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Election Year: A Good Time to Wonder, “How Should Christians Make Decisions?”

How many decisions do you make every day? You probably make a lot more decisions than you think. Some are small, others large, and a few are huge. Your choice **not** to decide may turn out disastrous!

During college, I met this young woman at a youth group where I volunteered. I didn't know she was a teacher at the church's school. In fact, I didn't know about the church at all until my roommate, Paul, and I learned about it from a fellow student. That's when I learned they needed some help for the youth group.

At that time, I had decided not to date. The last woman I dated hurt my feelings, and I was in “bachelor mode.” Yet, I made the choice to walk across the room and say hello. We hit it off, discovering we attended the same junior college.

Back at our dorm, I mentioned to Paul, that I was thinking about calling to ask her out. Paul encouraged me: “Good idea!” However, I stalled, still feeling the sting of that last girlfriend. She dumped me for another guy. In my mind, she made two bad decisions: breaking our relationship, and doing it in a heartless way.

After a while, Paul became impatient. He said, “Are you going to call her or not?” Timidly, I said, “I don't think so. I'm afraid of being hurt.” That's when Paul made the

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challenge: “If you don’t call her in the next 20 minutes, I’m going to call and ask her out myself.”

Nineteen minutes and thirty seconds later, I made another decision. In the heat of roommate competition, I made the call...and that woman and I have been married for 47 years!

Decisions come in all sizes. A string of little decisions can develop into a pattern with each decision building on another. The cluster of decisions can change your life, for good or for bad!

No one gets overweight when they decide to eat one chocolate chip cookie. No one gets a college degree by taking one course. Decisions form journeys. Journeys form lives — ours, and others. My wife Janet and I have two children who wouldn’t exist if I hadn’t made that call...or, if Paul hadn’t given me the push.

**If you don’t decide how your day
will be spent, someone else
will.
~ John C. Maxwell**

Election Year Decisions

Since 2016 is an election year, every U.S. citizen has an important decision to make. There are many people telling you who to choose. However, there is a much bigger issue, which very few are addressing: *how* to decide.

Some who make a mess of their lives likely never learned how to make godly decisions. In fact, many parents set out dozens of rules about what their kids should do or not do. The challenge? No one can anticipate every situation. Parents can’t anticipate what choices their children might face.

Parents can, however, teach children *how* to make good decisions. The “how” is where many people go through life as a train wreck: one bad decision after another.

So what does God give you on how to make decisions?

Christian Decision-Making

In Scripture, decision-making seems to have a lot to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:2 it says “Jesus gave instructions to the apostles by the Holy Spirit.” This is the same Holy Spirit who is the centerpiece of activity in the mission of the church: In Acts 1:8, it says “when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for Me....”

In Acts 5:32, it says, “We and the Holy Spirit are witnesses to Jesus and the resurrection.” During the first expansion of Christianity and the requirement to delegate ministry, the apostles chose seven men to help with ministry. In choosing them, it was important that these seven men were “known to be full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:2-5). The text goes on to say *how* that was so important: “They chose Philip (and the others) because they were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” They were wise and knew how to make good decisions. The result? In verse 7 it says the church grew and expanded its leadership base.

In Acts 15, you find one of the greatest challenges to the early church. It was a big decision. Since Jesus was Jewish and the movement of Christianity came out of Judaism, there was his important question, “Should Gentile men be circumcised, and should Gentile women be required to follow all the dietary rules of a kosher kitchen?” This was a gigantic decision that would determine whether Christianity would remain a small Jewish sect or become a world religion.

The Jerusalem council leaders made the decision that Gentiles and others could become Christians without being *culturally* Jewish. In explaining this to some Gentiles, Paul said, in Acts 15:28, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things...” The “necessary things” were the values of a Christian life that would not cause offense. The role of the Holy Spirit in this monumental decision is without question. So when you make a decision, do you pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit?

The Bible says, “Pray without ceasing.” That doesn’t mean folding your hands and closing your eyes while you drive down the road. It does reflect a “God conversation” that continues all the time. It is an active, ongoing relationship that guides everything for you. This posture toward God provides the context for Christian decision-making.

Another dimension of good decision-making is

“A double-minded person is unstable in all his ways.”

James 1:8

the advice Jesus gave in Matthew 6:24-34. This is fundamental: you can’t serve two

masters. It is impossible to put God first and to put money or things first. Jesus’ follow-up to this discussion includes a reminder that preoccupation with things like food, drink, and clothing leads to worry. Worry clouds decisions. Faith — complete trust — in God clarifies decisions.

Jesus says, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other ‘things’ will be provided.” The King of this Kingdom is not Santa Claus, asking for a list of all the things you *want*. The King is promising that you will have everything you *need*. This is the framework for good decision-making.

God’s Will

In the Lord’s Prayer you say, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” You can rattle it off whether you’re thinking about it or not. But to live under the conviction that you really want what God wants is a challenge. Your appetites, some friends, TV commercials, and the enemy all gang up on you every day with a different message: “Have it your way.”

This is not new. The Christians in the early church had this challenge. In 1 Peter 4:1-2 it

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says, “Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like Him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.”

In John 4, the disciples were focused on food while Jesus was focused on changing the lives of a Samaritan woman and her village. The disciples said to Jesus: “Have some food.” He said, “My food is to obey the will of the One who sent Me and to finish the work He gave me to do.” That is a great prescription for Christian decision-making. Conflict occurs when we attempt to subordinate the will of God to our own.

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The Mind of Christ

It’s easy to slip into a condition where you fret and worry about which direction to take. The Apostle Paul addresses that in Philippians 4:6-7: “Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need.... And God’s peace which is beyond human understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.”

This “union” is described as “the mind of Christ” — thinking like Jesus. Paul has direction for this in his letter to the Romans. He writes, “...the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are, for we do not know how we ought to pray: the Spirit pleads with God for us...” (Romans 8:28).

In Romans 11:34, Paul raises a question you have perhaps asked when trying to make a decision: “Who knows the mind of Christ?” Ever hear the phrase, “I need to clear my mind?” Scripture addresses this challenge in Romans 12:2. Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world but be *transformed* by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (emphasis mine).

The largest roadblock to spiritual renewal is the natural clutter of worldly concepts in the absence of spiritual growth. The Christian faith is a lifelong process. Many Christians get a shot of spiritual growth in the preaching message each week. Yet, as any mature Christian can tell you, that’s not enough. The world bombards you almost every waking hour with worldly messages. They are meant to draw you to conform to worldly thinking. So many Christians believe a 20- to 30-minute shot from a sermon is enough. That’s a big mistake!

Serious Bible study and disciplined personal Bible reading are essential. Basically, good decision-making is not based on your “feeling,” but upon “feeding” on God’s Word. In 1 Corinthians 2:16, Scripture asks and answers the question: “For who has known the mind of the Lord...?” The context is how to develop spiritual discernment. The verse continues: “But we have the mind of Christ.”

Paul gives the Corinthians direction, “Move beyond the milk of the Word” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). He is saying, “Grow up spiritually!” This is called Christian maturity, and it changes everything, including the decisions we make. The challenge for the Corinthians is still the struggle for many Christians today: “You still live as the people of this world live” (1 Corinthians 3:3).

The other day I was talking to my pastor, who teaches a dynamic Sunday morning Bible class. I was thinking about spiritual growth and decision-making when I said, “I just don’t understand why everyone in our church doesn’t come to Bible class.” Sadly, this comment is appropriate for many Christians. The “mind of Christ” goes beyond “knowledge” and “information.” It leads to spiritual wisdom.

Wisdom

Proverbs is a treasure chest filled with guidelines for decision-making. In Proverbs 2:6 it says, “It is the Lord who gives wisdom: from Him come knowledge and understanding.” Proverbs 4:7 points to the value of Christian wisdom: “Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do. Whatever else you do, get insight.”

Proverbs makes clear how you get wisdom. It is not by getting a Ph.D. from a university. Proverbs 9:10-12 says, “To be wise you must first have reverence for the Lord. If you know the Holy One, you have understanding. Wisdom will add years to your life. You are the one who will profit if you have wisdom, and if you reject it, you are the one who will suffer.”

Another dimension of wisdom focuses on getting outside advice. In the last 40 years, I have consulted 1,400 churches. I will

never understand why other churches (pastors and church leaders) rarely or never get outside, objective, expert advice. Proverbs 13:10: “Arrogance causes nothing but trouble. It is wiser to ask for advice.” Proverbs 15:22 says, “Get all the advice you can, and you will succeed; without it you will fail.”

I live on a tree farm. It is my hobby to plant and care for future timber trees. My timber consultant, Tom, has provided valuable direction over the years — a value many times beyond the cost. Proverbs 14:3 says, “The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won’t face the facts.”

I think of thousands of declining churches across the country where people are allowing their church to die because they fail to get direction and guidance. They have made many unwise

10 ISSUES ABOUT DECISION-MAKING

1. What to decide is not as important as how to decide.
2. Scripture says a wise person has many counselors.
3. Sometimes even a wrong decision is better than no decision at all.
4. When deciding, don’t get trapped by a binary approach: either/or. Many of the best decisions are a combination of both/and, or something completely different.
5. In good decision-making, wisdom is as important as intelligence, sometimes more important.
6. Wise Christians make good decisions in prayer.
7. A driving force for decision-making is to do God’s will, to do what God wants.
8. In order to know God’s will, be a lifelong learner from Scripture. Pray every day, “Lord, I want to be in Your will, not in Your way.”
9. Decisions are not as trivial as some might seem. Almost every decision has multiple consequences, most of which are not known at the time.
10. Operate your decision-making on the platform of Jesus’ promise: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and all other things (you need — not want) will be provided” (Matthew 6:33).

decisions that, collectively, have combined to cause the loss of spiritual influence on the nation. Proverbs 12:15: “A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others.” Proverbs 22:17 says, “Listen to this wise advice: follow it clearly, for it will do you good and you can pass it on: trust in the Lord.”

As you make thousands of decisions in your future, remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God’s sight” (1 Corinthians 3:19).

It would be great if what the apostle told the Ephesians would reflect how you have made your decisions: “I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father to give you the Spirit, *who will make you wise* and reveals God to you, so you will know Him” (Ephesians 1:16, emphasis mine).