

Jan 18: Decision-Making (pt3)

Before we jump in, I want to name something many Christians feel but don't always say out loud. When we talk about "God's will," there's often fear attached to it. Some of us have been taught—explicitly or implicitly—that God has one exact plan for every decision. One right job. One right house. One right college major. One right move. One right spouse. And if you miss it, you're off track—maybe permanently. So decision-making starts to feel like walking through a minefield. You pray, you analyze, you wait for a sign, and underneath it all is the fear:

What if I get this wrong?

What I want you to hear clearly today is that is not the picture Scripture paints of how God leads His people. God is not fragile. His purposes are not hanging by a thread. And your faithfulness is not measured by your ability to decode hidden instructions.

Ephesians 5:8-10

Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Notice that the imperative in Ephesians is not pleasing ourselves but rather pleasing God. When we make decisions and live life focusing on our pleasure and desire, we clearly display who we are actually worshiping. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, then this will be evidenced in the way you live trying to please God rather than yourself. This will be your first priority.

Trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord is about discovering what it means to learn, love, and live God's will. Discovering God's will, otherwise known as biblical discernment, is essentially the combination of faith plus wisdom. The action of faith is trust, like we have been covering. The action of wisdom we'll get to later this morning. Following God's will is a topic that generates all sorts of emotional responses. I know some people who respond in complete apathy because they believe God's will is impossible to know so we are free to do as we please and God will sort it all out in the end. Others respond with dread because they are paralyzed with fear, worrying they might make the wrong choice and therefore be outside of God's will. Both extremes are actually quite common, so let's take a few moments to see what God's word actually says about God's will because this is foundational to all decision-making.

Most of us ask the question this way: "What is God's will for this decision?" That sounds like a good question, but it often assumes something unbiblical—that God's will is a single, secret answer we must uncover before acting. Scripture invites us to ask a different question: "How does God form His people to walk wisely and faithfully with Him?" That's a relational question, not a technical one.

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Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

This verse is incredibly important. It draws a very significant distinction we should not ignore. Some things God has chosen not to reveal. They belong to Him. Other things He has revealed clearly—and those belong to us, which means we are responsible. God does not hold us responsible for what He has not revealed. BUT. He does hold us responsible for how we live in light of what He has revealed. And knowing what God has revealed has everything to do with knowing what God has said in His Word.

When Christians say “God’s will,” we often mean three different things without realizing it. Scripture treats these differently, and so should we because confusing them creates so much unnecessary stress, heartache, and confusion and actually distorts the freedom and liberty offered in Christ.

First is God’s sovereign will. Some refer to this as His secret will, but this is really about what is and isn’t knowable because it’s reserved for God alone like we read in Deuteronomy 29:29. Let’s read a few other passages describing God’s sovereign will:

Isaiah 46:10

My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.

Isaiah 45:7-9

I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things. Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the LORD have created it. Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles’?

Lamentations 3:37-38

Who has spoken and it come to pass, unless the Lord commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

Proverbs 16:9

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

Ephesians 1:11

In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

God's sovereign will refers to His eternal plan—what He has determined to bring about in history. What do those passages say about God's sovereign will? That it cannot be thwarted, that we can make plans but what actually happens is determined by the Lord, that we are not in control. We never have to pray that God's will be done. It always will. When Jesus taught us to pray "Thy will be done," it has nothing to do with hoping or letting God have His way, it's about submitting, out loud, to His sovereign will, attuning our hearts to the reality that He is in absolute sovereign control.

What do these passages say about our ability to know God's sovereign will? We can't know it. Sometimes we catch glimpses of God's sovereign will in hindsight, after the fact, and can put the pieces together and go "aha!". But never before. We cannot know beforehand that which God has already determined will happen unless it has been revealed to us in His Scriptures.

What do these passages reveal about how we ought to respond to God's sovereign will? Submission, like the pot to the potter. We fight against God's right to rule over every aspect of our lives because of our sin nature. We want control. We want autonomy. We want liberation. At the very least we want a say. But Scripture is clear that our response to God's authority needs to be humble submission because He is the Lord God Almighty!

What, then, ought to be our response towards God's sovereign will? Awe, reverence, worship. His sovereign will is an expression of His immeasurable greatness, His infinite magnitude, and we rightly respond with the fear of the Lord. A proper understanding of God's sovereignty is important for following God's will in our lives because it reminds us that we are not in control, that anything we plan is contingent on His plans, and His plans cannot be thwarted. In this life we may never know why something happened the way it did, but this is how we exercise the faith part of discernment. Faith plus wisdom, remember? We make decisions by faith, trusting in God's character, His goodness and wisdom, and believing that He is in control, that He is working all things out for our ultimate good, and this ultimate good is that we walk by the Spirit, that we become more and more like Christ.

If you make a decision but don't believe God can and will work through it regardless of the outcome, then the decision wasn't made in faith. If you make a decision based in fear because you are afraid of losing something you don't want to lose, then it's not based in faith. If you make a decision based in comfort, perhaps the easy way out, avoiding the messiness of others, then it's not based in faith. Likewise, if selfish desires motivated you rather than a desire to bring God glory, then the decision wasn't based in faith.

I say this with love, kindness, and empathy, but think for a moment how this may have played out in your life, in the decisions you've made for whom to marry, how to parent your children, what to do with your aging parents, how you ought to invest your time, talents, and treasure. Learning from reflection is a vital part of what it means to discern what is pleasing to the Lord because God loves us enough, has given us the gift of choice, so that we might

also learn from our mistakes, from our unbelief. Just like His sovereignty will, our unfaithfulness can be gleaned in hindsight. I've been there. I'm still there.

Here's the critical point: God's sovereign will is never presented in Scripture as something you are supposed to figure out in advance. You are not called to discern God's sovereign will; you are called to trust it. God's sovereignty is not a puzzle to solve—it is a safety net undergirding everything, including your obedience. Borrowing from a man far wiser than me, God ordains the ends and the means. All of it. Consider how that dismantles human wisdom.

Now we need to talk about God's moral will, what He commands, what He has revealed to us through His Word like in Deuteronomy 29:29. Let's look at some other Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 8:1-2

“The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. ² And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.”

Psalms 119: 29-37

Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law! I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame! I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart! Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.

Psalms 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Ephesians 5:15-20

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God

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the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Matthew 22:37-39

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

We could go on forever. What does the Bible say about God’s moral will? That it is knowable and available. We can know it through studying His Word and through the Holy Spirit’s empowerment and wisdom. It’s not a puzzle we have to agonize over. Our choice capacity includes knowing right from wrong, and we have a built-in mechanism called the conscience that aids us in walking by the Spirit according to the Father’s moral will.

What does the Bible say about our responsibility towards God’s revealed will? To learn it, hide it in our hearts, to make it the foundation of our worldview, to submit to it through our obedience and our hearts. Why is a proper understanding of God’s plan for us revealed in Scripture important for living a life godly life? Because it means we are without excuse, and it is impossible to love God and others in a manner that bring Hims glory if we don’t study His standards.

God’s moral will answers questions like: How should I live? What honors God? What is off-limits for God’s people? Here’s where discernment often gets simpler than we expect. If a decision requires disobedience, dishonesty, or compromise, it is not God’s leading—no matter how strong the desire or how good the outcome seems. God will never contradict Himself. A “feeling of peace” cannot override a command of Scripture.

The third and final category of God’s will is His desiring will, meaning what pleases God. This is where many our decisions actually live because we have this gift of choice, and by

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virtue of us having the capacity to be in relationship with God means we have a choice as to whether or not we have that relationship. God didn't make robots. He made humans in His image, and that means a willful, choosing heart.

God's desires speak to what delights Him—not in terms of strict commands, meaning His moral will, but in terms of wisdom, love, and maturity. In relationship. In choice. God desires that we would love Him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Second Peter 3:9 articulates this well.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God is exercising patience because it is His desire that none would perish, meaning be condemned to hell. But of course Scripture confirms that many have and will because of the gift of choice. People choosing to reject God grieves His heart. He certainly takes no pleasure in it, but neither will He go against His sovereign will, which includes the good gift of choice He has bestowed on humanity, a gift that comes with eternal responsibility and consequences. So while in a very real sense God is grieved by the choice people make to reject Him, to reject His moral will, so, too, does God take great pleasure in those who choose to:

“...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.”

Colossians 1:10

God is not only concerned with whether something is allowed, meaning His moral will, but how His people walk, His desiring will. This is the difference between a Pharisee and a disciple, between self-righteousness vs Christlikeness. We need to understand both. This is where Christians often get stuck, because Scripture does not always give a single right answer. And that's intentional. God is forming children, not programming robots. And this includes what happens to us at the heart level. Our culture says: Follow your heart. Scripture says: You need a reformed heart.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?

That verse makes many people uncomfortable, but it's meant to make us cautious—not cynical. Scripture does not say the heart is useless. It says the heart is unreliable without formation, without desiring the things of God. The solution is not to ignore the heart, but to allow God to renew it. God's primary way of leading His people is not bypassing their desires, but reshaping them over time.

Psalms 37:3-7

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

We need to get this: God's leading is usually quiet, slow, and cumulative. Scripture gives us practical filters—not mystical shortcuts. Remember that wisdom is received, not manufactured. But once received, it must be exercised. How do we exercise wisdom?

The Old Testament teaches wise decision making by its Wisdom Books and examples of wise men. Ecclesiastes 10:10 declares: "Wisdom has the advantage of giving success." Jesus commanded His disciples in Matthew 10:16, "Be shrewd as serpents." The apostles modeled wisdom in their decision making in 1 Thessalonians 3:1: "We thought it best..." We are instructed in Colossians 4:5 to use wisdom in decision making: "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."

Exercising wisdom begins with approach the source, the Lord God Almighty. We begin with prayerful dependence by asking: Am I seeking God—or just asking Him to bless what I already want? Prayer aligns us before it informs us.

Colossians 1:9-10

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

God reveals wisdom through His Word. When we approach a decision, ask: Is this consistent with God's Word? This requires knowing His Word.

Psalms 119:97-99

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ⁹⁹I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

God has given us tremendous rational capacity, and that should not be wasted. Scripture reveals we also need to do our own outside research. In Nehemiah 2:11-16, Nehemiah inspected the walls of Jerusalem, doing his own research to see their state and what needed to be done. In Joshua 2, Joshua sent two spies to Jericho to get the lay of the land and provide him with information he didn't have but needed in order to make an informed decision.

Our research must include the wisdom we receive from Scripture. For instance, when making a pros and cons list, like a t-chart, we need to pause and consider: What does

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Scripture explicitly or implicitly reveal about each of the variables? What stewardship roles and responsibilities need to be considered (e.g., finances, biblical roles, other resources)? What heart motivations and concerns need to be addressed, and what does Scripture say about these motivations and concerns? Earnestly ask God for wisdom for decisions that are not morally prohibited in God's Word. Research possible options and alternatives based on available information and bring those to the Lord.

God's wisdom includes godly and spiritually mature believers within our community. Ask: What do mature believers see that I might not?

Proverbs 20:18

Without counsel plans fail.

God often protects us through others. What do my spiritual leaders have to say about my decision? How is their counsel governed by Scripture vs personal opinion? What experiences can they share concerning this particular topic?

A teachable spirit includes both listening to the wisdom of others and learning from your own experiences of life. Pause and ask yourself: Will this choice shape me toward Christlikeness? What personal life experiences can I draw from concerning this particular decision? What was the outcome of those decisions, and what did I learn from them? Or am I stuck in immature thinking?

Hebrews 5:14

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

After considering all these steps, it's time to choose. Keep in mind that peace is a gift but it is not a compass. Biblical peace flows from trust, not ease. Desire matters, but it must be examined. Circumstances matter, but opportunity is not the same as calling. Paul had open doors and still experienced suffering. He felt a calling, but then doors closed. Eventually, discernment leads to a choice. And Scripture gives us freedom here.

Let me say this clearly: God is not waiting for you to fail. He is not hiding His will to test you. He delights in guiding His people. As such, we lack nothing to please God.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

We lack nothing not because we can know the future but because we can know Almighty God who holds the future in His hands. Faith is submitting to God's sovereignty as we trust in His good, righteous, holy, loving character. Wisdom is accepting our personal responsibility for daily seeking to please God with our choices, our commitments, our desires. This is what it means to be spiritually mature. The spiritually mature mind is a mind set on things above. It is a heart which is constantly setting aside selfish desires and ambitions and actively pursuing God's glory and pleasure. God promises:

Psalm 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.

As we close this series, I want us to step back for a moment—not to review everything we covered, but to reflect on what has quietly shifted underneath it all. Over these three weeks, we haven't just talked about how to make decisions. We've talked about what kind of people we believe we are, and what kind of God we believe He is.

In week one, we named the air we breathe. A world that tells us to trust ourselves, follow our hearts, measure success by outcomes, and carry the full weight of our choices alone. A world where decision-making is ultimately about self-protection and self-expression. In week two, Scripture confronted that vision—not harshly, but honestly. We saw that the biblical story begins somewhere else entirely. Not with the authority of the self, but with the lordship of God and His gifts. Not with happiness as the highest good, but faithfulness. Not with the assumption that we are wise enough on our own, but with the confession that we need wisdom from outside ourselves.

And today, we were reminded that biblical decision-making is not about decoding secrets or chasing signs. It's about walking with a God who has already spoken, who is actively forming His people, and who is faithful even when our discernment is imperfect.

Here's the quiet but radical shift I hope we carry with us: Christian decision-making is not primarily about choosing the right path. It is about trusting the right Guide. God does not promise that every choice will be easy. He does not promise that every choice will be clear. He does not promise that every decision will feel peaceful. He does not promise that obedience will always lead to immediate clarity or visible success. But He does promise His presence. He promises wisdom when we ask. He promises that our faithfulness is never wasted. And He promises that His purposes are larger than our ability to discern them perfectly. That means we don't have to live paralyzed by fear of getting it wrong. We don't have to wait for perfect clarity before we obey. And we don't have to carry the burden of outcomes that only God can control. Instead, we are invited into a different posture—one marked by humility, prayer, Scripture, community, and trust.

So as we end this conversation, here's the invitation: When you face decisions—big or small—don't ask first, "What do I feel?" Ask, "Who is the Lord, and how do I walk faithfully with Him here and now?" Don't aim for control. Aim for obedience. Don't chase certainty.

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Practice trust. And don't measure your faithfulness by how well things turn out. Measure it by how you are walking with God. "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." That is not a promise of ease. It is a promise of guidance.