

# Decision-Making

Good morning everybody. If you've got a bible, go ahead and turn with me to **Genesis 2**. Last week we kicked off our **Adulting series**, and we talked all about God's purpose for our work. Specifically how work is not just an unfortunately necessary part of our existence, but rather a blessing—something we *get* to participate in as a reflection of who God is. We saw how God put the first human being in a garden with a bunch of raw materials and said to him, essentially, “make something out of all this.” If you weren't here last week, be sure to go back and grab the podcast because how we think about work is obviously a very important part of learning to adult in today's world.

But today, we're gonna look at another big part of adulthood, and that's **decision-making**. **Like it or not, making decisions is a very regular part of being an adult.** You've got to make decisions about the career you will pursue, about whether you will be single or be married, if you get married about *who* you will marry, then decisions about whether or not you will have kids, decisions about where to live and if and when to buy a house, and how expensive of a house to buy...the list goes on and on and on. And for some of you, your blood pressure is rising just thinking about all those. But **in order to be a functioning adult in today's world, you will have to make decisions on a regular basis.** And so today, I want to try and answer the question *how should we go about making those decisions? What types of things should we rely on when making decisions?*

And in order to get a framework for that, I want us to look again, like we did last week, at Genesis 2 and 3. **Here in this passage, we get a glimpse at one of the first human decisions ever made.** And I want us to see what we can learn from it about our own decision-making. So let's look at Genesis 2, starting in v. 15:

*[15] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*

So this is where we left off last week. God puts Adam in the garden and gives him a job to do. Now last week we focused on what specifically God told Adam *to do* in the Garden, but **this week I want us to focus in on what he told Adam not to do.** What does he tell Adam *not* to do in this passage? *Eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* Not to eat from this one particular tree.

You know, I've often heard people ask “**what was significant about the tree** of the knowledge of good and evil? Was it a magic tree? Was it the fruit made of poison? Why was it the *that one tree* they weren't supposed to eat from?” And while that's a really good question, we're never given an explicit answer. We're never told what exactly it was about that tree that made God forbid eating from it. He does say “in the day you eat of it, you will surely die,” which is a *consequence of eating it*, but he never gives an *explanation for why they shouldn't eat from it*. So here's what that communicates to me: **it was less about the tree itself, and more about Adam and Eve trusting what God said. What God wants is for Adam and Eve to simply trust that his wisdom is for their good. He wants them, even though they don't understand why, to trust in his wisdom, that his ways are better than theirs.** That, in many ways, is the point of the tree.

So to see **what happens**, let's skip down to ch. 3, v. 1:

*[1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

So pay careful attention here. Look at how **the snake crafts the details** of his sales pitch. The logic he uses is "if you eat of it, you will know more than you do now. Your 'eyes will be opened' he says. You'll know good and evil—you'll know the inner workings of the universe just like God does." And you have to read through the lines a little for this part, but think about it: **if Adam and Eve know everything God does, who will they not really need anymore? God. If you know all the things God does—if you're all-knowing, you have no use for an all-knowing God.** The pitch the snake makes is that Eve can rid herself of that pesky little need to trust in wisdom outside of herself. **God says to Eve, "trust in my wisdom" and the snake says to Eve "trust in your own wisdom."** That's important. **In the decision that Adam and Eve have to make, they will either have to 1) rely on God's wisdom, or 2) rely on their own wisdom. That's the call that they, and all of humanity ever since, has had to make.**

So let's look at **what they decide**:

*[6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

So **the decision they make** is to trust in their own wisdom instead of God's. Given the option to trust and operate on what God says is good, or trust in what seems good to *them* in the moment, they choose to trust in their own. And the only real motivation given for *why* they choose that is that it "seems good to them," and seems like it will make them wise. **The lie is that by rejecting God's wisdom and trusting in our own, we can be wise. And human beings have been buying into that mindset hook, line and sinker ever since.** Given the option to trust and rely on God's wisdom, or simply rely on our own, we have a strong bias towards the latter, do we not? There's a popular verse in Proverbs that says "there is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way to death." Sounds pretty garden of Eden-esque, right?

And here's the thing: the better parts of us **know this isn't a good idea**. We actually know that it's not always best to trust in our own wisdom when it comes to making decisions. I heard a professor once describe the "you're stupid now" principle. Have you guys ever heard of the "you're stupid now" principle? Yeah, sounds really encouraging, right? Here's the "you're stupid now principle": he said almost everybody realizes once they are in their twenties that they were really stupid when they were teenagers. Get I get an amen on that one? And then usually when you get to be thirty or forty, you realize how

stupid you were when you were in your twenties. And then when you're in your fifties or sixties, you realize how stupid you were when you were in your thirties and forties. So, the professor asks, what's the moral of the story? To which the class all replies in unison "You're stupid *now*." Now that's a rather blunt way of putting it, but there's a lot of truth there, is there not? There are so many times in my life when I look back and go "man that was a really dumb decision to make." I know I have a tendency to make poor decisions. And yet, in the midst of my decision-making, none of that seems to make any practical difference. I still think that, when it comes time to make decisions, that I in my own limited wisdom know what's best for me.

But if we're going to get anywhere with making wise decisions in our adult life, **we're gonna have to figure out a way** to not always lean on our own wisdom, and instead learn to lean and rely on **God's wisdom**. That in many ways is the point of the story of the Garden. **But let's be honest—relying on God's wisdom is sometimes a slippery concept to master**. If for no other reason than there are just a lot of decisions we have to make that the it doesn't seem like God speaks explicitly to: *where should I live? Who should I marry? What career should I pursue?* A lot of the biggest decisions we make are often hard to find concrete, black & white, God-given answers to.

So it would seem **if we're going to learn to rely on God's wisdom, we're gonna need a multi-pronged, multi-faceted approach**. It's gonna have to be more than just "pray" and more than just "read the Bible." We're gonna need the ability to piece together God's wisdom from several different sources at once. So I want to walk you through today what I would consider to be a fairly comprehensive approach to relying on God's wisdom in decision-making. Here we go. First, relying on God's wisdom means relying on...

## 1. God's words.

There's a place in **2 Timothy** where Paul is writing to Timothy, who is in many ways like his protege in pastoring and church planting, and I want you to look at what he specifically says about the bible, what he calls the "sacred writings" and the "Scriptures":

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with **the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***

So two things here: first, Paul refers to Scripture as being **"breathed out by God."** Which means that **in Paul's mind, the bible that we hold in our hands is the very words of God**. Written by dozens of authors in their own formats and ways, but ultimately all spoken by God himself. And second, in light of that, Paul wants Timothy to ensure that he knows and loves and spends time in the bible, because he knows that it is "able to make one wise" and that their end result is to make us "complete, equipped for every good work." Here's what I gather from that: **if you want to make wise decisions, you need to be familiar with the bible**. And by that, I don't mean "have bibles lying around your house that you get out and dust off when you need an answer." Paul talks here about being *acquainted* with the Scriptures. Meaning you're around them often enough to be familiar with them.

Jesus, in one story, **when talking to a group of religious leaders** in the gospels, utters this line: “*You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures.*” Point blank, if you do not know the bible, you will eventually be in error. In all facets of life, but that certainly includes our decision-making. **If you aren’t familiar with the bible, you aren’t gonna be familiar with God’s wisdom.** Which means you have very little to draw on when it comes to making major and minor decisions. God’s wisdom is so often found in the pages of this book. So as best you can, familiarize yourself with it. Now that takes time, it takes effort, it takes wading through the difficulty and sometimes the confusion of reading it. But it’s worth it. **I wonder the difference it would make if we started reading the Bible like making wise decisions in our life depended on it.**

You know, it’s funny: **in the story from Genesis 2, one of the reasons Eve eats from the tree is that she sees that the fruit was “to be desired to make one wise.” Ironically, Eve shirks off true wisdom to grasp at the potential of wisdom.** In a similar way, it’s amazing to me how often people spend hours praying over some decision they have to make, wanting God to just give them a sign or a nudge about what they should decide, and do **all the while ignoring** the book in front of them that is filled with wisdom about the thing they’re praying about. If we want to know how to make decisions, we have to be familiar with, and learn to *lean on* God’s words. But that’s not all. We should also rely on, #2...

## 2. God’s voice.

Take a look with me at **James 1:5**:

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

What an **incredibly simple promise** that is. Lack wisdom? You should ask for it. Wondering what you should do about your career? Have you asked God? Wondering if or who you should marry? How often have you talked to God about it? Wondering if you’re ready to have kids or not? Have you asked God that question? **It amazes me how often I’ll find that I made a decision, especially major ones, without spending even a moment in prayer about it.** If I do pray, often it’s simply because I’ve exhausted all my other options and still feel clueless about what to do.

What if we **prayed first?** What if whenever a decision needed to be made, we just asked “God, what do you think I should do here?” But not only that. Sometimes I think we get so hyper-focused on the solution to a problem that we miss other stuff God might be trying to do in the midst of it. What if we even asked questions like “God, what do you want to teach me here?” “What do you want me to learn about myself and others through making this decision?” “What am I missing, what am I blind to, that you want to open my eyes to?”

What if we did all that, and then—catch this—**just listened for an answer?** I think **I often forget that sometimes prayer includes listening, not just rattling off requests to God.** **There’s this great interview that Dan Rather did with Mother Teresa back in the day.** In it, he asked her, “What do you say to God when you pray?” To which she responds, “I don’t say anything, I listen.” A little bit confused, he then asks “okay, well what does God say to you when you pray?” To which she says “He doesn’t say anything, he listens.” (Dan rather gets more uncomfortable, and then she says...) “And if you can’t

understand that, I can't explain it to you." That hurts my brain to think about. And obviously she's exaggerating to make a point. But the point she's making is this: **for all the questions and requests you make of God, don't forget to stop talking long enough, and get your iPhone far enough away from you for long enough, to hear what he says back in response.** I wonder if sometimes we spend so much time reading off our laundry lists of prayer requests to God that we forget that he is a speaking God, and has things he wants to say to us in response. Make sure you don't just talk to God, but also listen to God too. **God wants to speak to you about your decision-making. He wants to help you make decisions that are best in the long-run for you and are best in the long-run for the kingdom.** You don't have to doubt that. So slow down long enough, and ask him frequently enough, to hear what he has to say.

Now, I do think **it's worth saying here that God is never going to say something to you via prayer that contradicts what is in the bible.** God isn't bipolar—he's not going to contradict himself. He may say things to you via prayer that *aren't explicitly in Scripture*—that's very possible. But if you feel like you hear God telling you something that is at odds with what he says in Scripture, that's not God. **I'll give you a quick example. Back in the day at another church I pastored, we had a guy who told us that he had prayed about it, and he felt like God was telling him to leave his wife and three kids so he could marry his intern at work, whom he was already sleeping with. And he tried to pull a "there's nothing you can do about it—the Holy Spirit told me to."** And as his pastors we were just like, "no dude. Just, no. You might actually be talking to a real spirit, but it's the wrong one." You need to pick a different Spirit to listen to. So here's the point with that: **if you're ever in a place where you have to decide between what you think is the Holy Spirit, or listening to what the Scriptures say because they're at odds with each other—you go with the Scriptures.**

Now, sometimes God's voice is going to come directly from him via prayer, and sometimes it's going to come via a different avenue, like #3 which is...

### 3. God's people.

I think often in our hyper-individualistic, often self-consumed culture, this is the part of our decision-making **we tend to leave out:** *other people.* **Do not neglect the invaluable resource of other people who love God, love you, and might have wisdom that you don't have.**

**Proverbs is all about this** idea of seeking out wisdom from other people:

- *Prov. 11:14: Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.*
- *Prov. 19:20: Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.*
- *Prov. 10:17: Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.*
- *Prov. 24:6: For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.*
- *Prov. 12:15: The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.*

Are you getting the gist here? **Proverbs thinks it is a fantastic,** dare I say *necessary* idea to listen to the advice of others. And not just listen to it when you happen to hear it, but to *seek it out.* And not just a little bit of it, but a lot of it. Several of those verses use the word "abundance" to refer to how much advice and



counsel you should get when making decisions or making plans. **Other people are some of the most tangible resources you have when it comes to making decisions.** Don't make decisions, especially major ones, without laying things before them. Say "here's the decision I'm trying to make, here are the options, and here's what I'm thinking." And then ask them what they honestly think. **Give them the freedom to speak exactly what they think you need to hear without mincing words.**

Now, **when it comes to who** to ask for advice, here's what I'd recommend: *stick mainly to people who know and love Jesus and who know and love you.* If you mainly ask people who don't know and love Jesus, the advice they're going to give you is going to come from a very different perspective and worldview than if it had. And if you mainly ask people who don't know you, they're not going to be very helpful in helping you sort through how your motives and tendencies are influencing your thinking. **What you need is people who love Jesus enough to help you make decisions that honor him, and people who love and know you enough to tell you even things you might not want to hear.**

Now, a **couple practicals** as you do this. **First**, don't do the thing where you ask people for their advice, and then **proceed to ignore** any of it that doesn't align with what you already wanted to do. **Sometimes we only ask for advice from people who we know will tell us what we want to hear.** And that's not really advice, that's affirmation. Sometimes affirmation can be a good thing to seek out too—just don't make the mistake of thinking that it's the same thing as advice. And **second**, if someone gives you *advice* that conflicts with what you were thinking, don't just internally think "**well they just don't understand** the situation, or they wouldn't tell me to do that." If they don't understand the situation, then *help them better understand the situation*, and then see if that changes what they tell you to do. If that still doesn't change what they tell you to do, then it might be that *you're* the one who doesn't understand the situation. **Seeking out counsel in decision-making means leaning on, trusting in the counsel you get.**

So we should rely on God's words, God's voice, God's people, and #4, which is...

#### **4. God's faithfulness.**

Lastly, **there will come times** where you've done all of the above the best way you know how, and **still aren't any clearer as to the decision you should make.** What makes it harder is that some of us suffer from what's often called *analysis paralysis*, where we are so overwhelmed by the options in front of us and spend so much time picking each option apart, that we psych ourselves out of being able to make any decision at all.

So let me tell you something that I hope will set you free from some of that: **some things are not moral decisions.** Yes, there are certain situations where there is obviously a correct choice and an incorrect choice. Or a wise choice and a foolish choice. A good thing and a bad thing. And all of the things we've talked about today are meant to help you discern the difference between those two things. *But* sometimes you're not deciding between a good thing and a bad thing. Sometimes you're deciding between multiple good things. Let me give you a phrase to commit to memory: **God is faithful. Pick something.** Just pick something.

For example, let's say you're trying to decide if you want to pursue a career as **a doctor or a lawyer.** You think you could really like either of those career choices, you feel like both of them would enable you to serve other people through your career. And you're just absolutely torn as to which one to choose. And

let's say you've already thought through any ways that the bible might speak to this decision, you've spent time praying through the decision, both asking God for help and listening to what he might say in response, and you've sought out the advice and counsel from people who love Jesus and love you, and let's say after all of that you're still like "yeah I don't feel like any of that pushed me in one direction or the other." Here's what I think you should do: pick something. Just pick one and see how it goes. And trust as you do it that God is faithful to work through either decision, and that even if you realize later that you should've made the other decision, he will give you the wisdom and the people you need around you to know that. Trust that he is big enough and faithful enough to get you through it and teach you through it even if it was the wrong decision. *God is faithful. Pick something.*

Now, before we close, **let's circle back around** and talk about the one thing that all of this boils down to. **At the end of the day, how you make decisions is a question, just like the one Adam and Eve faced, of whether you will rely your own wisdom, or rely on God's.** That's what every decision is ultimately about. In your mind, who is all-knowing and who isn't? If you think of yourself as all-knowing, you will rely mostly on your own thinking and feeling and instinct for your decisions, big and small. and these four things will be largely absent from your life. If you think of yourself as the one who is all-knowing, there will be no reason to search the Scriptures, no reason to listen for God's voice, no reason to seek out counsel from others, and no motivation to rest in God's faithfulness through it all.

And **behind that mindset of trusting in your own wisdom** is what something that plagues every single one of us, Adam & Eve included: *a desire for autonomy from God. It's not just that we don't rely on God's wisdom, it's not just that we forget to or neglect to—it's that deep down we don't want to.* We'd rather think of ourselves as sufficient, ourselves as all-knowing. We'd rather think of ourselves as not needing help from God or from others. **That's been the case from the beginning—it's the very lie that the serpent sold Eve on.** So when we're given the option to rely on ourselves or seek out God's wisdom, left to our own devices, we will almost always choose to rely on ourselves.

**But Jesus** in his life on earth models something altogether different than that. Jesus also once faced a decision in a garden, much the same as Adam and Eve's. **His decision in the garden of Gethsemane, the night before his death, was to trust in God's wisdom, God's timing, God's plan—or to go his own way and trust in his own.** He even says as much in his prayer to God the Father in the garden:

*saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup [meaning "the suffering I'm about to experience"] from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."*

"Not my will, but yours." **Jesus, even though he is God, in this moment is faced with the choice of going his own way or submitting to the plan of the Father. And he chooses to trust fully in the plans, the wisdom of his Father. Jesus decided to do what Adam & Eve failed to do. He relied fully on the Father's wisdom.**

And **because he did, he made it possible for us to do the same.** Ephesians says that through Jesus we've "been given access to the Father." Through what Jesus did after making that decision in the Garden, we now have access to not just the Father's wisdom, but to the Father himself. Without what Jesus accomplished on the cross, none of us would be able to have God's wisdom, even if we wanted it. But because of the cross, **Jesus gives us access to the Father's wisdom, as well as the desire to seek it out. If you're a follower of Jesus, you've been given the insight to know, deep down, that**

**you need wisdom from outside of yourself. And through Jesus, you've been given constant access to the one who has it.**

I remember a friend of mine talking one time about how growing up, there was this raggedy old couch in the family room at their house. All the other furniture would get replaced every few years, but that raggedy couch just got patched up. And he said usually, when their family was all in the family room, they'd all sit on their own chairs and seats, doing their own thing. But his dad would always sit on one side of that raggedy couch, all the way on one side of it. And he used to talk about how any time he or one of his sisters needed help, needed advice, needed encouragement—they would get up from their seat and go sit on that raggedy couch next to their dad. And no matter what, no matter how busy he was, no matter how wrapped up he was in a show he was watching, he would stop what he was doing, he would listen, and he would give them advice or encouragement. And as cheesy as it is, I remember thinking when he told me that: *that's what we have through Jesus. That's what we have in the bible, that's what we have in prayer, that's what we have in other followers of Jesus, that's what we have in God's faithfulness.* **All of those are avenues to God the Father, sitting on his side of the raggedy couch, just waiting for us to come sit next to him.** So he's ready to listen, he's ready to speak—the question is only *how soon will we go sit with him?*

Let's pray.