

Prayer:

Father, grant us wisdom from Your Word that we might know how to love and obey You in all we think, say, and do.

Overview of the Course:

Vocation: What Am I Called to Do and to Be?

1. **The Caller and the Called:** *What is the Context of Calling?*
 - Your life is not your own. God is the Caller; we are the called. Find your calling in His Word.
 - Love Christ by obedience to His call and thus pursue your purpose: to glorify and enjoy Him forever.
2. **The Meaning of Means:** *What is the Concept of Calling?*
 - You are part of a royal priesthood. All work for the Lord is sacred – it has meaning and worth.
 - God loves His people through His people. Loving your neighbor is the framework of faithful calling.
3. **The Scope of the Summons:** *What is the Content of Calling?*
 - Christ is Lord over every sphere of life. You are called to glorify and enjoy Him in all things.
 - The Dominion Mandate and the Great Commission are equally ultimate ends.
4. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Work**
 - The framework applied to our work – in all our labor, including our jobs, and in our rest.
 - Common pitfalls: idolatry, identity, and indifference. Truths we must not forget in our work.
5. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Families**
 - The family is the basic unit of all society; it's the institution through which humanity lives on.
 - Abandoning God's Word as to the structure and functions of the family is devastating to all.
6. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Church**
 - The church is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and is marked by certain defining traits.
 - Faithful followers of Christ will be members of His church and obey His commandments therein.
7. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Society**
 - God has ordained and established various, distinct institutions which make up His creational order.
 - Christ governs, with all authority, ever sphere of life and all must submit to His lordship in them.
8. **Wrong Way: How NOT to Discern God's Will**
 - In our biblical ignorance, we are tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine.
 - We misunderstand not only the nature of God's will, but also the pathways of learning it.
9. **Proper Path: How to Discern God's Will**
 - God is a good Father and a perfect Teacher. He offers clarity and not confusion for his children.
 - His Word teaches us how to think and make decisions like Him as we bear His image in the world.
10. Productivity: Stewarding Our Most Limited Resource (Time)

Goal of Lesson 9:

In this lesson, our goal is to draw from the scriptures a model for discerning the will of God in our lives – not only in general as Christians, but also with specific application to any situation in which we find ourselves. Our aim is to grow in the ability to make biblical decisions and in our confidence that those decisions will be blessed by God.

Next week, God-willing, we will finish out this course on vocation with an examination of stewardship – particularly as it relates to the resource of our time. We will talk through some helpful ways of viewing time as well as the tools which God has provided for us to leverage in making the best use of our time here under the sun.

The biblical model for change: *renew your mind in accordance with the Word, then put off the old and put on the new.*

Lesson 9: Proper Path – How to Discern God’s Will

Last week we looked at a number of the popular methods that evangelicals use today for making decisions, particularly as it relates to finding God’s individual will for a believer.

We also worked through the common language used in association with that model and compared what we often hear believers say (or possibly even what we say ourselves) in relation to that process with what God says in the scriptures.

In doing so, we discovered a number of things which can be summarized like this:

The Bible DOES NOT TEACH that we get guidance from God through...

1. Feelings, having a peace about it, open/closed doors, circumstantial signs and fleeces, or through confirmations.
2. Special directions are sometimes given, but the biblical pattern is that they’re rare, intrusive, clear, supernatural, and often go against conventional wisdom.

This week we are going to speak briefly about what the term “God’s will” actually means biblically and then try and construct a model for decision-making as taught in the scriptures so that we can all grow in our ability and confidence in discerning what is right and wrong in any circumstance or decision with which we’re faced.

Just like last week, I’m going to work largely through material put out by Greg Koukl with Stand to Reason Ministries, but I also want to point you to some additional resources which will no doubt be very edifying to you if you make the time to work through them.

I’ll say up front that I agree with what Koukl has to say (which is why I’m sharing it), but that he is attempting to teach not in a vacuum, but in a world that has a strong tendency towards the internal, subjective, feelings-based path of decision-making.

As such, he leans in a bit towards the rationalistic side of things. What he says and what I’ll share is theologically accurate and helpful and good for you to learn and implement; however, you could also benefit from additional teaching that works out in more detail some of the subjective interactions with the Holy Spirit in the process.

To that end, I want to point you to three sets of resources:

1. **Third Mill – “Making Biblical Decisions” Course** (10-part)
 - Third Mill’s online seminary curriculum includes a course on Biblical Decision Making. It studies the Bible’s system of ethics and how Christians can evaluate problems in ways that lead to biblical solutions. Each lecture is ~1.5 hours and can be watched, listened to, or read.
 - <https://bit.ly/thirdmill-decisions>
2. **Dr. Richard Pratt – “Discovering God’s Will” Sermon Series** (3-part)
 - In 2008 Dr. Pratt delivered a series of sermons at Independent Pres in Memphis, TN on “Discovering God’s Will.” In it he outlines the wisdom model of decision making that we’ll discuss today (he calls it “Circles of Discovery”), but in it he includes some additional emphasis on what the Puritans called “providence” and the subjective conscience-level interaction with Holy Spirit often referred to as “conviction.”

- <https://bit.ly/pratt-decisions>
3. **Dr. Greg Bahnsen – “A Course in Personal Holiness” Lectures** (last 4 of 19-part)
- Before his death in the mid-1990s, Dr. Bahnsen taught this class on personal ethics to seminary students who were interested in entering the ministry. It is geared towards a more formal exploration of the topic, but is none-the-less approachable for any who has interest. I’m sharing the last four lectures in the course and would point you to two in particular as useful in light of what we’re covering in this class: “Ethical Epistemology” and “Ethical Decision-Making.”
 - <https://bit.ly/bahnsen-ethics>

I. What is “God’s Will”?

In the material we’re using today, Koukl gives a bipartite view of God’s will – he breaks it up into two separate categories. If you review the material from Dr. Pratt, you’ll hear him use a tripartite classification – he breaks it out into three separate categories.

- I’ll try to note the difference as we go along, but just know that these are two ways of slicing the same pie.
 - Koukl wraps up into one category what Pratt (and others) delineate separately, but nothing in the point of this model is substantively different in application to decision making.
- A. **God’s Sovereign Will: God’s designs or decrees** (Pratt: “decretive” will)
- a. This designation of God’s will refers to what He either decrees or allows. It affirms His total control over the events of the universe, down to the tiniest detail.
 - i. **Ephesians 1:1** – “[God] works all things after the counsel of His **will**.”
 - ii. **Romans 9:19** – “Who resists His **will**?”
 - iii. **Daniel 4:35** – “He does according to His **will** in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand.”
 - iv. **Acts 2:23** – “...this man, delivered up by the **predetermined plan** and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men.”
 - v. **Acts 4:27-28** – “...there were gathered together, Herod and Pontius Pilate...to do whatever Thy hand and **Thy purpose** predestined to occur.”
 - vi. **Job 12:9** – “The **hand of the Lord** has done this.”
 1. Job believed that regardless of who brings on the affliction, it is God who allows it.
 - b. God’s sovereign will, for the most part, is hidden (secret). We can only discover it in two ways:
 - i. We usually learn it in **hindsight** (looking back on the past).
 1. “Do you want to know God’s sovereign will for today? Well, I’ll tell you tomorrow.”

- ii. Some of His sovereign purposes have been **revealed in Scripture**.
 - 1. e.g., the fate of the lost and the saved, prophecy, etc.
- iii. We don't have access to God's sovereign will for the purpose of proactive decision-making.

B. God's Moral Will: God's desires (Pratt: "desiderative" and "preceptive" will)

- a. God's moral will describes how men and women ought to live. Some examples:
 - i. **2 Peter 3:9** – "The Lord is...not **willing** that any should perish..."
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 4:3** – "For this is the **will** of God, your sanctification..."
 - iii. **Ephesians 5:16-18** – "Don't be foolish but understand what the **will** of the Lord is...be filled with the Spirit."
 - iv. **1 Peter 2:13-15** – "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the **will** of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."
 - v. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** – "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is God's **will** for you in Christ Jesus."
- b. God's moral will is completely revealed in the Bible (what is needed for salvation & sanctification).
 - i. **2 Timothy 3:14-17** – "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to **salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, **equipped for every good work**."
- c. God's moral will does not connote individualized guidance, but is broad and applies to every Christian equally – there is no particular prescription for you or me, but there is God's perfect, unchanging truth which applies equally to both you and me.
- d. Koukl asks, "What is conspicuous about these verses in virtue of its absence?" They don't mention anything about God's individual will for me. **It's not about what I do, but about who I am.**
 - i. God's will is not:
 - 1. Which woman you marry, but what kind of husband you are.
 - 2. Which job you take, but what kind of worker you are.
 - 3. Where you live, but what kind of neighbor you are.
 - 4. What ministry you're in, but what kind of servant you are.
 - ii. God's will is not a particular place to go, thing to do, or item to procure...God's will is about you. **In a sense, God's will is you.**

1. And if you want to know what God's perfect will is, you need look no further than Jesus Christ. God's perfect will for you is that you be made just like Him.
2. **Romans 8:28-29** – "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...**"
 - a. Koukl asks, "When was the last time you made a decision based on humility, self-sacrifice, servanthood, selflessness, or the interests of proclaiming the Gospel?"
 - b. These are the characteristics and priorities of Christ. Do you factor them into your decision-making?

C. Wait...God has two different wills?

- a. Some object to the idea that God can have two wills. It sounds like a contradiction.
- b. But the problem can be avoided when we realize that God "wants" things ("wills" them) in two different ways:
 - i. God has sovereign decrees. These are things which no one can deny or disobey.
 - ii. God has moral desires. These are things which man can and does disobey.
- c. Examples:
 - i. In 1 Samuel 8:4-22 Israel asks for a king like the other nations have.
 1. This is a rejection of God's leadership, a violation of His moral will.
 2. Yet, it's part of God's sovereign plan to raise up the throne of David.
 - ii. We see the same two things working in Acts 2:23: "This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God [part of God's sovereign will], you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death [a violation of God's moral will]."

D. What about God's "individual" will for me?

- a. God's sovereign will is secret and his moral will is totally revealed.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 29:29** (R.C. Sproul's favorite verse) – "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."
- b. No other "will" exists in the Bible.
 - i. Koukl says, "I found no special category of 'God's will' in the Scriptures tailor-made for me that I had to discover before I could make decisions."

II. What should we conclude? The individual will of God, as commonly understood, does not exist.

A. Does the Bible teach that there's a specific will of God for our lives that we must discover before we can make our decisions? No.

- a. In terms of my functional day-to-day decision making, there is no personalized "God's will" for me to discover.
- b. God has not already decided for me.
- c. Therefore, there are no signs I have "read" and no voice of God I must "hear" in order to make sound, biblical, godly decisions.
- d. There is no individualized "perfect will" I must figure out, and no "permissive will" I have to watch out for.
- e. Koukl says, "While talking to a very young Christian, she used the phrase 'God told me' four times in about 60 seconds. When I questioned her about it she said, 'Yes, we have a wonderful relationship.' For 2,000 years, getting private communications from God was never seen as an important part of an optimal relationship with God. Old Testament prophets signed such statements with their own blood, yet such words fall from our lips like water."
- f. J.I. Packer says,
 - i. "What shall we say of [the personal guidance model]? The first thing to say is that this idea of guidance is actually a novelty among orthodox evangelicals. It does not go back further than the last century. Second, it has led people to so much foolish action on the one hand, and so much foolish inaction on the other, as well as puzzlement and heartbreak when the 'hotline' to God seems to go silent, that it has to be seen as discredited. Third, it must be said that Scripture gives us no more warrant constantly to expect personal 'hotline,' 'voice from the control-tower' guidance than to expect new authoritative revelations for the guidance of the whole church."

B. No, God doesn't decide for us. Instead, God has dignified us with the responsibility of making significant choices ourselves.

- a. God is a good Father, and good fathers do not raise their children by making every decision for them, but rather they teach their children how to make good decisions.
- b. That's got to leave some of you feeling depressed, empty, or angry.

C. "But doesn't God care?! Is He not involved?! Has he left me all alone in this?!"

- a. Yes, of course God cares. Of course, He's involved. And, no, He has not left you alone.
- b. **Romans 12:2** – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

III. Summary Observations

The hard work here is going through the paradigm shift, allowing you to see the issue with entirely new eyes.

If we started with the model that follows, you may have been tempted to just think of it as a "how-to" guide in discovering that individual will of God for you before you made your decisions.

But the big shift in our thinking that needs to occur is to realize that there is no special, pre-packaged plan for you which God requires or even desires for you to discover prior to you making wise decisions.

So, let's quickly review. Our model of decision-making must include and entail the basic biblical observations on the issue...

A. On the one hand, we *DID NOT* observe...

- a. Any indication there was a blueprint for your or my life which we must discover in order to make our decisions.
- b. Any Scripture telling us to pray for God's decision before we act.
- c. Any place where we are instructed to "hear from the Lord" before we make even significant decisions.
- d. Any hint of the kind of language we use in making decisions ("I felt led...", "God told me...", "I'm trying to find God's will about...", "I don't know what the Lord wants me to do...", "I had a peace about it...", etc.)

B. On the other hand, we *DID* observe...

- a. Commands and prohibitions expected to be obeyed.
- b. Places where critical and important decisions seem to be left up to us (e.g., marriage, ministry, choice of job, etc.).
- c. The rule of freedom of choice in non-moral areas.
- d. The legitimacy of our personal desires.
- e. The importance of our conscience.
- f. The need to make wise use of our time and avoid unnecessary waiting.
- g. The command to pray for wisdom (not specific guidance).
- h. The decision-making habits of the apostles and early church.

C. Conclusions from Koukl:

- a. He says, "These observations were stunning to me given the current evangelical emphasis on hearing from the Lord in making decisions."
- b. "I concluded that God doesn't decide for me. Instead, like a good father, He teaches me how to make good decisions."
- c. "What is the method God teaches us? The wisdom model."
- d. The wisdom model's guiding principle:

i. "Using the guidelines of God's Word combined with wisdom, you have the freedom to do anything you want, with God's blessing."

- ii. Note the three parts mentioned:

1. God's moral will (from the Scriptures)
2. Wisdom
3. Personal wants and desires

IV. God's Guidelines for Decision Making ("The Wisdom Model")

This is the model we see practiced by the disciples; a model entirely consistent with each of the above observations. Koukl says, "It's the most workable, practical, biblical model I know of."

This will be set out in three overlapping circles surrounded by one all-encompassing one.

A. **The First Circle: God's Moral Will – options that are commanded or prohibited by Scripture.**

(What does God have to say about this issue in His Word?)

- a. We learn God's moral will through:
 - i. **Reading** – "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching..." (1 Timothy 4:13).
 - ii. **Careful consideration** – "Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything..." (2 Timothy 2:7).
 - iii. **Diligent study, search, and inquiry** – "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).
 - iv. **Meditation** – "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).
 - v. **Memorization** – "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11).
 - vi. **Gifted teachers** – "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- b. What is the objective? **Total obedience.**
 - i. Remember that God's moral will extends not only to the choices themselves, but also to your motives and intentions.
 1. "You've heard it said..." (the commandment), "but I tell you..." (the heart behind it)
 - ii. You can do a moral thing (becoming a musician) with an immoral motive (anger towards one's parents) or immoral intent (revenge).
- c. **Example: God's moral will and marriage** – You have the moral liberty of marrying anyone you want who is...

- i. *A Christian* – “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness with lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- ii. *A member of the opposite sex* – “And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? Consequently, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).
- iii. *Biblically free to remarry if divorced* – many are not (see 1 Corinthians 7 for more details).

B. The Second Circle: Wisdom – apply wisdom to the remaining choices or options.

- a. Why wisdom? It helps us make good decisions.
 - i. **Proverbs 2:2, 9** – “Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; ... Then you will discern righteousness, justice, and equity and every good course.”
 - ii. **Proverbs 8:35-36** – “He who finds me [that is, wisdom] finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who sins against me injures himself, and all who hate me love death.”
- b. What is wisdom?
 - i. A few summary definitions:
 1. Brian’s insert: “Wisdom is God’s truth applied to your life.”
 2. Koukl says, “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge.”
 3. Dr. Bahnsen: “Guidance [or wisdom] comes from the rational application of God’s teaching to the objective facts of our situation.”
 - a. “Christians should avoid mystical conceptions of divine guidance. There is a pervasive weakness in the church in terms of understanding God’s will. So many will say, ‘I’m just going to pray and God’s going to guide me.’ ‘He’s going to give me this impulse or nudge or feeling that I need.’ For all the piety with which that may ring, that is NOT biblical. That is NOT God’s idea of guidance.”
 - ii. That which is *sensible* (reasonable and rational).
 1. A good mental rule of thumb comes from Dr. Bahnsen:
 - a. “Take all of the facts of your situation and all of the biblical principles from studying God’s word, in the midst of dependent prayer and the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, then draw conclusions and explain the rationale such that if you were to write it out and hand it to a multitude of Christians the vast majority could see how you came to that conclusion and agree with you in it.”
 - iii. That which is *expedient* (not hurried or hasty, but also not unnecessarily delayed).

1. **Ephesians 5:15** – “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”
 2. **Colossians 4:5** – “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”
- iv. Wisdom allows us to see all the alternatives and all the consequences so that we don’t do something foolish.
1. **Proverbs 12:15** – “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”
 2. **Proverbs 13:10** – “By insolence [pride, arrogance, overconfidence, presumption] comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.”
 3. **Proverbs 15:22** – “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”
- c. Where do we get wisdom?
- i. Pray for it:
 1. **James 1:5** – “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”
 2. Even Solomon asked for it: “How shall I lead?”
 - a. **2 Chronicles 1:10** – “Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can rule this great people of Thine?”
 - b. God was pleased with Solomon’s request. (vs. 11)
 - c. Interesting here, Solomon was a king of Israel. He had a direct line to God in ways that other believers did not. In the context of this verse, he is speaking with God (vs. 7: “In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, ‘Ask what I shall give you.’”).
 - i. Even with that type of direct line to God, Solomon knew that God desired for him to make decisions based on wisdom and not based on constant or regular hearing from God.
 - ii. We also get wisdom from counsel, instruction, research, knowledge, and experience.
 1. How do I make good decisions? Wisdom.
 2. How do I get wisdom? Experience.
 3. How do I get experience? Bad decisions.
- d. Incidentally, wisdom allows for differing views on what is most sensible or appropriate when morality is not an issue.

e. Example: Wisdom and Marriage

- i. You have the liberty of marrying anyone you want who qualifies by God's moral will, but you have to live with the consequences.
 1. Marry wisely, marry well.
 2. Koukl says, "Marrying a nag is not a sin; it's just stupid."
 - a. **Proverbs 21:9** – "It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman."
 - b. **Proverbs 27:15** – "A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike."
 3. Don't marry for beauty at the sacrifice of discretion.
 - a. **Proverbs 11:22** – "As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion."
 - b. Koukl: "You get the gold ring, but you get the pig with it."
 4. Note: Solomon wrote Proverbs as advice for his son. If he had written it for his daughter, he would've included all sorts of counsel against lazy, passive, effeminate men. Please take no offense at the above examples.
- ii. Sometimes God's moral will is a guide to our making wise choices. For example:
 1. The Bible teaches that wives should be responsive and obedient to the leadership of their husband and that husbands should be sacrificial in loving their wives (Ephesians 5:22-33).
 2. Therefore, wisdom suggests:
 - a. That a woman choose a man she respects and whose leadership she can easily respond to, and
 - b. That a man select a woman he can be a servant to through loving and leading in a sacrificial way.
- f. There's a problem that often occurs with the "individual will" or "blueprint" model:
 - i. What happens is we supposedly get our own personal word from the Lord and then do something either contrary to the Word or seriously violating wisdom, and we do so because we "really believe the Lord is leading in this."
 1. That's simply not true. Example: missionaries leaving spouse and kids.

C. Third Circle: Personal Factors (our desires and conscience)

- a. Personal desires. Believe it or not, our desires are valid and a part of biblical decision-making.

- i. Example: marriage (1 Corinthians 7:40) – “In my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is.”
 - ii. Example: giving (2 Corinthians 9:7) – “Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.”
- b. Personal **conscience**. (God alone is Lord of the conscience. Don't bind another's and don't sin against your own. Your conscience is to be a guide – though it is always subordinate to God's Word. A goal of sanctification is to have our conscience grow more in line with God's Word.)
- i. **Romans 14:5** – “One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”
 - ii. **Romans 14:22-23** – “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he is eating not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”
- c. In actual practice, this generally happens in reverse order.
- i. We first think about what we want, then consider whether it's wise and moral.
 - ii. The important thing is not the order, but the final product.
 1. Is your decision morally sound, prudent (i.e., wise), and in concert with your desires and personal conscience?
- d. What if the “personal” circle doesn't overlap with the other two?
- i. Sometimes the only choices available to us are ones we don't like. What then?
 - ii. If we're faced with a moral obligation (e.g., being faithful to our promises), then we must do what is right, not what we like.
 1. **Psalm 15:4** speaks of the one who fears the LORD, “who swears to his own hurt and does not change.”
 - iii. If we have no moral obligation (e.g., getting married vs. staying single), then we can choose to do nothing for the time being.
- e. **Example: Personal Factors and Marriage**
- i. Your personal likes and dislikes should be factored into the equation. What is physically attractive to you? What kind of personality do you enjoy? Ultimately, the decision who to marry is up to you.
 - ii. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul teaches:
 1. There are pros and cons to being **single**.
 - a. **Pro**: single people can serve the Lord more effectively.

- i. **7:32** – “But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.”
 - ii. **7:35** – “And this I say for your own benefit...to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.”
 - b. **Con:** single people may suffer sexual frustration.
 - i. **7:9** – “But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn [in passion].”
 - ii. Paul does not mean that two people burning with sexual passion for each other should get married, but that if someone’s inclined to burn with passion, that’s a good sign he should find a spouse rather than fall into sexual sin.
2. There are also pros and cons to being **married**.
 - a. **Pro:** married people enjoy sexual intimacy.
 - i. **7:3** – “Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.”
 - b. **Con:** married people must split their attentions and energies.
 - i. **7:33** – “But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.”
3. There are moral obligations constraining each decision.
 - a. Single people cannot fornicate.
 - i. **7:1** – “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to [sexually] touch a woman. But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”
 - b. Married people cannot get divorced.
 - i. **7:10** – “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.”

- ii. **7:39** – “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”

D. The Final Circle: God's Sovereign Will (surrounding all of the inner, overlapping three)

- a. God's sovereignty doesn't directly affect our **decisions**; it affects our **attitudes**.
- b. When God intervenes in ways we cannot control, we can trust the circumstances and the results to Him because He is sovereignly in control.
- c. This gives us:
 - i. **Freedom** – In the process of my free agency in decision making, God fulfills His sovereign purpose.
 - 1. **Genesis 50:20** – “...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...”
 - 2. **Romans 8:28** – “...God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God...”
 - ii. **Rest** – We make our plans with an attitude of humble surrender, trusting Him with the final result: “If God wills [blank], then great. If it doesn't work out, fine.”
 - 1. God's sovereignty encourages an attitude of utter dependence and trust.
 - 2. **James 4:13-16** – “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow... Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”
 - 3. **Psalm 138:8** – “The Lord will accomplish what concerns me.”

E. Does knowing God's will require a special “sixth” sense? No.

- a. Rather spiritual maturity is:
 - i. Growing in our understanding of the Word.
 - ii. Growing in our wisdom (the ability to apply God's Word to life circumstances).
 - iii. Growing in our submission – to God's revealed will and His sovereign designs (providence).
- b. The result: Peace.
 - i. This is NOT a sense of peace **as God's signal that you've chosen what He wants**.
 - ii. Instead, it's a peace that says: “I feel good about the decision I made.”
 - iii. What if you have no peace? Then you may be violating wisdom.
 - 1. Look further. Seek counsel.

F. The exception...Intrusive Special Revelation?

- a. There may be times when God does want you to follow a special plan, like He did on rare occasions in the Bible.
- b. Remember the biblical pattern though:
 - i. This does not come by some internal feeling of being led.
 - ii. Rather, God's direction comes uninvited, it's clear, it's supernatural, it may be contrary to conventional wisdom, and it becomes morally obligatory if/when given.

G. The Wisdom Model in summary:

- a. ***In the absence of a clear, definitive, special command of God, make the wisest, most expedient choice.***
- b. Guidance is simple: if God has not given a direct command in Scripture, then do the wisest and most desirable thing.
 - i. Sometimes the process is quick.
 - ii. Sometimes the process takes a long time.
 - iii. It all depends on the circumstances of each decision.
- c. Remember the guiding principle:
 - i. ***"Using the guidelines of God's Word combined with wisdom, you have the freedom to do anything you want, with God's blessing."***
- d. A closing note from J.I. Packer:
 - i. "The basic fault here is disregard of a principle that is writ large in Scripture – too large perhaps for some to see. **The principle is that the right course is always to choose the wisest means to the noblest end. Namely, the advancing of God's kingdom and glory.** Moral law delimits the area within which the choice must be made ... God gives wisdom ..., then leads us within these limits to the best option ... God enables us to discern this by prayerfully using our minds, thinking how Scripture applies, comparing alternatives, weighing advice, taking account of our heart's desire, estimating our capabilities. Some call this common sense. The Bible calls it wisdom. It is one of God's most precious gifts."

Luke 7:35 – "Yet wisdom is vindicated [justified and shown to be right] by all her children [by the lifestyle, moral character, and good deeds of her followers]."