I'm not saying we have to be perfect- like if we mess up it's all over- none of us are perfect, and that's not what God expects. But we have to come honest with God, giving him everything and walking in obedience moment by moment, if we hope to experience his help.

Note: free Bible today is for this purpose!

### **Get Advice**

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (15:22)*

See also: 11:14, 15:22, 20:18, 24:6

Pretty straightforward, again. But the question is: are we really open to advice? Are we bringing our good and trusted friends into our decision making process? And even before that: are we in relationships where this can happen? CG...

I think all of us have seen the folly of making decision on our own without any good input.

### **Submit to Sovereignty**

*In their hearts human beings plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps. (16:9)*

See also: 16:1, 16:9, 16:33, 19:21, 20:24, 27:1

We need to submit to God and his plan. Not that we become passive- note that we are still planning, we still need to get advice, we still need to do the moral will of God. But there's something that needs to happen deep in our heart in relation to God- there needs to be a trust, a dependence. Sometimes, we feel like we keep running into a wall because this is what is trying to get in us...

### **Be diligent and wise in the process**

*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty. (21:5)*

See also: 21:5, 24:27

### **Communion/Challenge:**

- Bring your decisions to Him. Commit to changing what He may be speaking to you about your decision making process.
- Receive grace and forgiveness if you feel like you've been slipping up with your decision making.
- Embrace Him and Lord, Lover again. Or perhaps, for the very first time.