

Discerning God's Will

Series Overview

What do we mean when we ask if we're following in God's will? Does a specific question or decision need to be attached (e.g. Who should I date? Where should I work?)? This six-week series is designed to re-orient our view of what it means to walk in God's will. The ultimate goal is for small group members to think rightly about God's will in a well-rounded manner in order to live out the Gospel through God-honoring decision making. For some, this will mean gaining freedom from paralyzing decisions. For others, this will be encouragement to take responsibility, make a decision, and follow-through.

Why This Series?

- Help each other in the journey of being followers of Christ who pursue godly living whole-heartedly
- Break down walls and misconceptions about discerning the will of God
- Begin a discussion
- Create a common language for discussions about God's will

Series Breakdown

Week 1: What Is "God's Will"?

This study is aimed at answering the question, "What is God's will?" and beginning a discussion. Three categories of "will" are introduced.

During weeks 2-4 your group will spend time "unpacking" unhelpful motivations for and methods of determining God's will in their lives. Encourage your group not to lose hope in this part of the process. As we learn and grow it's beneficial to address unhelpful ways of thinking and behaving before we discuss the positive aspects.

Week 2: Why Do We Search For God's Will?

In this study your group will discuss our motivations for determining God's will. Group members will be introduced to common unhealthy motivations for knowing God's will. They will also be asked to examine their own motivations.

Week 3: Typical Mindsets

In this study your group will discuss typical mindsets for seeking God's will. Group members will be introduced to common pitfalls of misapplied or unhealthy mindsets and asked to examine their own mindsets.

Week 4: Potentially Misleading Methods

In this study your group will discuss typical methods for discerning God's will. Group members will be introduced to commonly misapplied methods when seeking God's will and asked to examine their own methods.

Week 5: Wisdom

In this study your group will discuss the role of wisdom in discerning God's will. Where does wisdom come from? What is wisdom? Why do we need wisdom?

- A teaching video by Pastor Jon Neal is included this week: <https://youtu.be/KwAOWpANdkE>

Week 6: Decision-Making: Wisdom Applied

In this study your group will continue their discussion of the role of wisdom in discerning God's will. They're also going to get practical by discussing how they actually can obtain wisdom in their lives and think through helpful tools for decision-making.

Each study will include this progress bar to help your group members recall previous discussions as well as see where the discussion is leading over time.

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

FYIs

- Handouts are *essential* to this study.
- Hyperbole will be frequently used in this study. Guard against your group members getting caught in the details of intentionally exaggerated examples and scenarios. Help group members focus on the general principles these examples highlight.
- While we encourage you to read Kevin DeYoung's book (listed under **Additional Resources**) to provide greater context for yourself as a leader, this is by no means required for you or your group members. All quoted sections from that text include references in the study.
- The goal for each of these studies is to generate about 45 minutes of discussion (excluding Accountability Questions). Some groups may find that they are able to divide an individual study into two nights of discussion—that's OK! Feel free to flex these as needed to suit your unique group dynamic.
- Please read through the entire six-week series of studies prior to beginning to lead. This will help you defer questions to the appropriate week as needed and encourage those who just want to jump ahead to the practical application!

Additional Resources

- *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will*, Kevin DeYoung
- Andy Stanley Sermon: <http://store.northpoint.org/the-best-question-ever-part-one-the-best-question-ever.html>

Discerning God's Will

Week 1: What Is "God's Will"?

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

Learning Objectives

- Lay a strong foundation in defining "God's will."
- Ensure we're all on the same page moving forward.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- Think through your past experiences and understanding of "God's will."

Questions for Discussion

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: We're going to spend the next six small group study times focusing on how we discern God's will and make good, biblically-sound decisions. To get us started, tonight we're going to make sure we're all on the same page about what "God's will" even means.

? How would you define the word "will"?

Possible Answers: Volition—the power of choosing one's own actions. Wish. Desire. Purpose to be carried out.

? How have you heard the phrase "God's will" used amongst other Christians?

Possible Answers: To help me consider God's desires when I'm only considering my own desires. To get me to do stuff I may or may not want to do (to manipulate me).

? Optional: Why do you think God's will is such a hot topic (with so many books written about it)?

Possible Answers: It's important for our spiritual health that we first consider God as we move through life.

Read Out Loud: What often brings confusion to Christians is misunderstanding or mixing up different definitions of God's will. Christians commonly use three categories when talking about God's will. The first is God's eternal plan.

Leader's Note: The terminology for these next portions are loosely taken from Kevin DeYoung's Book, Just Do Something, pgs. 15-24.

Three Subdivisions of God's Will

1. God's Will: Eternal Plan— God Always Gets His Way

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 1:5-12 (NIV)

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Read Out Loud: Isaiah 46:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago;

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me.

¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning,

from ancient times, what is still to come.

I say, 'My purpose will stand,

and I will do all that I please.'



What do these verses seem to be describing about God's will?

Possible Answers: God works out everything according to His will. God really is in control of everything that is happening in the world and my life. God's eternal plan cannot be thwarted. He will accomplish the goal of bringing salvation to those He chooses through His Son, Jesus.



In what ways have you experienced this aspect of God's will (eternal plan) in your life?

Possible Answers: Salvation.

Leader's Note: This might be a great opportunity to briefly share faith stories (or portions of faith stories) in your group.

2. God's Will: Gospel-Living— God Shows Us How He Wants Us To Live

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-20 (NIV)

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ...

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Out Loud: 1 Thessalonians 5:11-18 (NIV)

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Read Out Loud: Hebrews 13:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



How are these passages describing Gospel-living?

Possible Answers: God shows us how to conduct ourselves in life. He shows us how to live... not exactly what to do. God shows us what ought to be in our lives.

? What things other than Scripture do we allow to inform our understanding of right and wrong?

Possible Answers: Other peoples' opinions. Culture. Past experiences.

? Why is it tempting for followers of Christ to turn Gospel-living into moralism or legalism?

Possible Answers: It can seem like the easier path (checklists of dos and don'ts). It can also be easy to believe that if we do or say the right things, we earn or deserve our salvation more.

? How can we fight against this slippery slope?

Possible Answers: Reminding ourselves of the truth that nothing needs to be (or can be) added to the truth of the Gospel. To recognize our own unworthiness.

Leader's Note: Ultimately, help the group come to the conclusion that the Bible (not culture, not our opinion, not what "feels" loving, not what is inclusive) gets the final say about right and wrong. Don't get caught here too long.

3. God's Will: Direction – Does God Have a Specific Plan For My Life?

Read Out Loud: We often ask questions such as: Where does God want me to go to college? Does God want me to take that job? Should I marry that person? Christians often think that because God is sovereign over everything and has desires for us that He shares in the Bible, then He naturally must have a path set out that He wants us to walk down. This leads us to ask: Can I miss God's will for my life? Can I make a wrong decision that will put me on the wrong path?

? What thoughts do these questions above bring to your mind when considering God's will?

Possible Answers: That somehow our will and God's will have to be different. It worries me that God doesn't have an exact "plan" for every step of my life. It frees me to think about how God might not be sitting in heaven shaking His head at every decision I make.

Read Out Loud: A great resource on this topic is a book called *Just Do Something* by Kevin DeYoung. We'll be reading quotes from this book throughout our time studying this topic. Here's our first one.

God is not a Magic 8-Ball we shake up and peer into whenever we have a decision to make. He is a good God who gives us brains, shows us the way of obedience, and invites us to take risks for Him.¹

Our Assertion:
God does have a specific plan for our lives, but it is not one that He expects us to figure out before we make a decision.

¹ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 24.

? Why is it tempting to focus on God's will of direction rather than God's eternal purpose or Gospel-living when we make decisions?

Possible Answers: It's what's immediately in front of us (rather than big-picture). It feels more tangible. It feels like the most important thing in that moment.

For Discussion and Accountability

? How are you resting in God's eternal plan, the fact that an all-knowing, all-powerful God has everything in control?

? How are you living by biblical commands through the Gospel?

Discerning God's Will

Week 2: What Is Our Motivation For Knowing God's Will?

	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

Learning Objective

- Think through our individual motives (and misconceptions) for pursuing God's will in our lives.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- Take time to discern your own reasoning behind pursuing God's will for your life.

A Quick Recap...

Pray for your time together as a group.

Three Subdivisions of God's Will:

1. God's Will: Eternal Plan
2. God's Will: Gospel-Living
3. God's Will: Direction

Our Assertion:

God does have a specific plan for our lives, but it is not one that He expects us to figure out before we make a decision.



Can anyone summarize the meaning of each of these three categories?

Possible Answers: Eternal Plan—God is sovereign and what He says will be happens. Salvation is His main focus. Gospel-Living—God shows us how to live, not necessarily what to do. Direction—God has a plan for our lives, but He's probably not going to show us what that is before we need to live it.

I Want To Know God's Will For My Life! Why?

Read Out Loud: For the next few weeks of this series we will spend time "unpacking" unhelpful motivations for and methods of determining God's will in our lives. As we do this, keep hope alive! After we break down these stereotypes and misconceptions, we will rebuild with healthy tools. This week we will discuss our motivation for determining God's will. We will be introduced to common unhealthy motivations for knowing God's will and examine our own motivations.

To start things off, let's brainstorm a list of reasons why followers of Christ want to know God's will for their lives.

Leader's Note: Take some time to brainstorm. You can encourage people to either do this individually or have it as a large-group activity. After you fill in the chart, discuss it as a group. Spend 10-15 minutes here or longer if you're having a good discussion!

Why Do Christians Want To Know?	What's Positive About This Reason?	What's Harmful About This Reason?

Optional Transition: Feel free to continue to add to this chart as we move through the rest of our study.

Read Out Loud: 1 Samuel 12:21 (NIV)

²¹ Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless.

Read Out Loud: Colossians 3:5 (NIV)

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

? What idols in our lives keep us from a right understanding of God's will? How do they do that?

Possible Answers: Success. Money. Career. Having perfect children, or house, or relationships. They shift our focus away from what's most important to God—worshiping Him alone. They don't reflect a Gospel-centered life.

Leader's Note: Facilitating Tip! When multiple questions are strung together, evaluate ahead of time if they should be read one at a time or all together. Often group members will answer the second question on their own without you reading it to them. If the conversation doesn't naturally move in that direction, then feel free to ask the follow up ☺.

? How can good things (e.g. relationships, work) become idols in our lives?

Possible Answers: When we hold them so tightly that we're not willing to view them with wisdom and through the lens of the Gospel. When we place them above worshiping God and allow them to fill those needs that God should fill (peace, security, etc.). When they consume us.

? How can knowing God's will for our lives also become an idol?

Possible Answers: We can become fixated on the direction we're moving in rather than the one who's leading us. We can look to a known future for security, happiness, and peace rather than God alone.

Read Out Loud: Luke 18:18-27 (NIV)

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him [Jesus], "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

? What do you think was the rich young man's motivation for asking Christ what he needed to do?

Possible Answers: He wanted to understand the "bare minimum" for securing his future. He wanted a checklist (much like the Pharisees) for what obedience looked like.

? In what ways can you relate to the rich man's motivation?

? What does Jesus really want from the young man?

Possible Answers: Whole-hearted devotion.

? How does understanding the Gospel impact our motivation for pursuing God's will?

Possible Answers: Pursuing God's will no longer becomes about taking the "safe" path or a way to make sure that we are right with Him (and will go to heaven).

For Discussion and Accountability

? In what ways do you need to rethink your motivation for pursuing God's will, and how can our small group come alongside you in that process?

Discerning God's Will

Week 3: Typical Mindsets

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

Learning Objective

- Think through which pitfalls are a part of our decision-making processes and need to change.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- We've included specific scenarios in this study that highlight certain pitfalls we may encounter in the decision-making process. If you have any stories from your own life, feel free to substitute them in.

A Quick Recap...

Pray for your time together as a group.

Three Subdivisions of God's Will:

1. God's Will: Eternal Plan
2. God's Will: Gospel-Living
3. God's Will: Direction

Our Assertion:

God does have a specific plan for our lives, but it is not one that He expects us to figure out before we make a decision.



Can anyone summarize the meaning of each of these three categories?

Possible Answers: Eternal Plan—God is sovereign and what He says will be happens. Salvation is His main focus. Gospel-Living—God shows us how to live, not necessarily what to do. Direction—God has a plan for our lives, but He's probably not going to show us what that is before we need to live it.

Read Out Loud: In this study we'll discuss typical mindsets for God's will. We'll be introduced to common pitfalls of misapplied or unhealthy mindsets when seeking God's will and asked to examine our own mindsets.

Pretend You're A Mentor

Leader's Note: Break into five groups to read through and comment on five mentoring scenarios. Remind your group that these examples may be "extreme." Help them to draw out the underlying principles of the examples. These scenarios will be discussed later in the study. Caution! Don't spend too much time here.

Scenarios

1. Carrie is overwhelmed by the decision about if she should date this guy or not. It has consumed her prayer life, her time with the Lord, and is always the conversation topic with her friends. Her friends are beginning to grow concerned with how it's taking over her life. She's interpreting God's silence as distance from Him, and as such is weary and feeling unloved by God.
2. Frank is trying to discern if he's supposed to take this new job that he's been offered. He was given three weeks to decide, and thought that would be a great amount of time to pray about it and seek God with the decision. He has to make the decision tomorrow, and is angry with God because he hasn't received any response. He says his friends constantly get words and impressions from God with decisions they make, so he feels abandoned, unloved, and uncared for by God.
3. Owen is trying to figure out some things about college. What college should he attend? What major should he declare when he gets there? Should he plan on trying to get an internship during his sophomore year or junior year? What if he finds out that he hates the college after a couple of years? Can he transfer? Would that set him behind? How would he pay for college if he decided to go to Grad School? These are the questions plaguing his mind.
4. You're friends with Susan and Matt. Matt has had feelings for Susan for a long time. Susan... well...not so much. To her they're just friends. Matt finally decided to approach Susan and ask her out. He told her he had prayed about the decision a lot, and really felt that God told him that they were supposed to be together. Susan, still not interested in Matt at all, is really confused about the situation.
5. Walter is really stressed out. His brother is having a hard time in school and has gotten into a bad crowd. He's not a believer, and so it makes conversations over the phone difficult. Walter is trying to figure out if he should move back home to be near him during this season. Last night he was so overwhelmed with all the factors out of his control that he came close to having a panic attack. The fear and worry seems to be paralyzing.

? What advice would you give the person/people in this situation?

Leader's Note: This question is for each group to discuss regarding their scenario.

Conventional Mindsets...

Optional Transition: With those scenarios in the back of your mind, let's think through some pitfalls of conventional mindsets about God's will.

1) Focuses On Non-Moral Decisions

Leader's Note: For this purpose, "non-moral" means things that Scripture does not directly address.

Read Out Loud: Micah 6:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.



According to this passage, where is our focus to be?

Possible Answers: On seeking and walking with God. We should reflect to the world the character and values that He has demonstrated for us.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 1



What advice would you give Carrie?

Possible Answers: Is it morally right or wrong? Would it be healthy Gospel-living to date this guy?

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung:

Once, while preaching on this topic, I said in a bold declarative statement, "God doesn't care where you go to school or where you live or what job you take." A thoughtful young woman talked to me afterward and was discouraged to hear that God didn't care about the most important decisions in her life. I explained to her that I probably wasn't very clear. God certainly cares about these decisions insofar as He cares for us and every detail of our lives. But in another sense, and this was the point I was trying to make, these are not the most important issues in God's book. The most important issues for God are moral purity, theological fidelity, compassion, joy, our witness, faithfulness, hospitality, love, worship, and faith. These are His big concerns. The problem is that we tend to focus most of our attention on everything else. We obsess over the things God has not mentioned and may never mention, while, by contrast, we spend little time on all the things God has already revealed to us in the Bible.²



How can having too heavy of a focus on non-moral decisions be dangerous?

Possible Answers: They can distract us from the deeper work God is doing in our lives and from worshipping Him fully. They can lead us to the false belief that we can fail God.

² DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleece, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 42.

2) Sneaky God

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

In the conventional view of God's will, however, we get the impression that He not only hides His will from us, but He then expects us to find it. So we obsess over God's will of direction, eventually getting frustrated with God for not showing us what He wants. We end up disappointed with ourselves or angry with God because we can't seem to figure out how to find God's will for our lives.³

Read Out Loud: Scenario 2

? What advice would you give Frank?

Possible Answers: Does this job make sense for the direction you want to go? Will this job necessitate compromising the Gospel?

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 3:17b-18 (NIV)

^{17b} And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

? How would this passage help comfort someone like Frank?

Possible Answers: God loves Frank more than He can imagine. That love means that Frank is not alone or forgotten by God. God cares about these details of his life.

? How can viewing God as sneaky with a secret agenda be dangerous?

Possible Answers: Skews His true character and paints Him as untrustworthy and not valuing our best interests.

3) Causes An Unhealthy Preoccupation With The Future

Read Out Loud: James 4:13-15 (NIV)

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

³ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 44.

? How do these verses instruct us to view the future?

Possible Answers: It should not be our main focus. We should concentrate on daily following after Christ and living out the Gospel.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 3

? Given the passage above, what advice would you give Owen?

Possible Answers: While making a good decision about which college to attend is important, his greater priority should be how God is calling him to live and serve Him right now. Fixating on the “ripple effect” of decisions will just continue to bring him unrest.

? How can a preoccupation with the future be a dangerous pitfall?

Possible Answers: It distracts us from our present purpose of faithfully walking with and worshiping God and sharing the Gospel with others.

4) Undermines Personal Responsibility

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

...if we say “God told me to do this” or “God’s leading me here,” this puts our decisions out of reach from criticisms or concerns. We should choose some different terminology. “I prayed about it, and this seems best” or “It seems like the Lord is leading” would be a more helpful way of communicating our dependence on God. We don’t want “God told me so” or “God laid it on my heart” or “It’s God’s will” or worse yet, “God told me that He wants you to do such and such” to be conversation stoppers that remove accountability in decision making.⁴

Read Out Loud: Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

? How can we acknowledge God’s sovereignty and yet still take personal responsibility for our decision-making?

Possible Answers: Saying that we’ve sought Him in a decision (prayer, reading our Bibles), but acknowledging that we made the actual decision to move forward.

⁴ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleece, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 47.

? Why is this unhelpful pitfall so tempting?

Possible Answers: It gives us an excuse when things go wrong and ignores our responsibility/role in that process.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 4

? What advice would you give Matt?

Possible Answers: Talk about how that puts unfair pressure on Susan and shuts down discussion. He should share his feelings, but trust that God will give Susan the wisdom to make the best decision for her.

5) Generates Worry

Read Out Loud: Matthew 6:25-28, 33-34 (NIV)

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ... ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

? What does this passage teach us about worry?

Possible Answers: Worry does not benefit us. Obedience looks like focusing on God and how He has called us to follow after Him.

? How does worry reflect on our trust of God?

Possible Answers: Worry can indicate a lack of trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God. It can be our attempt at “control” over a situation.

Leader’s Note: Anxiety that goes beyond a healthy struggle with worry can be overwhelming for those who are caught in it. If you find that through your discussion someone shares about a more significant struggle in this area, please refer him/her to Restoring Hope (restoringhope@hopecc.com). This ministry provides great resources to help people better evaluate their particular situation.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 5

? Based on the passage above, what advice would you give Walter?

Possible Answer: Remind him that God cares about his brother even more than he does and knows his needs. Worrying will not change the situation. He should talk to someone about the severity of his anxiety.

? How can we combat the temptation to become anxious?

Possible Answers: Read/memorize Scripture. Pray. Talk to other Christ-followers.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Which of the above pitfalls do you often fall prey to? Do you often:

- Focus solely on non-moral decisions instead of Christ-likeness?
- View God as hiding things from you?
- Find yourself consumed with the future and what it might bring?
- Neglect your own personal responsibility?
- Struggle with fear and worry by your lack of trust in God?

? How can our small group come alongside you in addressing your personal pitfalls?

Discerning God's Will

Week 4: Potentially Misleading Methods

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

Learning Objective

- Think through pitfalls that are a part of our decision-making processes and need to change.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- We've included specific scenarios in this study that highlight certain pitfalls we may encounter in the decision-making process. If you have any stories from your own life, feel free to substitute them in.

A Quick Recap...

Pray for your time together as a group.

Last week we discussed 5 common pitfalls of unhealthy mindsets when seeking God's will. They were:

1. Focuses on Non-moral Decisions
2. Sneaky God
3. Causes An Unhealthy Preoccupation with the Future
4. Undermines Personal Responsibility
5. Generates Worry

Read Out Loud: In this study we will discuss "typical" methods Christians often use to discern God's will. While there are times God does move in extraordinary and miraculous ways, it can be dangerous to wait for, expect to, or seek out extraordinary means of knowing. Tonight we will be introduced to commonly misapplied methods when seeking God's will and asked to examine our own methods.

Pretend You're A Mentor

Leader's Note: Break into four groups to read through and comment on four mentoring scenarios. Remind your group that these examples may be "extreme." Help them to draw out the underlying principles of the examples. These scenarios will be discussed later in the study. Caution! Don't spend too much time here.

Scenarios

1. Carrie is trying to make a decision on what college to attend. She's been really wrestling with the decision. She's debating going to the U of MN in the Twin Cities or going to Madison. One

night, she had a dream about all the lost students in Wisconsin and their need for the Gospel. She says that this was a clear sign from God, and decided to go to Madison.

2. Owen has been worried about his job situation for quite some time. He hates his job, and it's starting to affect him negatively. While in the midst of his turmoil, a job offer came his way from the conglomerate giant in his small town. However, they have a pretty poor reputation. But, Owen can't shake the timing of the opportunity, and really sees this as a door God is opening before him. He decides to take the new job.
3. Frank is wrestling if he should ask out Megan or not. There are so many factors in the air, that it seems almost impossible to get a clear answer. In desperation, while at a series of stoplights, and offers up a prayer and says, "God, if you want me to ask her out, make all of the stoplights go green in the next 5 seconds." Low and behold, four seconds later, all of the lights go green and Frank decides that he is going to ask Megan out.
4. Matt is torn about marrying Gretchen. He just can't shake this feeling that they are supposed to be together and God wants him in this relationship. Gretchen isn't a Christian, and so a lot of Matt's friends have concerns about their relationship. Matt's mentor has even expressed concern. Again, he just can't shake the feeling though. After a long season of praying about it, Matt senses a lot of peace about the decision, and decides to marry Gretchen.

? Would you hold him/her up as an example to follow? Why or why not?

Leader's Note: This question is for each group to discuss regarding their scenario.

The Conventional Methods...

Optional Transition: With those scenarios in the back of your mind, let's think through the conventional methods of finding God's will and some of their potential pitfalls.

1) Supernatural Intervention

Read Out Loud: Acts 9:10-16 (NIV)

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." ¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

When we read the Bible, we know we are hearing from God. We are not only reading what God has inspired by the Spirit, but what He continues to say by the same Spirit. By contrast, hearing from God outside the Bible in these last days is always more tenuous, less clear, and less authoritative. We have no promise in Scripture that God will speak to us apart from the Spirit speaking through His Word... If you think you've heard from God, I'm not ready to lock you up in a psych ward, nor am I ready to bless whatever you "heard" because you think God said it. Hearing from God directly can be important and legitimate, but I certainly wouldn't treat a special impression from the Lord as more special than the sure word of the Lord found in the Bible.⁵

? Have you ever had God intervene miraculously to show you His will? If yes, how so?

? Why do we need to be careful in interpreting circumstances that may seem miraculous?

Possible Answers: They can easily be skewed/manipulated to suit our purposes.

? On occasion, God intervenes in the lives of His people in miraculous ways to offer direction. How do we balance this reality with an understanding that miraculous intervention is just that—miraculous?

Possible Answers: We need to leave room for the belief that God could be telling us something in a very miraculous and obvious way; however, we shouldn't expect miraculous intervention to occur before we make a decision, nor should we believe that every coincidental occurrence is miraculous intervention.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 1

? What advice would you give Carrie as she wrestles with what her dream could mean?

Possible Answers: While your dream could be God sharing His heart specifically for the students of Madison, God cares and desires for all people to come to know Him—U of MN and Madison students alike. Her role is to share the Gospel wherever she goes to school.

⁵ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 66-67.

2) Circumstances: Open And Closed Doors

Read Out Loud: Jonah 1:1-3 (NIV)

¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” ³But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

? Why did Jonah go to Tarshish rather than Nineveh?

Possible Answers: He didn't like the command God was giving him. He thought running away would be easier—that He could escape what God called Him to do.

? How could an available ship to Tarshish been viewed by Jonah as an “open door”?

Possible Answers: He could view the situation as “God made this ship available at just the right time, so clearly He doesn't really want me to go to Nineveh. If He really wanted that to happen, there wouldn't have been a way for me to escape.”

? How have you used the open/closed door method when attempting to discern God's will in the past?

? Why is it so tempting to use this method as a significant part of decision-making? When can this method be useful and when can it lead us astray?

Possible Answers: It can be useful when it helps us boldly step out in faith to follow a direction where we feel that God is leading us. It can lead us astray by giving us something else to blame if our decisions don't work out the way we envisioned. We can put the responsibility on the “door” rather than our choice. This method can lead us astray when we don't evaluate all aspects of a decision through wisdom or when we are unable to make a decision for lack of an open or closed door.

? In a lot of cases, Christians are tempted to view difficulties, trials, and discomfort as “closed doors.”

What does God have to say about suffering in His Word? How could viewing all discomfort as a stop sign hinder our obedience to God's will?

Possible Answers: See Romans 5:1-5, James 1:2-4, 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, and others.

DeYoung: Here's the bottom line: If God opens the door for you to do something you know is good and necessary, be thankful for the opportunity. But other than that, don't assume that the relative ease or difficulty of a new situation is God's way of telling you to do one thing or the other. Remember, God's will

*for your life is your sanctification, and God tends to use discomfort and trials more than comfort and ease to make us holy.*⁶

Read Out Loud: Scenario 2

? What advice would you give Owen as he wrestles with what his “open door” could mean?

Possible Answers: Would working at this place move you towards Gospel-living?

3) Divine Chance

Read Out Loud: Judges 6:12-17, 36-40 (NIV)

¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” ¹³ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

¹⁵ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.” ¹⁶ The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.” ¹⁷ Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ...

³⁶ Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this

Israel During the Time of Judges

The book of Judges reflects a time of turmoil for the people of Israel. “For several centuries...the Lord periodically provided leaders to come to the aid of Israel just when they seemed to be on the brink of extinction. These leaders were called ‘deliverers,’ or ‘ones bringing justice’--the ‘judges’ for whom the book is named.”* These judges, like Gideon, would not have had the guidance of Scripture like we do today, though their understanding of who God is would have been shaped by their history as a people and the “oral tradition” passed down of how God had intervened in their lives.

*A Survey of the Old Testament, Andrew Hill & John Walton, 192

⁶ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleecees, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 76-77.

time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.”⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

? Why do you think Gideon sought God’s will in this way?

Possible Answers: He was scared. He wanted certainty. He wasn’t very familiar with God’s ways.

? How is Gideon’s situation different from ours today?

Possible Answers: We have the Bible. We know Jesus.

? Why is it dangerous to expect God to do “tricks” or miracles to confirm our direction in decision-making?

Possible Answers: We are toeing the line of putting God to the test. We can use this as an excuse to not move forward or more easily cast blame on God when something does or does not work out the way we envisioned. We can use it as an excuse to not be obedient to Gospel-living.

Read Out Loud: Scenario 3

? What advice would you give Frank when he tells you his plan for making this decision?

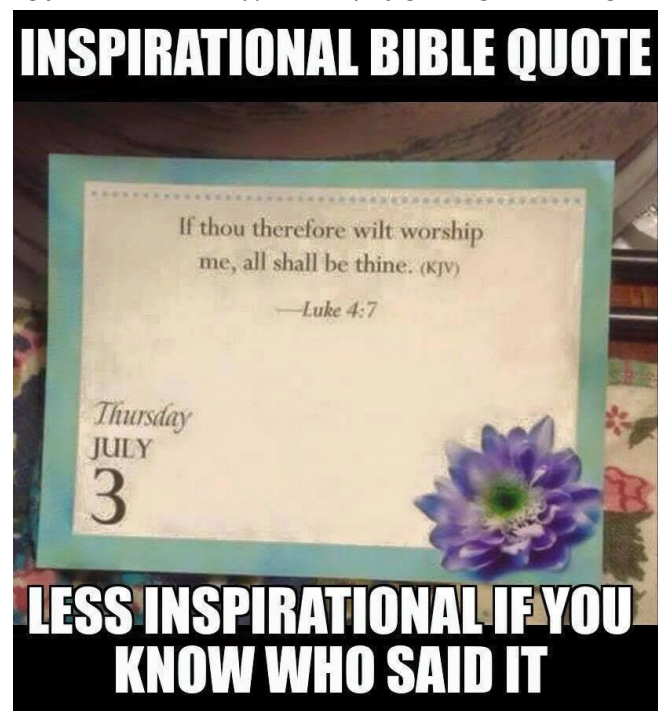
Possible Answers: That the type of “sign” he’s looking for is not God’s typical way of guiding us. Is Megan a Christian who is actively pursuing Christ? Is he actually interested in her? Those are better questions to be evaluating as he makes this decision.

4) Impressions

Read Out Loud: Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

? How do Christians typically use feelings as signs to validate decision-making?



Possible Answers: They often look for “peace” as a sign that they should move forward with a decision, and “unrest” or “discomfort” that they should not.

Leader’s Note: Check out the context of the “Inspirational Bible Quote” 😊.

? The verses above mention the peace of God. What are some truths about God that offer us peace?

How is that different from the peace that is found in circumstantial comfort?

Possible Answers: That God loves us and desires what’s best for us—pursuing Him. That He knows every detail about us. That God is sovereign and in control. These truths about God’s character and relationship can offer us peace even when circumstances are challenging or uncomfortable.

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

Here’s my profound wisdom on the matter: Impressions are impressions. They are not in a special category. Don’t confuse impressions, hunches, and subjective feelings with certain words from the Lord. If a thought or impulse pops into your head, even if it happens while reading Scripture, don’t assume it is a voice from heaven. We all get intuitions and hunches and gut feelings all the time. Some are from the Lord. Some aren’t.⁷

Read Out Loud: Scenario 4

? What advice would you give to Matt as explains his rationale for marrying Gretchen?

Possible Answers: How has he addressed the concerns shared by his Gospel-friends? Is his peace more reflective of comfort and “getting his way” than true surrender? What is wise?

For Discussion and Accountability

? Which of the decision-making methods we discussed do you find yourself typically using?

? How do your decision-making methods line up with biblical principles?

⁷ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleece, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 82.

Discerning God's Will

Week 5: Wisdom

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision-Making

Learning Objective

- Have a clear understanding of what biblical wisdom means.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- This study includes a teaching video from Pastor Jon Neal: <https://youtu.be/KwAOWpANdKE>. Make sure you have it queued up in advance.

A Quick Recap...

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: Let's think back to the first study in this series.

Three Subdivisions of God's Will:

1. God's Will: Eternal Plan
2. God's Will: Gospel-Living
3. God's Will: Direction



Can anyone summarize the meaning of each of these three categories?

Possible Answers: Eternal Plan—God is sovereign and what He says will be happens. Salvation is His main focus. Gospel-Living—God shows us how to live, not necessarily what to do. Direction—God has a plan for our lives, but He's probably not going to show us what that is before we need to live it.

Where Does Wisdom Come From?

Read Out Loud: Proverbs 1:1-7 (NIV)

- ¹ The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
- ² for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
- ³ for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;
- ⁴ for giving prudence to those who are simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young—

⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—
⁶ for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Read Out Loud: Proverbs 2:1-6 (NIV)

¹ My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
² turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
³ indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴ and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.



How is wisdom referred to in these passages?

Possible Answers: It's a gift from the Lord and from knowing Him. It's something to value highly. It's connected with justice, fairness, being upright, understanding, etc.



Why is the “fear of the Lord” referenced as a basis for understanding and wisdom?

Possible Answers: Biblical wisdom is rooted in a right understanding of who God is and our relationship with Him.



What other sources for wisdom and knowledge do you see people seeking out?

Possible Answers: Media, friends, culture in general, history.

What Is Wisdom?

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music

from your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

? What do we learn about wisdom from this passage?

Possible Answers: It's connected with being in relationship with the Lord. It results in Gospel-living. Being wise is part of understanding God's will.

? How is wisdom closely linked to God's eternal plan and Gospel-living in the passages we've read today?

Possible Answers: If we are obedient in searching for and following in God's eternal plan and Gospel-living, wisdom will be a result of those choices.

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

The fool, the opposite of the wise person, is not a moron or an oaf. The fool is the person who does not live life God's way. Wisdom is knowing God and doing as He commands. Foolishness, on the other hand, is turning from God and listening only to yourself. So when we talk about wisdom, we are talking about more than witty aphorisms and homespun advice. We are talking about a profoundly God-centered approach to life. Biblical wisdom means living a disciplined and prudent life in the fear of the Lord.⁸

Definition of Wisdom:

Living in such a way with godly, sound judgment in light of internal and external factors.

Why Do You Need Wisdom?

Leader's Note: Play the teaching video from Pastor Jon Neal. This video talks participants through the four reasons below.

1) Direction Matters

- The Path Principle = Your Direction, Not Your Intention, Determines Your Destination
- Every bad moral decision usually comes from a series of unwise decisions.
- Every good moral decision usually comes from a series of wise decisions.

2) Motives Are Confusing

- When Motives Aren't Completely Pure

⁸ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 87.

3) It's More Than A Matter of Morality

- When Decisions Go Beyond Moral, e.g. Do I get a drink with this person? What are my physical boundaries in dating? Should I eat that next piece of pie?

4) You're Commanded To Be Wise

? Which of these four reasons landed with you the most? Why?

? What other reasons do you have for pursuing wisdom in your own life?

? In what ways can Gospel friends help us in our decision-making process?

Possible Answers: They can help us discern our emotions and other factors that may be influencing our decision-making process. They can offer outside perspectives. They can point us to Scripture that we may be forgetting. They can pray for us!

For Discussion and Accountability

? What do you need to pursue to gain wisdom in your own life?

? How are you seeking and applying wisdom in your life? Where do you need to?

Discerning God's Will

Week 6: Decision Making—Wisdom Applied

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study 6
What Is "God's Will"?	What Is Our Motivation?	Typical Mindsets	Potentially Misleading Methods	Wisdom	Decision- Making

Learning Objective

- Each group member will know their next step towards making decisions based on biblical wisdom.

Tools for Decision Making

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: We've spent a lot of time deconstructing our views of God's will and decision-making, and in our last study, we looked at what biblical wisdom really means. This week, we're going to get practical by discussing how we actually can obtain wisdom in our lives and think through helpful tools for decision-making. We looked at this passage in our previous study, but today we'll use it as a guide to learning what tools God gives us for making Gospel-centered decisions.

Read Out Loud: Proverbs 2: 1-10 (NIV)

- ¹ My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
- ² turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
- ³ indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
- ⁴ and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
- ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
- ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
- ⁷ He holds success in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
- ⁸ for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.
- ⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just
and fair—every good path.

¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

? The word “if” is used several times in this passage, implying a cause and effect relationship. What are the “ifs,” and what do they lead to?

*Possible Answers: “If”: accept God’s words, store up commands, turn to wisdom and understanding, etc.
“Then”: Will obtain wisdom and understanding. Know what is right and just.*

? What tools for decision-making do we see listed in the passage?

Possible Answers:

1. *Reading God’s Word (vs. 1)*
2. *Prayer (vs. 2)*
3. *Community (vs. 3)*

1. God’s Word—Store Up God’s Commands

Read Out Loud: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV)

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

? What does this passage say about God’s Word?

Possible Answers: That it’s from God. That it will equip Christ-followers for all that God has called them to do. That it’s useful. Knowing it will lead to wisdom.

? How has Scripture equipped you for “every good work”? Are there any passages that have “equipped” you? Which ones?

Read Out Loud: Psalm 1:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

? What is being contrasted in this passage? What does this reveal about God's Word?

Possible Answers: Those who follow after and find joy in the sinful things of the world vs. those who seek the Lord. Knowing and obeying God's Word will keep us following Him.

Read Out Loud: Quote from DeYoung

God doesn't want us to merely give external obedience to His commands. He wants us to know Him so intimately that His thoughts become our thoughts, His ways our ways, His affections our affections. God wants us to drink so deeply of the Scripture that our heads and hearts are transformed so that we love what He loves and hate what He hates.⁹

2. Holy Spirit—Turn Your Ear To Wisdom

Read Out Loud: John 14:25-26 (NIV)

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Read Out Loud: Galatians 5:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

? How does the Holy Spirit equip us to make Gospel-centered decisions?

Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit helps us better understand who God is and what He desires. If we are "walking" in the Spirit, then we will be moving in a God-honoring direction.

? The Galatians passage highlights the tension between flesh and spirit. How do you see this tension playing out in your own decision-making?

Possible Answers: My flesh wants to go the comfortable route—the one of least resistance. My flesh is impatient when I should be waiting and pursuing wisdom.

⁹ DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Moody Publishers. Page 90.

? How are you walking in the Spirit? How are you rooting out sin, living by faith, and surrendering your life to God?

3. God's People—Call Out For Insight

Read Out Loud: Proverbs 12:15 (NIV)

The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice.

Read Out Loud: 1 Kings 12:1-19 (NIV)

¹ Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. ² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. ³ So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: ⁴ “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”

⁵ Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

⁶ Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked.

⁷ They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

⁸ But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. ⁹ He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?”

¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him replied, “These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.’ Now tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. ¹¹ My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’”

¹² Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.” ¹³ The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, ¹⁴ he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” ¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

“What share do we have in David,
what part in Jesse’s son?

To your tents, Israel!

Look after your own house, David!”

So the Israelites went home. ¹⁷ But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

¹⁸ King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. ¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

? Optional: King Rehoboam's decisions split an entire kingdom. When in your life has following the advice of "fools" resulted in poor decision making?

? When do we need sound advice from other Christians the most? (e.g. When we don't have the knowledge/experience needed.)

Possible Answers: When emotions are high or low. When you're deceived.

? Do you have Gospel friends in your life who will give you (sometimes hard) feedback? Who are you going to for advice? How can our small group play a part in doing this for one another?

Two Questions

Optional Transition: We've looked at our next passage earlier in this series, but will now re-examine it as a tool for wise decision-making.

Read Out Loud: Matthew 6:19-21, 25-27, 33-34 (NIV)

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ...

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ...³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

? Where is Jesus telling His disciples to put their focus?

Possible Answers: On Him and eternal things. On following after and growing in Him.

? Where is Jesus specifically telling His disciples to NOT put their focus?

Possible Answers: On temporary things. On daily needs. On what's immediately in front of them.

Read Out Loud: Jesus' disciples are asking the wrong questions in this passage. When making a decision, better questions to ask are 1. Is it moral? and 2. Is it wise?

Best Questions to Always Ask Together When Making A Decision:

- Is it moral?
- Is it wise?

? What decisions are you facing in your life right now? How can these two questions help you in this process?

For Discussion and Accountability

? Thinking back on the six parts of this series, what is one thing you need to change about your decision-making process? Who can encourage you to make those changes?