

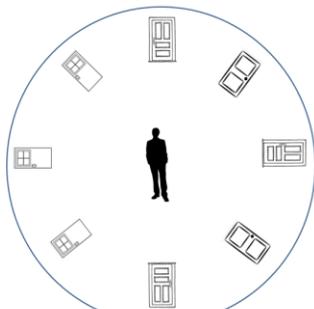
# PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL DECISION MAKING

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## Which door should I choose?



- Career?
- College?
- Marriage?
- Schooling?
- Buy?
- Adopt?
- Retire?
- Missions?
- Medicine?

- This presentation is a description of eight foundation principles that underlie biblical decision-making.
- This presentation is a look at eight common incorrect assumptions people have when making decisions.

**Purpose**

- This presentation is not an effort to tell individuals they don't know how to make biblical decisions.
- This presentation is not an oversimplified attempt to provide a "one-size-fits-all" or "formula" approach to knowing God's will.
- This presentation is not a comprehensive look at this topic.

**Not our Purpose**

- God can work any way He chooses.
- God can use signs, opened and closed doors, and work in supernatural ways.
- God can work within individuals to use their logic, circumstances, experience, and wisdom.
- God is not obligated to work in the same way twice.

**Our Assumptions**

### Principle 1: Have an accurate concept of God.

Present or Distant?  
Active or Silent?  
Caring or Ambivalent?

*plans & purposes*

*"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."*

*plans & purposes*      **Jer. 29:11**

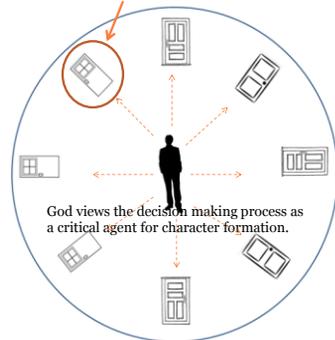
## God created us with the capacity to decide.

- We are created in His image.
- Our freedom gives rise to responsibility.



## Incorrect Assumption

We tend to view the decision as all important.



## Principle 2: God's Word is Foundational.



*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3:16, 17*

The Bible is God's Word to you. **Good for...**

1. Teaching
2. Conviction
3. Reconciliation
4. Righteousness

**So that...** You can be complete

## Freedom and Responsibility

The Bible defines God's Moral Will.



Take responsibility for determining if the decision is within God's Moral Will



Employ freedom in wise decision making within His Moral Will

## Incorrect Assumption

There is only ONE right person, ONE right job, ONE right house, One right school. It is my job as the decision maker to locate the ONE and thus solve the riddle.



## Sometimes all choices are not equal.

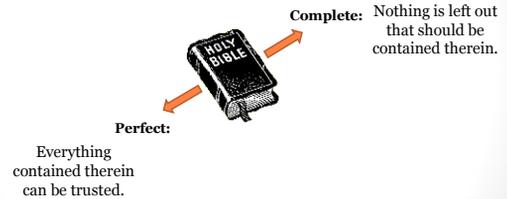
Outside God's Moral Will (Area 1)



## Opposition to God's Will

- Living outside God's moral will.
- Apathy toward the Word and its authority.
- Being controlled by fear.
- Power & Control
- Pride
- Lack of willingness to delay gratification.
- Unbiblical priorities
- People pleasing
- Selfishness
- Materialism

## Perfect and Complete



## Interpreting Scripture Skill #1 Clear vs. Cloudy

- Interpret all “cloudy” scripture in light of “clear” scripture.
- Act fully without reservation on “clear” scripture.
- Use caution on “cloudy” scripture.
- God has left enough undefined in scripture for us to seek Him.

## Interpreting Scripture Skill #2 Context

- Biblical decisions are supported by scripture that is interpreted in context.
- When context is ignored, two errors can be made:
  1. Scripture doesn't apply or support the decision.
  2. Scripture is so ambiguous it must be “stretched” in order to make it fit.

## Interpreting Scripture Skill #3 Proverbs vs. Promises

**Examples of 'proverbs'** (generally and usually true, although exceptions do occur):

- **Proverbs 22:6** “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
- **Proverbs 16:7** “When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

**Examples of Promises** (promised truths):

- **John 14:2-3** “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

## Interpreting Scripture Skill #4 Description or Prescription?

- **Description Examples:** Examples or teachings that occurred in Scripture, but were not intended to serve as a truth or teaching for all people in all situations.
  - Paul went into the desert for approximately 3 years after his conversion (*Galatians 1:15-18*). That doesn't mean after conversion all believers should go on a 3 year trip to the desert.
- **Prescription Statements:** Biblical teachings or examples God intended to be normative (“the norm”) for all people.
  - Thou shalt not lie, steal, commit adultery, have other God's, etc.
  - Believe in Jesus Christ to be saved; love one another, etc.

### Principle 3: Pray for Direction

*"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James 1:5*

In whom (Christ) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col 2:3

### Prayer moves Him... and us.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Matt. 7:7-8

God Responds to Prayer

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" Hab. 1:2

We Respond in Prayer

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Hab. 3:18

### Incorrect Assumption

- If I just had more faith, God would answer according to my desires.



We go to prayer in search for answers.

Then God changes our questions.

Consider

### Principle 4: Trust and have a surrendered heart.

*"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is..." Jer. 17:7*

Confidence, Relies on, Security in

*"not my will, but thine, be done." Luke 22:42*

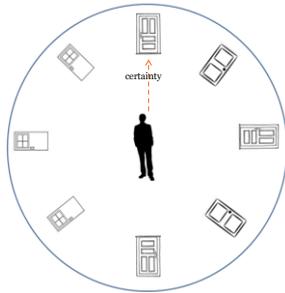
Surrender

Faith is trusting God through the uncertainty.

Walk by faith not by sight.

**Incorrect Assumption**

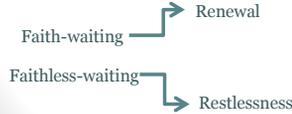
I should have certainty of the door before I go through it.



**Principle 5: Wait on God**

→ Look for, expect, hope  
*“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*  
**Is. 40:31**

→ Change their strength for the better



**Incorrect Assumption**

Waiting is doing nothing.

*“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him...” Ps. 37:7*

→ spin

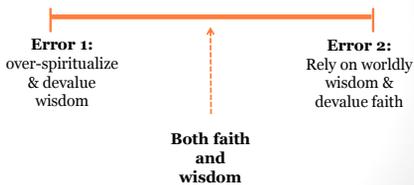
**Principle 6: Seek Wise Counsel**

*“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.”* **Prov. 19:20-21**

*Chākhām (Heb 2450): An intelligent attitude toward the experiences of life. This includes matters of general interest, basic morality, prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and spiritual experience. Lexical Aids*

**Incorrect Assumption**

In decision making, we either use faith or wisdom.



**Godly Wisdom vs. Worldly Wisdom**

**Godly Wisdom**

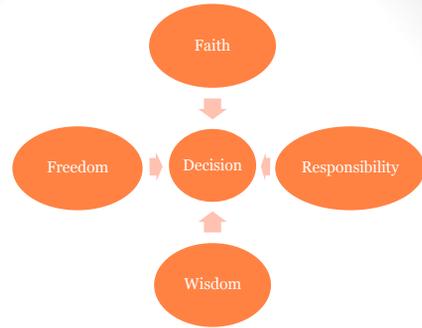
- Believers possess the Holy Spirit which makes having the mind of Christ a growing reality. A Christ-like use of knowledge is godly wisdom.

**Worldly Wisdom**

- Worldly Wisdom appeals to our human nature. A naturalistic use of knowledge is worldly wisdom.

## What should I look for in a counselor?

- Genuinely concerned for you and either knows or is willing to learn about your background.
- Known to be biblically sound, spiritually mature and aware of their own blind spots.
- Skilled at listening and asking good questions.
- Somewhat experienced, knowledgeable, or trained in the area for which you are seeking guidance.
- Exercises confidentiality and uses discretion.
- Exemplifies humility and gentleness, yet loves you enough to tell you the truth or where you may be interpreting situations in error.
- Provides an honest opinion and is direct when necessary.
- Able to be objective in the situation.



## Principle 7: Walk with God

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27*

*Akoloutheō*: (Gr 190) The first thing involved in following Jesus is a cleaving to Him in believing trust and obedience, those cleaving to Him, also following His leading, acting according to His example.  
*Lexical Aids*



## Incorrect Assumption

Determining God’s Will should be difficult.

Decisions are most “natural” when they come out of a walk with Christ.

Consider

## Two types of decisions

### Calculated

- Marriage: Jill or Jane?
- Job: State Farm or Caterpillar?
- Schooling: ISU or U of I?
- Investment: Public or Private?
- Adoption: Yes or No?

### Uncalculated

- Anger: Yell or Soft answer?
- Hurt: love or hate?
- Temptation: Sin or Resistance?
- Need: Aid or ignore?
- Blessing: Give thanks or no?

Walking with God

We learn decision making from the Master.

We begin to have the mind of the Master

## Our Regenerated Will

- We grow in the likeness of Christ as we walk with Him.
- *“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Cor. 3:17,18*

*To be steered... the bus needs to be moving.*



Move

## Principle 8: Acknowledge God's Sovereignty

*“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Rom 8:28*

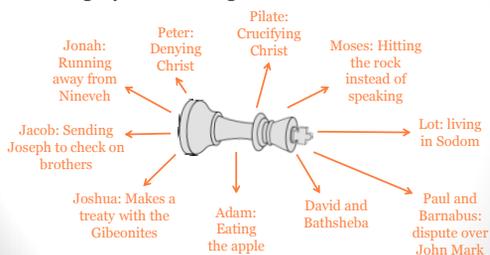
Profitable, useful

Incorrect Assumption

If I make the wrong choice I will be on God's "B" plan.

## Bad move...

A meta-theme of Scripture is God, in His sovereignty, redeeming broken and bad decisions.



## Conclusion

### Principles

1. Have an accurate concept of God.
2. God's Word as the foundation.
3. Pray for direction.
4. Trusting and having a surrendered heart.
5. Wait on God's timing.
6. Seek wise counsel
7. Walk with God
8. Acknowledge God's sovereignty.

BELIEVE  
READ  
PRAY  
TRUST  
WAIT  
SEEK  
WALK  
REST

## Appendix

## Identify Your Assumptions

### Common Cognitive Biases

### Common Assumptions

- **Present Bias:**
  - Tendency to pay attention to what is happening now and to lack adequate attention to the future.
  - Long term consequences of actions are minimized or ignored due to the desire to meet present day needs.
    - One study found that when making choices of food for the following week, 74% of participants chose fruit. But when choosing for today, 70% chose chocolate.

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/decisionmaking.html>; study by Read and van Leeuwen

### Common Assumptions

- **Confirmation Bias:**
  - The tendency to selectively look for information that confirms what we already want or believe.
  - The tendency to discount or forget information that contradicts what we want or believe.
  - This bias tends to be strongest for emotional issues and deep beliefs.
  - Help people be honest about desire and find balance.
  - We don't want them to believe all desires are bad. For example, it isn't wrong for a young adult to desire to be married. However, desire that isn't balanced by other factors, can cloud their ability to discern.

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/decisionmaking.html>;

### Common Assumptions

- **Negativity Bias:**
  - Tendency to remember negative events better than positive events.
  - Compliments and Criticisms x 3
- **Familiarity Bias:**
  - Tendency to stick with what is familiar when faced with ambiguity or uncertainty.
  - Tendency to choose a "known" over an "unknown;" especially if the "unknown" is perceived to have some possibility of risk.

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/decisionmaking.html>

### Common Assumptions

- **Over-emphasis/Under-emphasis Bias:**
  - Occurs when individuals are repeatedly reminded of one point (over-emphasis) while not being reminded of a corresponding concept (under-emphasis) which leads to imbalanced focus.
  - This can make people fearful that doing something (that they desire, would enjoy, prefer, etc.) must be inappropriate or sinful when it is not.

## Common Cognitive Biases

- **Loss Aversion:**
  - Tendency to fear the pain of a potential loss much more than a potential positive impact and thus to choose the option with the least potential for discomfort.
- **Illusory Correlation:**
  - This is the primary cause of misinterpreting signs.
  - Tendency to see two things that occur close together as being meaningfully related when either (1) no relationship exists OR (2) when a minor relationship exists and the person perceives it to be more significant than it is.

<http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/decisionmaking.htm>; <http://psychology.about.com/od/index/g/illusory-correlation.htm>

## Satisficing vs. Maximizing

- These decision-making styles occur on a continuum.
- In some ways, these biases are like personality traits; they appear to have a genetic component.
- **Satisficing** – the person looks for options until finding one that meets baseline criteria, then stops searching.
  - **Pro:** Make their choices more easily; tend to be more satisfied with their decisions and not regret their choices later (i.e., they accept what comes and go on).
  - **Con:** Can overlook good options they would have found if they searched longer.

Simon (1956); Schwartz et al. (2002)

## Satisficing vs. Maximizing Styles

- **Maximizing** – the person tries to consider all possible options in order to choose the very best option.
  - **Pro:** thoroughly search through the options with careful analysis.
  - **Con:** Can get stuck in “analysis paralysis” and may get stuck in the decision making process. Tend to have more angst about their choices due to their tendency to endlessly compare options and wonder how the other options would have worked out.

Simon (1956); Schwartz et al. (2002)

## Common Assumptions

- **Faith-Feelings Confusion**
  - This occurs when individuals confuse what they believe to be true with what they feel to be true.
  - A common, but unbiblical formula:
    - Faith = certainty
    - Leads people to grope for emotional certainty.
  - A more challenging, but biblical approach:
    - Faith = trusting God through the uncertainty.
    - Leads to trust, surrender, clinging to biblical promises.

## Uncertainty & Feeling Lack of Control

- Research shows people tend to search for patterns and meaning, especially during times of uncertainty.
- Individuals are more likely to see patterns among random events and/or objects when the individuals are feeling uncertainty and lack of control.
- By nature, human beings tend to seek the path of least anxiety. Seeing patterns and meaning lowers anxiety.
  - How might this tendency affect a brother or sister who is seeking direction for a major life decision?

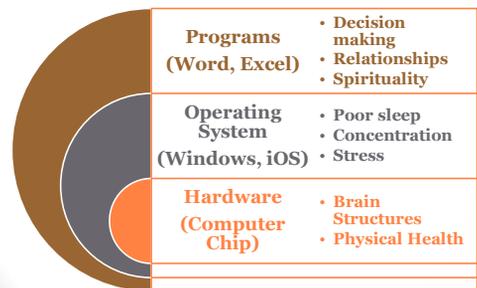
Whitson and Galinsky, 2008, Science, Vol. 322, No. 5898

## Factors That Affect Decision Making

## What Interferes with Good Decision Making?

- Lack of sleep
- Too much distraction
- Information overload
- Lack of time to think
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Grief
- Time pressure (negative for some, a benefit to others)
- Severe stress – can lead to paralysis in decision making

## Levels of Brain & Mental Functioning



## Personality and Decision Making

- Personality can greatly affect decision making.
  - **Social vs. Internal:** Social individuals often want to talk through decisions with others, while internal processors tend to want to think things through alone.
  - **Big Picture vs. Here and Now:** Big picture thinkers tend to think about the long term implications and possibilities of decisions while others tend to think about what is in the here and now.
  - **Thinkers vs. Feelers:** Thinkers approach decisions in a logical/analytical manner while feelers are more emotion/person-focused.

## Responsibility: Mine? Yours?

- People vary in how comfortable they are in making large decisions.
- **“Responsibility Averse”**
  - Would rather not make decisions alone due to anxiety about making wrong decisions or fear of the outcome.
  - **Pro:** will readily seek counsel.
  - **Con:** may avoid or delay making decisions in order to avoid the associated anxiety; often would rather someone else take responsibility for making the decision (i.e., tell me the right answer).

## Responsibility: Mine? Yours? Cont'd

- **“Responsibility Inclined”**
  - Tend to view decisions as their personal responsibility whether it is or not.
  - **Pro:** Willing to step up to the decision and takes it seriously.
  - **Con:** May take on responsibility others should take themselves; may feel the weight of the world on their shoulders... even when they can't control the outcomes.

## Specific Issues

A brief discussion of a few common, sticky decision-making issues.

## “God Told Me.”

- What are we talking about?
  - Hearing the audible voice of God? Seeing a vision? Specific Scriptures? How the Bible fell open? Promptings or impressions?
- Receiving promptings and impressions from God is a spiritually intimate experience.
  - We have all certainly experienced God’s movement in our lives through promptings and impressions. God interacts with us!!
- Because promptings and impressions are subjective, they must be validated.
  - You can’t experience mine and I can’t experience yours.
  - The experience is **real**, but may not be **true**.
  - The bigger the decision, the more important validation becomes.

## Consider:

How Can I Tell if Impressions are from God?

“This is a critical question. For impressions could be produced by any number of sources: God, Satan, an angel, a demon, human emotions (such as fear or ecstasy), hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, or an upset stomach.”

Friese & Maxson (2004) Decision Making and the Will of God, p. 93.

## “God Told Me.” Cont’d

- **The Ideal:** When working with others, the hope is they will view promptings as one part of their biblical decision making process to be tested and taken together with prayer, counsel, Godly wisdom, etc.
- Aspects of a good attitude:
  - Humility and openness to consider other points of view.
  - Submission to authority.
  - Willingness to allow the meaning of the prompting to be examined and, possibly, to be viewed as not-significant.

## “God Told Me.” Cont’d

- **Trouble ahead:** People who are adamant God has spoken to them in isolation.
  - They believe they have the ability to know “for certain.”
  - They often hold the corresponding belief that other people don’t have the same ability to know for certain.
  - They view those that don’t agree with them as “not listening to God” instead of “not listening to my impression.”

## How Can I Tell Impressions are from God?

“Impressions are real; believers experience them. But impressions are *not authoritative*. They do not constitute the authoritative voice of the Spirit. They may be useful in pointing the way to wisdom, but on the issue of their authority, impressions are just impressions. They may be ‘spiritual’ or reflect the influence of the Spirit, but they fall short of direct revelation and thus fall short of authoritative guidance. Impressions by any other name confuse the issue and confound the believer in decision making. Impressions are still just impressions.”

Friese & Maxson (2004) Decision Making and the Will of God, p. 93.

## Open & Closed Doors – Easy & Hard

- Determining God’s direction through circumstances can be both helpful and tricky.
- Individual’s interpret these situations very differently—from practical to mystical.
- Some underlying assumptions people carry:
  - If something goes easily, then it must be from God.
  - If something is difficult, then it must not be from God.
  - If it is not hard, then it must not be true.
  - If it is easy, it must not be from God.

## Open & Closed Doors: Easy & Hard Cont'd

- We need to help people validate what they perceive to be open or closed doors.
- We must help people understand their assumptions about open/closed and easy/hard as a basis for making decisions.
  - Sometimes what God wants will only be attained through hard work, battle, and trials.
  - Other times, what is easy allows people to feel good, but to be short-sighted.
  - Other times, God opens the doors and things go smoothly.
  - Other times, difficulty means stop.

## Ordinary Decisions and Equal Options

- Significant time wasted and distress occurs in the lives of Christians searching for specific direction about items over which God has given us freedom to choose.
- This comes from the belief every decision has only one right option.
- Ordinary Decisions:
  - Which sandwich should I pick? Turkey or Roast beef?
  - Should I wash the laundry on Monday or Tuesday?
- Equal Options:
  - Choosing between two minivans, both with similar mileage and options, both within your budget.

## What About Good Decisions That Turn Out Bad?

- **Example:** I made a good decision to buy a used minivan based on cost/budget, features, needs, reliability information, etc..... And then the engine needed to be replaced in 7 months, just after the warranty expired.
- We often cannot know 'Why?' in the present.
- Some possible reasons:
  - It might have been a bad decision after all.
  - Someone else may have refused obedience.
  - God may desire for us to learn obedience and trust or He may know we need a certain type of growth.
  - God sometimes keeps us in the ambiguous in order to sustain our faith.

## Signs

- Many people go to extremes about signs -all or nothing.
- Consider the following points:
  1. God can, has, and does use signs.
  2. Seeking signs is never commanded nor regarded as normative in the Bible.
  3. Our object of faith must be God rather than a sign.
- Inappropriate use of signs,
  - Demanding signs or telling God how He will respond to us, and more so, on what timetable He is to tell us is presumptuous.
  - Question to ask people: "Did God agree to that?"

## God Can... So, does He Always?

- God can-
  - Heal people.
  - Use a miraculous sign to bring two people together in marriage.
  - Bring a job offer to someone without them even seeking a job.
- Just because God is able, doesn't mean He will choose to.
- The fact something worked one time for someone doesn't mean it will work a second time or for a different person.