

Proverbs | The Spirit of Wisdom for Daily Life

Guidance – How to Decide

Proverbs 11.3; 12.5, 15, 22; 16.1-4, 9, 25, 33; 21.5; 27.1; **Romans** 12.1-2
8.12.18

Proverbs 11.3 *The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.*

12.5 *The thoughts of the righteous are just, But the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.*

12.15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*

15.22 *Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.*

16.1-4 *The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. ² All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives. ³ Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established. ⁴ The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.*

16.9 *The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.*

16.25 *There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

16.33 *The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.*

21.5 *The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*

27.1 *Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

Romans 12.2 *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

We've been looking at the Book of Proverbs for a few weeks. Today we look at ten passages on the theme of GUIDANCE or discovering God's will.

How do you make a decision that's in line with God's will...with God's plan? How do you decide what God wants you to DO in any given situation?

That's the topic from Proverbs today... and I'd dare say that most people in this room have wrestled with this idea at some point in your life (maybe at many points!) EVEN people who

don't believe in the God of the Bible will sometimes speak of opportunities "the universe has brought into my life" and will then wonder HOW to respond...

In Romantic Comedies when boy-meets-girl, BOY may ask girl, "Hey! Do you believe in fate?" as if there's a desire to make a decision that's in keeping with some larger plan... AND even people who don't believe in ANY supernatural power/plan/fate... even atheists when they come to the end of their rope will sort of call out into the vast unknown for direction or guidance: "what should I do?!"

Looking at these passages (and one from Romans) I'd like to consider:

- 1) Little Children Making Big Decisions
- 2) A Child Shall Lead them
- 3) Growing Up (being child-LIKE but not child-ISH)

When I say, "little children making big decisions" I mean that we all face moments in life when we FEEL outclassed and overwhelmed and we JUST don't know what to do... we NEED guidance.

We may be out of high school and in our mid-twenties or older...thirties...forties...fifties and beyond and we FEEL like we SHOULD be competent to make a decision by this age...BUT...we also recognize how consequential this impending decision really is. And you may feel... very... small in the face of this decision – so much hangs on it... And what if you choose the wrong option?

The enrollment counselor asks, "Hmmm...I notice that you haven't yet declared your major: ARE YOU READY TO DO THAT NOW?" – and you swallow hard and think, "Really?! I have to decide NOW at the age of 19 what I'll be doing for the rest of my life?!"

And then we take out a student loan that "will obligate me for the next... 15 years...or more...?"

We may take out an auto loan... and wonder how we can possibly sign on the dotted line. Is this the right car? Can I commit?

We may be looking at a relationship with another person that may lead to marriage and ... and we have seen BAD marriages, even horrible, miserable marriages... AND WE THINK: "I can't possibly make this decision! What if this is the wrong person?"

How can I decide NOW...how I will be spending the rest of my life? It feels overwhelming and even if you've been an adult for many years... all of a sudden you feel...so little...insignificant...like a child.

And...you probably KNOW the trend, that people are INDEED making these decisions later and later. Robert Wuthnow (Sociologist at Princeton; Bowling Alone) said that in 1960, 77% of

women and 65% of men had completed all the major transitions to adulthood by age 30. By the year 2000 those numbers were down to 46% (for women) and 31% (for men). Since 2000 the numbers continue to drop.

And MAYBE part of this delay is a sense that young people feel ill-equipped to make those big decisions ... and I get it! We all feel small in the face of these critical choices: little children making big decisions.

And yet they have to be made... the Honda or the Toyota (the Ford or the Chevy)... To major in communications or journalism? To marry or to remain single?... To stay in South Florida or move to Atlanta (one of our elders asked me to tell the whole congregation that the answer to THAT question is always – STAY IN SOUTH FLORIDA!) ...To buy a house or rent?... To take this job or that job?... To have children?...To adopt? ...How to educate those children?...How to care for my aging parents?... When to retire?... Treatment options for various diseases?... ON AND ON with these big decisions ...that expose our uncertainties and insecurities ...that leave us feeling paralyzed... feeling small. Little children making big decisions. Can we know God's will?

And the Bible is actually going to agree with our anxiety... Who do we think we are? – “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

The Proverbs of the New Testament (The Book of James) puts it even more starkly: Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will 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. You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4.13-16)

See? If being paralyzed in the face of big decisions is a problem – another, even BIGGER problem is to make these big decisions AS IF IT ALL DEPENDS ON ME... as if I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul – “I'll go here and there and DO BUSINESS and get a degree and have children... I know how biology works...how education works...how to write a résumé. I know how to make a decision!”

So...we have paralysis and indecision (on one side) and bravado and presumption (on the other).

And when Jesus Christ comes He says, “I will fulfill the PLAN for you...I will take your place...I will become a Child and go through all the life-choices that people have to make... I COME AS THE CHILD OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER... who makes all the right decisions... ‘and a little child shall lead them’ (Isa 11.6) ”

And Jesus Christ, the Perfect Child of God, who makes all His choices according to the will of the Father and in fulfillment of the eternal Plan... HE DOES IT NOT SO MUCH AS OUR EXAMPLE but as our Agent...acting on our behalf!

More than just teaching us how to make decisions HE IS MAKING THEM ON MY BEHALF... He is fulfilling MY DESTINY FOR ME.

And all His decisions... bring Him... to the Cross.

It looks like His decision-making is a big disaster. He fails...He's defeated...He's rejected by people...and in the end, punished by God... AND YET, St Peter could describe the decisions of Jesus Christ in these terms: "this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again..." (Act 2.23-24)

It was the predetermined plan of God... this little Child...grew up making all the right decisions...to fulfill the Father's great Plan... He shouldered the burden of these heavy choices, these momentous decisions and ALWAYS decided and acted in keeping with the will of the Father...so that at the end of this Child's earthly course, He could say to His Father: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17.4-5)

He's the Son who perfectly carried out the Father's Plan ... who made every decision according to the Father's beautiful design... And though the outcome of His decisions looks like a disaster, it actually fulfilled the Father's plan... His dying words were, "It is finished!" God's predetermined PLAN is fulfilled, FOR ME!

And His resurrection proves that His decisions were NOT the disaster they seem to be – what we meant for evil God meant for good (Genesis 50.20).

Now what does this Good News mean for people who want to live AND MAKE DECISIONS according to God's will?

First, because God has shown me His good intentions I am learning that He can be trusted completely. I have seen the mercies of God and the logical response is to present my whole self to Him – I know He can be trusted and I want to do things His way whether that seems to make sense to me or not.

The way that seems right to me leads to death – but His way will lead to life. I'm learning to think by the New Logic of grace, to be transformed by the renewing of my mind, so that I may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12.2)

This alone is the answer to so many decisions I have to make. I'm able to ask, "Is there some command of God that I'm breaking in this decision? AND if so, then it's the wrong decision: "The integrity of the upright will guide them..." (Proverbs 11.3)

I'm learning to live wisely (a renewing of the mind is taking place). I'm seeing that wisdom is progressive i.e. I'm learning to live, not by slavish formulas but in the freedom of sonship. I don't have to be frozen in fear that I might choose the wrong car because if my decision is ill-informed or even if it's sinful, I can trust the God who raised Jesus from the dead to bring good out of my bad decisions ("The LORD has made everything for its own purpose" [16.4] even my bad decisions!)

Learning to live in the mercies of God...the New Logic of grace means that I see my own sinfulness and I can ask others for help. I don't have to be smug and self-assured... "the way of the fool is right in his own eyes but the wise man listens to counsel... there's wisdom in many counselors" – I can be child-like and inquisitive and ready to learn and yet not childish!

God is growing us up... and as we live as the children of grace... as we continue to relate to God through Jesus Christ...as we repent and believe and repent and believe... wisdom is growing in us.

I'm learning that I really can't see myself very well ... so I'm putting away my bravado about my independent plans and instead I'm asking help from YOU (my brothers and sisters) and I'm learning to welcome the presence of God in this new freedom... committing all my ways to the Father who loves me.

I'm not only entrusting the big decisions to Him but I'm acknowledging Him in ALL my ways (like Chesterton said, even in my leisure activities). God is giving me the freedom to fail. A verse we didn't quote, (Proverbs 24.16) "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity..." – in other words, THINGS may not go as I planned or as I hoped but God can be trusted EVEN in my failures... He will raise me up and will sustain me (7x – complete!)...now and forever.

For the believer in Jesus Christ, we can see that if God brought life and immortality out of the worst event in all of human history – that infinitely dreadful moment when God came and was rejected, betrayed, tortured and killed – if God predetermined good from THAT, then I know He will bring good out of my decisions (even the bad ones!).

And see...for you who are NOT yet believing this message – do you see the tremendous value for YOU and the incentive for you to believe this? If Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead, it guarantees that everyone who trusts Him will not be disappointed... there's a new basis/clarity for making right decisions and an assurance that EVEN your bad decisions will work for good – as

God raised Jesus from the dead, so your dead decisions will be redeemed and raised....for your ultimate good.

Only believe... and let the renewal begin.