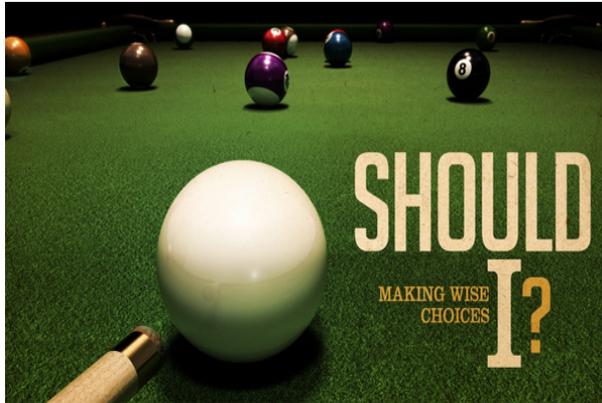


**SERIES: DETERMINING GOD'S WILL IN OUR LIVES**

**PART III. HOW DO WE DETERMINE GOD'S WILL IN OUR DECISION MAKING**

**By Pastor Matthew Woods**



In part II of this series we reminded ourselves of the things we know God wants for us. He wants us to know salvation as so wonderfully reminded in **John 3:15-17**. We also know that the Lord wants us to live our lives carrying a firm hope in Jesus Christ so that everything we do may be done to the glory of God. Yet, we also reminded ourselves that Satan is all too eager to try to confuse us and get us to doubt the Word of the Lord. We know the formula from Genesis 3, "Did God really say..." So then the battle is within us

because sin wants one thing while the Lord wants another. Yet while the Lord never forces His will upon us He makes it clear that not following His will brings about curses while following His will brings about blessings (cf. Deut 28 and in Matthew 7). Here in part III we try to see God's will in our personal decision making. How do we determine God's will in decisions such as Jobs, marriage, or even in the daily choices?

**DO MY DECISIONS REALLY MATTER TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER?**

First, let's ask ourselves, "Do my decisions really matter to our Heavenly Father?" Well, let's ask this another way: Does a child's decisions matter to her/his parents? As a parent I have to confess that the decisions my boys make are important. Decisions small and large can reflect one's character and be life altering. Therefore, it matters to me as a parent that the decisions my sons make are godly decisions, "large" or "small". I prefer that they act as men of integrity. For example I hope that I have instilled in them the proper way to treat a lady and given them an example in the way I have conducted myself with my wife, their mom, worthy of a future bride. I pray that whatever job they work at that they show up on time, work hard, and conduct themselves appropriately with fellow workers. I pray for a good relationship with the church regularly engaged with its fellowship and never too discouraged with the church's inevitable flaws. I pray for good decisions in areas of faith, courage, success, and in being men worthy of respect by both the Lord and our neighbors.

I would hope that they would make sound decisions in regards to their safety. For example, young men usually drive quickly. Once I was one of those young men who drove too fast too often. So I pray that they will be safe drivers. I would hope that they would be men of compassion who would be willing to help when given opportunity. I pray that they would make decisions that would reflect a humility and gratitude for the things that they have been entrusted with in this world. And, of course, I worry for them as a parent does that their decisions will lead them into a future with some level of success.

No parent wants a child to fail. Nor does our Lord want us to fail when making our own decisions. So I would answer the question with a decisive "Yes my decisions really do matter to our heavenly Father." After all why would Jesus come to bring salvation without wanting our

decision making to be healthy? This is one motivation when Jesus tells the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more (**John 8:1-11**) and the rich young ruler to sell all his possession and give them to the poor before he decides to follow Jesus (**Luke 18:18-23**). Jesus gives them a good alternative over what their decisions have previously led to—one that will help them win.

### **WHERE DO WE START?**

Start in prayer. Go to the Lord first. I won't belay the obvious here, but prayer is the place to start even before you go into the word. The first and best place to start is with Jesus. When Jesus picked His disciples He prayed all night to the Heavenly Father for wisdom (**Luke 6:12-17**). Jesus' whole ministry is marked by prayer.

Go back further to Nehemiah 9. This is the longest recorded prayer in the scripture. Nehemiah's faith life was a balance of prayer and action. But he always prayed first. Nehemiah prayed and then put his request before the king (**Neh. 2:3,4**); he prayed and then "set a watch" (**Neh. 4:9**). He exhorted the people to "remember the Lord ... and fight" (**Neh. 4:14**). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and managed to rebuild the wall in a very short period of time because he was a man of prayer. Nehemiah is an excellent book in teaching one to pray to achieve one's goals.

As you pray clarify with the Lord what it is you are actually praying for. During a High School football game between two Christian Schools is the right prayer to win the game? Perhaps instead it would better to see the game as an opportunity to play to the best of one's abilities and pray for that and then let the outcome of the game just happen.

When it comes to a relationship and hopes of marriage many may pray for the "right one". In prayer it may be helpful to pray for a "good one" which leaves room for the joy of discovering a relationship rather than looking for someone who fulfills a personal checklist. The "right one" may be too narrow and one may become too "picky" and unable to see a "good one."

What about financial decisions? We all live on fixed incomes. When we want something like a new car really bad it's good for the Lord to grant clarity so one can know their true limits. For instance, is this a want or a need? Can I just fix the old car? Financial decisions need prayer and clarity because often the wrong emotions get mixed up in the decision making.

When it comes to jobs a prayer of patience helps in clarifying what one is really praying for; "a good paying job", "a job that is fun", "a job that meets my expectations", "a job worthy of me". Pray in steps if necessary. Maybe pray for one's resume to be seen by fair people. Pray to have a constructive interview and allow an opportunity to be seen. When you pray be specific but also when praying remember to seek the Lord's will.

### **TURN TO THE WISDOM OF THE WORD.**

Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. This is the advice of **Colossian 3:16**. When the Word dwells in us richly it gives us an advantage over the world. This was also Paul's advice to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3**. <sup>14</sup>*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,<sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. The goal of being the Word is that we first know the Lord Jesus but in knowing Jesus we also may be "thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

After one goes directly to the Lord in prayer then go to God's Word. When we make decisions it is fair to say that the Bible does not specifically answer questions like "Which job is

best?” or “Whom shall I marry?” The Bible does however give us some criteria worth considering. First, will my decision become an obstacle to my faith? Second, is my decision going to violate my conscience? When Martin Luther stood before all the powerful people of his day at the Diet of Worms he believed that he may not leave that event alive. He was prepared to give his life if necessary for the Gospel. As part of his famous declaration; “Here I stand...” he also made note of the fact that it is not good to go against one’s conscience. Third, your decision should not cause anyone to stumble or fall, including oneself. Finally, one would do well to glorify the Lord and avoid any decision that creates or elevates oneself or something else to become an idol. Idols always demand sacrifice (the church and faith being the biggest). Idols work as a thief to pull us away from the living Lord and Savior, Jesus. Regular Bible Reading and study will help to keep one focused on godly wisdom through even the toughest decisions. There really is no substitute.

#### **ASK FOR DIRECTIONS...SEEK WISE COUNSEL**

Nobody likes asking for directions. Over the years I have however, learned that stopping to ask most often takes less time than trying to figure out the right way to go. Let’s say I go on vacation to Disney World and have never been there before. Would it not help to talk to someone that has lived in Florida and has season tickets, and who has been there countless times? Of course! This only makes sense.

Consider personal example. When I worked in Yosemite for a season years ago I was fortunate enough to have a cabin-mate that had been in the park almost twenty years. He knew everything. So each weekend he would take me to places in the park that were rarely seen and helped me discover unknown swimming holes, hot springs, abandoned trails with spectacular views, waterfalls that few venture out to see, and more. He was like a living encyclopedia full of information about the park which he Himself had learned from years of experience.

Similarly, to find someone who is wise can provide the same opportunity in helping us to make a good decision. Besides many of our decisions are often layered under many emotions that often make deciding more complicated. Talking with someone offers us an objective view and may help us to sort out the pros and cons of any direction we choose. It is good that we hear from someone that won’t just tell us what we want to hear. And if this person is someone we know, like a grandmother, or a friend from church, they are more likely able to give us honest advice in a way that is firm and straightforward. And if this person is knowledgeable in the scriptures and is one who discerns the wisdom of the Word well then we may discover a better way to discern options in a godly manner. So, getting good solid counsel from a person who is wise in the scriptures, familiar with us but yet able to weigh things honestly with us, and is a person who is objective—this person is a valuable resource for making our way through decisions large or small.

*“The way of a fool seems right, but a wise man listens to advice” (Prov. 12:15)*

*<sup>13</sup> Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning.  
Ecclesiastes 4:13*

*“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”  
Proverbs 19:20*

## EVALUATE YOUR DECISION.



Often just making a big decision brings relief and at other times it brings none. You should be prepared that often it's common to second guess yourself especially when the decisions are health related or when end-of life decisions are made. Sometimes even when the decision is made the results may be painful or unsatisfying. Usually because the circumstances are so imprecise because they fall into the realm of best guess one can only make the best decision one can by using the information one has at the time one has it.

In the realm of jobs a decision is often made based on money or benefits. On deciding on a relationship a decision is always highly emotion driven. It's hard to back away from a bad decision because we have invested so much of our energy and our emotions. When a large number of people are telling us that the love our life does not seem to bring out the best in us just the idea of failure, or starting over, or having no one motivates the heart to try one more time—prove that it can be done. And when a job takes more time from the kids than planned or the job somehow “nags at us” because something just seems out of alignment and we can't put our finger on it but it's there—maybe we need to reexamine. Good money works for a while but one's contentment often weighs in as a higher priority eventually.

However, if a consensus of people agree and it begins to feel right and it all seems to make sense and align as a good thing then we should probably take that as our “sign” that it is good. If however, a consensus goes the other way and things seem like it is being forced somehow then maybe it would be better to try a different choice.

When one of our members decided to move from his current Assisted living facility to a newly constructed facility it only took him one day to realize he had made a mistake. He was sold up to that point but later realized that the new location just wasn't going to meet his needs as he first thought. So he and his wife moved back after only six days. Remember if we evaluate our decision and somehow if it just doesn't seem to be right—that little voice is telling us we made the wrong choice then remember it's ok to make a different decision. That's often part of growing in the Lord and in wisdom. We are bound to make a bad choice at some point in spite of all of our efforts. The Lord can forgive bad choices.

So, as we close things out please know three main things about seeking the Lord's will in our choices. First, the Lord absolutely wants us to succeed in our faith. This is not necessarily the same thing as a successful career. Blessings are good but to succeed in our faith means that Jesus remains the center of our life and salvation is our hope. So turn to the Lord in prayer. Secondly, the Lord wants us gives us opportunity for sound advice from His Word and from people who can discern His Word. When Mature, godly people, are sought our decisions have a better chance of being objective, honest, and have a greater opportunity to be a blessing over a curse. Finally, honestly evaluate your decision. Sometimes we just do the best we can given our circumstances—Lord forgive us. In any case when we make an effort to please the Lord in our decision making, and we seek to do right by Him and loved ones the Lord's Will will be served and He will be glorified. I hope that this series has been helpful and a blessing in your decision making process. The Lord be with you.