

Wisdom recap - God cares about how you live, and in so far as it depends on you, wants you to have a good life based on how he defines the good life. So this morning, we're gonna get into the nitty gritty to help us see that more clearly.

If you have a Bible, we'll be in **Proverbs 16:1-3**.

And as you're turning there, I have a story I want to share with you:

Flash back, 13 years ago. There was a guy, he was about 24 years old and in ministry and was traveling that day to go to a Christian conference. He didn't want to drive on his own, so he rode with some college students to this conference. He also couldn't tell you why, but he decided that morning to where his one cool article of clothing he owned - a leather jacket. And yes, it was black. So after 8 hours or so in the car, he arrived with his college friends, at this conference in Greensboro, NC. He gets in this long line to register for the conference. The line moves slowly. About 10-15 people in the front of the line move to the registration tables. And then someone working the conference stops the line so registration tables don't get crowded. This happens for about 5-10 minutes. This guy is finally at the front of the line, about to register for the conference, when he's stopped by this female staff person overseeing the line. The guy thought about this woman, "Ooo she cute." And she thought about this guy, "Ooo he cute." And it was there this guy met for the very first time the woman that he would later date, and marry, and have four kids with.

This woman so happens to be in full-time ministry, and prior to going into ministry, went to a young, small church called Midtown Fellowship in Columbia, SC. And over their years of dating and marriage, they would pop in on random Sundays to go to this church. And later, they end up deciding to leave their ministry in Kentucky to be a part of this church.

Well - if you haven't figured it out by now - that guy was me. And it's wild to think, all of the decisions, that seemed insignificant in the moment, that actually led me to meeting Lucy. But it does make me think from time to time questions like

- What happened if I chose not to ride with my college friends that day?
- What happened if I didn't talk to her in the front of the line?
- What happened had I not worn my cool leather jacket?

My life could have been completely different. At the very least, I would not have met Lucy the way I did. At most, I might not even be here in Columbia, and there may be four tiny humans who may not exist.

Now think about your life - did you know, according to research done by Harvard, that you make about 35,000 decisions a day?

So you and I have 35k decisions to make each day. And we have no guarantees on how any will turn out. We don't know which ones will end up mattering very little and whether or not some could change the course of our whole lives. When you think about it that way...that's a lot to think about.

Now, what if I told you that there was a way to set yourself up for greater success than failure when making everyday decisions? Would you be interested in that?

Well, good news... that's what we're talking about today. How do we become wise people who make wise decisions? and to be fair, the decisions i have in mind are less wardrobe-related and more substantial.

Proverbs 16:1-3

The plans of the heart belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the spirit.
3 Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.

This is known as parallelism. It's a Hebrew poetry trick in which each line of the poem sounds similar to the others but not exactly the same. As readers, it's our job to sit with the passage and note the similarities and differences from line to line to figure out what the passage is trying to communicate.

I'll give you an example. Here's a poem I wrote using this parallelism trick:

I love pizza
Sauce, bread, and cheese go great together
Thank you for existing, Dominos

Now, when you look at that, I'm kinda saying the same idea with each line, but the wording changes with each line to help you see the differences. And it's in the differences where the main idea comes out more.

Ok, so back to **Proverbs 16**. Look at it again. What do you notice from each line that's similar and different? Because that's where there will often be some good biblical insight. I'll give you a couple of things I noticed

There are two forces at work in these three lines.

- 1 - There's **our agency** - what we do matters
- 2 - a name that occurs in each of these three lines - **the LORD**. Yahweh. God is behind it all.

When it comes to decision-making, that's foundational to understand: You have a part to play, and God controls it all. And that matters... because if you don't hold those two things together...you will fall into one of two errors:

1- Overthinking - I have a decision to make but I'm too caught up in the details and the weightiness of the decision that you're either way too slow to act or don't act at all. You're stuck in decision paralysis, hoping the magical solution will just fall into place, so you do nothing, waiting for the moment to arrive ... And this can easily happen when you believe you don't have any real agency in your choices.

But then there's the other side of it, where rather than overthinking, we swing so far the other way, and it leads to:

2—Impulsivity—I have a decision to make, and I'm so caught up in the moment that I'm relying too much on what my gut thinks that I don't have the ability to cool down, step back, and deliberate the decision. I just act and hope for the best. But this, too, is missing it because you're behaving as though God is not in control. It all depends on you to figure it out.

Those two extremes happen when we don't consider these two ideas: that you have agency and God is in control.

So with that, how do I actually make good/wise decisions? Well, the key is found in v.3. Look at that again.

Proverbs 16:3

Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.

There it is right there: how do you make good, wise decisions? Commit your work to the LORD. So what does that mean - to commit your work to the LORD? Well, we gotta do some Bible work to see exactly what that looks like. We gotta search for some clues:

Here's what I mean. Here's one clue on how to make wise decisions:

Proverbs 4:20, 22

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings...For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

Alright, this is King Solomon speaking to his son, but zooming out, something more is going on. God is speaking through Solomon to address God's people. To use a theological word, this is what's called verbal plenary inspiration. Where God is speaking through the human authors to communicate truth. So, in this verse, is it Solomon speaking to his son or is it God speaking to his people? Yes. God speaking through Solomon is saying, "If you want to be a wise person, listen to my words. Meditate on what I'm saying to you." And that gives us our first category, if you want to make wise decisions commit yourself to God's Word.

1 - Commit yourself to God's Word

Scripture invites us to see Reality for what it really is: God at the center of it all. God invites us into a relationship with Him and helps us see how to live.

If I want to be wise, I need to be in His Word regularly.

To put it another way, if I want to know what God wants for me, I need to know what He's already said in His Word. And the book of Proverbs, and the entire scope of Scripture, is FILLED with all this wisdom available right in front of you when it comes to relationships, and family, and marriage, and finances, and work, and near-anything else you can think of. Wisdom is available, and it's here for the taking so that you're not left alone to figure it out.

What a gift we have. Did you know that most people had no access to a Bible for the first 1500-1600 years of Christianity? What a privilege you and I have that we live in a time and place where we have all of this right in front of us.

Shameless plug - YoBL

So that's the first one...here's the next clue on how to make wise decisions...

Proverbs 15:29

The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

God hears us and wants us to talk with Him in prayer. There's a similar verse in the New Testament, **James 1:5**

James 1:5

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

So that leads to category number two...

2 - Commit yourself to prayer

Look back at **James 1:5** for a moment...

I love that. That's a promise God is making to us. Do you want wisdom on something? Ask. God will hear you and answer you. I find myself doing this a lot. "God, I don't what to do with parenting - will you help me? You say if I ask, you'll give it to me so I'm banking on you keeping your promise. Help me." And I find God does answer, whether through bringing a verse to mind or a friend from church recommending a book or a podcast or someone telling me what works for them.

Can we just reflect for a second on how incredible that is? The God of the Universe is not some distant cosmic force out there who has left me to stumble around in the dark, trying to figure my life out. He loves you, guides you, and wants to give you wisdom if you just stop and ask for it in prayer.

Illustration - me in post-grad class. I get to ask the teacher whatever. They're the expert.

So, if I want to be a wise person, I need to pray regularly—not just when I have a decision to make, but regularly getting away from distractions and inputs and focusing my mind on Him and His Word. I think this can be really difficult now more than ever because if I consistently fill my mind with other inputs like social media, music, TV, or whatever...then I'm unable to quiet my mind and be with God in prayer.

Can I just say I think this is so crucial - because if you don't regularly spend time in prayer, talking to him, you will inevitably become victims of your own circumstances, listening to your own inner monologue rather than God's.

(Shameless plug for FJT?)

That's the second way we commit our work to the LORD and make wise choices...the third and final clue in in how we do this...

Proverbs 15:22

Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

Proverbs 11:14

Where there is no guidance, a people falls,
but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

3 - Commit yourself to God's people

Look back at **Proverbs 11:14**

I love that last bit: **in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.** In other words, how do you not blow your life up and ruin it? By having an abundance of counselors. People who love you. People who love Jesus. People who want you to grow in your love of Jesus and who have stepped back from a situation enough to tell you what you need to hear even if you don't want to hear it.

Now how do I find those counselors? Well, the Bible is pretty clear on this - the local church is the primary place to do just that - to get an abundance of wise counselors to help you live into wisdom. Which, a shameless plug, but if you are not yet involved in a LifeGroup - my hope and prayer is that you take that next step in your walk with Jesus. To surround yourself with others to help you live into this godly wisdom.

To get around other folks and bring up things you're genuinely trying to figure out in life, like,

- "How am I supposed to handle *this*? What am I supposed to do in this situation?"
- For college students - "How should I think about my major or career path or who I date?" Ask your LifeGroup, ask a pastor
- For parents: "When should I give my kids a phone?" ask your LG.
- Some of you have kids who can be a real struggle, and you're thinking, "I don't know how to handle this." What a perfect opportunity to bring that to your LG and say, "Here's what's going on. Has anyone got any insight?"

And if you think, "Well, that's hard to do because everyone in my LifeGroup is the same age and season of life as me," Okay, then take the initiative, find other folks in our church, and ask for their advice on stuff.

I remember asking friends of mine from our church a while back - hey, I'm thinking through some parenting stuff. I need help with my kids I want them to be resilient and teach them hard work. Do y'all have any advice? And they said team sports are helpful. So I'm not a big sports guy, but that's what we do. And I never would have arrived at that thought had I not asked people.

Recap—All three—God's Word, prayer, and God's People—are on the same team to help guide us towards wise decision-making.

But this also comes with a warning, relook at **Proverbs 16** again:

Proverbs 16:2

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the spirit.

So passage warns and reminds us that left on our own, we think we make good decisions when, in reality, it may not be the case. So how you determine whether your decisions are good or not all depends on whether you're leaning into these three resources God has for us: His Word, prayer, and His people. So I have a decision to make:

- Do I have verses that steer me in one direction or another?
- Am I praying about this topic, bringing it before God, and do I feel like God is leaning me one way or the other?
- Have I brought this up to wise people who love Jesus and who love me? What do they have to say?

Because all three resources are meant to work together. So if I have a decision and all three are on the same team, green lights all around, then you can make your decision and walk in confidence. On the flip side, if you're making a decision and not all three are on the same team, or you have a yellow/red light in one of those areas, I think, at the very least, it should give you some cause for concern to see if you're living sinfully or unwisely.

So, if I may say the blunt thing about this topic: When making decisions, I think we would do well to heed that warning not to do what is "**pure in your own eyes**." And to get practical, some of you need to stop putting God's name on your foolishness.

By that, I mean what I've noticed is that in church circles, people will make really bad, foolish decisions and use the language of

- “I feel God is leading me/us to _____.”
- “I’ve been praying about _____ for a while and have peace about it, so that’s what I’m going to do.”
 - Like, I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed this. I see pastors tend to do this a lot. Use the language of “God called me to this, so I’m leaving the church,” or they shock everyone in the church by saying, “I’ve been praying about this for a while, and I’m getting a new job here,” and it’s like maybe you did seek God but it sure sounds like you wanted more money, so just say that.

But I notice it's not just with pastors. People in church do this a lot too. And, my fear is when you use hyper-spiritual language like that, it's as if you're saying, "So don't ask me about it. Don't ask me questions. The decision has been made."

When that happens, what often happens is you're really saying, "I want to do what I want to do. And I just want you to agree with me."

So please, hear me if that's you, please stop over-spiritualizing something you really want to do. Please stop lying about God to make yourself feel better. Take his name out of your mouth. Please stop making decisions on your own and baptizing them in pseudo-spiritual lingo so that no one pushes back on you and you feel better about yourself because you look spiritual. Because when you do that...

- That could very well be why your relationship is the mess that it is...because you're not really getting input from God's Word, and prayer, and His people. You're doing what's pure in your own eyes.
- That's likely why your life is how it is...because people who genuinely love you are trying to tell you otherwise, but you don't wanna hear it when in reality, you are the common denominator behind most, if not all, of your problems
- That's likely why you church hop every 10 years and are about to leave this one... you've over-spiritualized your preferences to the point where no one can push back or speak to you.
 - And when you over-spiritualize things, I genuinely worry that you are creating a terrible trajectory for your soul if you never truly pause and listen to what God and others might be trying to say to you in your decision-making process. You're just doing what's pure in your own eyes without stopping to consider, "Maybe I'm off on this."

So I'm begging you as your pastor, who loves you and wants Jesus for you, please stop putting God's name on something He didn't really say. My concern isn't so much the decision you make as it is how you go about the decision-making process.

And if that's you...please...run to God - the source of all grace and forgiveness and wisdom - He wants to restore you and help you.

This is all to say that I want us to be a church where healthy, wise decision-making is normal and natural. We allow each other to speak into each other's lives because we're all in this together.

Now are there instances of churches manipulating and abusing this idea? Sure.

But please don't let the exceptions take away from what God is saying ought to be the normal pattern

The pattern where... we do life together normally and naturally to help each other become more like Jesus and that definitely will include, at times, challenging each other and speaking into each other's lives because that's necessary for your growth.

Listen if you want a place where you're challenged to be more like Jesus, this is a great place for you. It works if you work it. But we're not here to put on the church face and silently smile and nod politely when you want to blow up your life. We love Jesus and you too much for that.

Homework

So this week in LifeGroup I have some homework for us. And again, I want this to be a normal and natural thing we do, so chill. I'm not asking anything we don't already normally do.

But this week, I want us to all have the freedom to normally and naturally discuss something you're deciding, whether it's about family, budgeting, work, a relationship, or anything in between. And say, "I would like your wisdom on this. What do you think?"

- Then, people can normally and naturally give input with an open/closed hand based on how much biblical data there is on the topic and speak into it. For example, you share what you're thinking through, and people can say something like...
 - Have you been taking this to Jesus first? Where do you sense him leading you? Why is that?
 - Can I tell you what's helped me?
 - Sounds like you're overthinking this, waiting for the perfect choice to fall into your lap, and you just need to choose - and I don't think you're wrong either way
 - Can I tell you some concerns?

Conclusion

Who is behind it all - LORD, Yahweh.

The God who is near. Who is with us. Who loves us.

We live in a world created by a God who loves you. Who wants to help you and guide you so that you're not stumbling through the dark. He gives you His Word. He gives you the gift of prayer. He gives you the gift of church family. And what's even more - He gives you Himself to help you to live life wisely.

He sent His Son - made flesh 2,000 years ago - who committed His whole life ...

So that you're not stuck on your own. So that you're not simply doing what's pure in your own eyes. But you have God made flesh, who you can look to, who gives you grace, and love, and wisdom beyond measure so that you as you make decisions, He is with you every step of the way.