

## ***Making Important Personal Decisions***

Let's consider the case study of Jeremy Mullins who grew up in the family-owned manufacturing business. He worked there as a teenager. When he went away to college, he worked in the factory during summer vacations. After college he became a permanent employee. It's the only job he ever had. When his father died of a heart attack, he inherited the company.

Some of the employees have worked for the company all their lives. They have been loyal through recessions, salary reductions and job offers to go elsewhere. And Jeremy has tried to reward them with job security and good pay.

It's a family business in more ways than one. Jeremy's father and grandfather before him owned the company. But it feels like a family, too. Most of the hundred or so employees and their relatives have known each other almost all of their lives. Some of their parents and grandparents worked there before them.

Now Jeremy Mullins faces one of the most important decisions of his life. In the same week, two opportunities have come his way. The first is from a company in Florida that wants to hire him for a high salary and significant stock options. He could earn a great living without all the headaches of being the top boss. His financial future would be secure.

The second offer came from a multi-national company that wants to buy his business and close it down. They really want his company's name, reputation and patents, but they don't want the current employees and management.

Selling, taking the new job and moving makes good economic sense. Besides, none of his own children want to enter the business, and he would eventually have to sell the company anyway. If he waits until retirement age the company may not be worth much because of

competition, or it may be worth more and could be sold to the employees. It could go either way. If he sells now he will make a fortune but force all the employees to look for new jobs.

Jeremy is a Christian. He's committed to doing what God wants. So what should he do? There are risks either way. There will be criticisms either way. If he sells and moves, some will say he is greedy and selfish. If he stays and keeps the company going, some will say he missed the opportunity of a lifetime and tried to make next year into 1952.

We all face important personal decisions that can be difficult to make. Our decisions may be in the area of business, health, housing, finance, career, politics, family, neighborhood, church, school, dating, marriage, friendships or any of the other relationships of life.

Some people may be hurt and angry or disagree no matter what decision we make. We can see both sides of the issue and are frightened we will make a mistake that will haunt us for years to come. We want God to tell us exactly what to do, but he doesn't give us the handwritten letter from heaven that we would like to have. Time is limited. Doing nothing is a decision of its own and may be the worst possible decision.

How should a Christian go about making important personal decisions? Honestly, it's not an exact science. We usually have to choose without knowing all the facts. We won't always get it right. But we do have significant help from God that teaches us how to decide.

First on the list is to always start with God. Tell God that you want to do his will no matter what. Commit to do what is right, even if that is very hard to do. Let there be no doubt in your mind or in God's mind that his will and his way are top priority.

Just the opposite is to start out with your

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mind made up and then tell God to help get what you want. Lots of people do that and are disappointed or angry with God for not giving them their way.

As Christians we have committed to be followers of Jesus Christ. We seek to be like the New Testament Christians who willingly called themselves “slaves of Jesus Christ” and resolved that they would do his will even if it meant suffering and death. We take seriously the counsel of Proverbs 3:5-6 where it says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Tell God, “I trust you. I believe in you. I’m depending on you and your help, not upon myself.”

Next, get the facts. We need good information in order to make good decisions. We need to avoid jumping to conclusions. We need to avoid making decisions based on ignorance or false information.

Proverbs 15:14 says, “The discerning heart seeks knowledge.” Knowledge is necessary for wisdom. We must know the facts in order to make a good decision. Bad information often leads to bad decisions. Usually we cannot get all of the information we would like. That’s one of the reasons we need God’s help. Often we need to decide before all the information is in.

Third on our list is to research the Bible. Most of what we can know about the will of God is already revealed in the Bible. A powerful teaching in II Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

God has already put into the Bible everything we need to know in order to be equipped to do what we need to do. The Bible is our source book and the reference book for what God wants us to know and what God wants us to do.

Another section of the New Testament, II

Peter 1:2-4, helps to explain the same concept:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires.

God has already given us in the Bible everything we need to live good and godly lives. We don’t have to search the world for God’s will; we have it. We need to search the Bible where God’s will is already recorded for us to learn.

The question is how do we find out what the Bible has to say? The obvious answer is to read the Bible. Every Christian should make a regular effort to read God’s word. If you read three or four chapters a day, you’ll read the entire Bible in a year. If that’s too much, then read a page or half a page each day.

Mark your Bible. Underline the concepts and truths and advice that specially stand out to you. Carry your Bible with you to church and write notes in the margins. Mark your Bible so that you can more easily find the information you need when you need it.

Learn how the Bible works. Buy or borrow a study Bible with indexes and marginal notes so that you can easily look up what God says about marriage, borrowing money, raising children, getting along with neighbors or how to behave in stressful circumstances. Buy some Bible research software for your computer. Take a Bible and for an hour or so just learn by yourself how to find what you’re looking for. Like a lot of other things in life, a few minutes reading instructions can go a long way to getting the greatest benefit.

The bottom line is to research the Bible and know what it has to say about the decision you

need to make.

Number Four is to seek wise counsel. This can go hand-in-hand with Number Three because wise counselors often know what the Bible says and can help us discover God's will in the Bible. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Wisdom is found in those who take advice."

Let me tell you my own experience. I have found that there are good and godly Christians with enormous wisdom and vast experience. They know the Bible and they have deep insights. When I face challenging and difficult decisions, I go to those who are wise and ask for their advice. It doesn't mean they are always right. It doesn't mean that they can make my decisions for me. But, they are gifts from God toward knowing what to do. I can barely imagine making an important decision without first consulting with wise and godly Christians.

Just as it is important to study the Bible before we face a crisis, it is also important to know wise Christians before we face a crisis. Building relationships, becoming connected with other Christians in the church, knowing who to ask and who to trust is an important part of making wise decisions in life.

Here's a quiz. If you were to face a very important personal decision next week, who are three godly wise Christians you could call for counsel? Be sure that your list of three is not just good buddies who will tell you what you want to hear. Pick people who will tell you what God wants you to hear!

Number Five on the list is to pray for wisdom. Knowledge has to do with facts. Wisdom is how we use those facts. Wisdom is about being smart. But, we are looking for God's smarts, not human smarts. It is the application of God's truth and God's will to our specific situation.

There is an interesting example in Proverbs 26:4-5. At first reading it almost sounds silly and contradictory. Proverbs 26:4 says, "Do not

answer a fool according to his folly, or you'll be like him yourself. Proverbs 26:5 says, "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." The truth is that sometimes we need to keep quiet when a fool speaks; and sometimes we need to answer when a fool speaks. It depends on the particular fool and the particular situation. So how do we know what to do when? We need wisdom.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." This is one of the opportunities for Christians to have a supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit of God. We pray for wisdom and the Spirit gives to our heads and hearts the wisdom we need to apply God's will to our specific situation.

A word of caution is important here. If someone claims to have wisdom from God that contradicts the teaching of the Bible and the counsel of godly wise Christians, that person is probably wrong. All of the pieces should fit together in order to get the complete picture of God's will and God's wisdom. We should be highly suspicious of persons who claim they have a word from God that is not compatible with God's Word.

Number Six is to make a decision. To this point we have done everything we can do and asked God

to help us in every way he has promised. It is time to actually decide.

The question here may seem overly simple: What seems to be the right thing to do? You have committed this to God. You have gotten the available facts. You have researched the Bible. You have sought wise counsel. You have prayed for wisdom. Okay, what do you think you should do?

If "doing what seems right" sounds a little less spectacular than you expected, listen to what the Bible says in Acts 15:28. The early

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church leaders were trying to decide if Gentiles had to become Jews to become Christians. Acts 15:28 says, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements . . . .” How did they decide this very important issue? They did what seemed good to them.

Paul and Timothy had been traveling together as missionaries around the Roman Empire. Now they were trying to decide whether they should stay together or split up. According to I Thessalonians 3:1-2:

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith.

How did they make this decision? They thought it was the best way to handle the matter.

In the opening lines of the third book of the New Testament, the book of Luke, St. Luke has accumulated all this information about the biography of Jesus. He’s a physician and an historian, and he’s trying to figure out what to do with this information. Luke 1:3 says, “Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you.”

The reason we have the gospel of Luke is because it seemed like a good idea one day, but it was based upon this overall context.

Once you have decided what seems right, make a preliminary decision about what you are going to do. Don’t tell others yet. Tell God in your prayers that this is what you have decided. Ask God to show you if you are wrong. Ask God to confirm the decision if it is right. Live with the decision for a few days or weeks – as if you’re going to do it, but allowing for the possibility of reconsideration and change.

Then finalize your decision. Conclude that this is what you are going to do and proceed to do it. Rest in the confidence that you have done everything in your power to seek and do the

will and wisdom of God. Tell others what you have decided.

Then, implement the decision. Do it! There may be doubts and criticisms, but now is the time to act. And do it Christianly. Colossians 3:17 says, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Do what you have decided to do. Go for it. Trust God to stop you if it’s wrong and help you if it’s right. Depend on him.

Those of us who are Christians are to live by faith. That means that we trust God for what cannot be seen. It means that we follow the process and then depend on God to turn our decisions and actions into his great good. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

As Christians making important decisions we have a process and a presupposition. The process is to commit to God, get the facts, research the Bible, seek wise counsel, pray for wisdom, make a decision and implement that decision. But it’s all based upon this presupposition: God loves us; God wants the best for us; God is always on our side.

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Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
[www.wooddale.org](http://www.wooddale.org)  
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