

We have decisions to make all the time. Some of little consequence, and others that have a lasting consequence and can shape the direction of our lives and the lives of our family, and somehow it seems that it seems to be more difficult to make decisions today than perhaps it was at some times in the past, and I think that part of the reason for that is that there are so many different options for so many different things in our lives. It used to be that we had a few options, and today there's really unlimited choices it seems.

I want you to imagine for me going into the grocery store and walking down the aisle that's labeled 'cereal', and then I want you to go back at some time and remember that there used to be no such thing as cold cereal, and then just corn flakes and raisin bran and shredded wheat, and now there are countless varieties. I mean there's almost half a dozen types of Cheerios, even a small subset of our cereal aisle. And I think that's just one of the many things in which we find a wide variety of options, and I think that could be part of what makes decision making difficult.

A second reason that seems to be true, especially for emerging generations are the first ones to deal with what you might call the illusion of perfection, and it's a common problem because of it. Being able to share things online, we're able to see people's lives through a different lens than we might otherwise be able to see it. It used to be that you knew about your imperfect home and your imperfect friends and their imperfect families, and you got a first row seat to those imperfections. But today, because of social media, being able to share things, we see what many call the illusion of perfection. You see a snapshot of someone else's life, and it just looks perfect. You look online, and you say, "Well, look at their family, don't they just look lovely? And they're in matching outfits all the time, and they're behind this barn door. And is that their place or is that someone else's?" And you see their meal, and you look, "That looks almost too beautiful to eat. How do they put that together? I'm barely finding time to put something on the table."

And you know how it looks like, their lives look perfect. And then you reflect on your own life, and you think, "Oh man, it's not so good for me." We compare other people's highlight reels with our behind the scenes, and then we conclude that our lives maybe aren't so great because theirs looks so perfect. Have you ever had this struggle? You know how it is. There's that person with the perfect relationship over there on the perfect date, or the perfect meal, and then you compare the perfect meal with what you pulled out of the refrigerator in front of you and you think, "Well, this'll sustain my body. It has the calories I need." And then there's this idea that when it comes to faith as well that sometimes we think that God has a perfect plan for our lives, and we don't want to miss it.

So many people say that there must be one perfect person for everybody to be in a relationship with, which I think is kind of funny because if you think about it, if one person marries the wrong person, well then the whole system's blown, and let me be clear, I don't think it works exactly like that. And yet still we find ourselves not wanting to miss the perfect plan that God has for us, and because there's this illusion of perfection out there, there's this whole group of people that struggle about making the decision that might not be perfect, and so instead of making imperfect decisions we instead end up making no decision at all, which can end up being even more trouble.

So how do we grow in our decision making? How do we find the divine direction for our lives in both big ways and small? Well, we're going to take a closer look at the scriptures and first at the apostle Paul. Now, if anybody should understand what God's will is and what the divine direction would be for his life,

it's got to be Paul, right? I mean this guy wrote most of the new testament, he started churches all over the ancient [inaudible 00:04:25], and if anybody has what God has in mind I would think it's got to be the apostle Paul. So let's take a look at one of Paul's own letters that he wrote to one of the churches that he'd started, and just see how many details he knows about what's coming in the future. In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 16, Paul writes this in Verse 6:

"I may stay with you or even spend the winter there in Corinth," that's the name of the town, "so that you can send me on my way to wherever I'm off to next." Did you see that? I may stay with you or I may not. I might even be there all winter. Have you ever had a guest that's said, "Well, I might stay, or I might be with you all winter." What's after Corinth? Who knows. Wherever I'm off to next, Paul says. And Verse 7 it continues, "I don't want to make a quick visit to you, since I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord lets it happen." I don't want to just visit you for a little while. I know, I'm certain, no, no, I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord lets it happen.

It seems that perhaps even Paul didn't have a clue about exactly what was coming up next. He didn't know the details, and yet he served God very effectively. He served God right where he was and took the next faithful step in his life. And if you ever feel a little bit like Paul, uncertain about what exactly it is that's coming next in your life, take comfort in knowing that God doesn't always show us the details of the future, but God walks with us step, by step, by step. God walks with us. A lot of times we may find ourselves saying, "God, just show me what to do, and just show me the way that you have for me." And God doesn't always show us the way. God doesn't always show us what to do, but instead God gives us wisdom to decide. Wisdom is one of the most important traits that we can pursue.

You remember the story of Solomon, king of Israel. In a dream God said to him, "You can have whatever you want, what is it Solomon that you want to ask for?" What Solomon doesn't say is, "Give me riches, give me power, destroy my enemies." But what he does say is, "Help me be a good king. Give me the wisdom to know right from wrong, give me wisdom to make faithful decisions as I lead these people." And God said, "Hey, because you didn't ask for all these other things, I'm going to give them to you as well, and I'm going to give you wisdom."

This very same Solomon is the one who according to tradition wrote the words from Proverbs Chapter 4, Verse 7, "The beginning of wisdom," how do you get it? "Get wisdom," he says, "Get understanding before anything else." Very direct here. Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do. How do you do it? However it is you've got to get it, and while you may not have had a dream with God asking you questions about would you rather have this or would you rather have that, you may have reached some point in your life, whether you are 30 or 40 or 50, at some point, wherever it is, wherever your age you may find a place where you say something like this, "You know, I wish I knew back then what I know now." Have you ever said that? "I wish I knew back then what I know now." Do you know what that is? That's wisdom. You've received wisdom.

Wisdom above anything else is more valuable than gold. Solomon said, "Get wisdom." I want divine direction, God show me what to do. That God won't always show us what to do, but God will give you wisdom to decide. So how do we move towards wisdom? And I have three simple thoughts to offer for you, and it should be easy to remember, and that will help us move in God's divine direction, the direction towards wisdom. And the first thing is this, it's just simple words; walk with the wise. Walk with the wise. Proverbs 13:20 says this, "Walk with wise people," our scripture for today, "and become

wise. Befriend fools and get in trouble." Walk with wise people. What happens when you walk with wise people? You become wise. And befriend fools. What happens when you make friends with fools? Get in trouble. Maybe you've heard this advice or someone has offered it to you. Pay attention to who you spend your time around because you'll start looking more and more like them. Walk with wise people and become wise, make friends with fools and get in trouble. We find this to be true.

If you want to be a person that's looking more like Jesus, then spend time with those who are following after Jesus. I love this image, we call it to walk with the wise. It's a way of doing life together, moving through both the exciting times, the joys as well as the concerns, the challenging times in our lives. Walking together through life. And it's not just like going to ask a wise person for advice. We're actually connected and doing life together. It's one of the reasons why we have groups that meet together outside of worship or Sunday school classes, and other opportunities for us to gather together, to be with people, to live life together. And what we need, all of us, is other people who are consistently in our lives, because being in church one hour a week is not enough.

We need people to walk constantly with us who lead us in the right direction. And you might find yourself in a place where you look at someone else that says, "You know, you're living faithfully in a way that I want for my own life. I want to live in that way." And you might find yourself being the example, being able to help someone else walk with Jesus. If you want to make better decisions, hang around with better people. If you want God as a direction, hang out with God's people. That doesn't mean that you're not supposed to connect with people who are far away from God, but it means that at the same time you're also walking with those who are walking with Jesus. You walk with the wise and you become wise.

The second thing we're going to do is this, it's to ask, just to ask God. James Chapter 1, Verse 5 says this, "But anyone who needs wisdom should ask God. His very nature is to give to everyone without a second thought, without keeping a score. Wisdom will certainly be given to those who ask." If any of you lacks wisdom, what should you do? You should ask God. Ask God for wisdom and God will give you wisdom. Another picture of this we find in the Psalms 32, Verse 8 in which God says this, "I will instruct you and teach you about the direction you should go. I'll advise you and I'll keep my eye on you." And when I read this scripture and I think about God keeping God's eye on us, I just have a picture of something that you may have remembered from your life, and that's learning to ride a bicycle, and an adult who is maybe helping you do that. And maybe many parents have that opportunity with children.

And you know how it goes, you've got the bicycle, and the child is on the bicycle, or you're on your bicycle, and there's someone right behind that's holding the seat, and you're running along with them and you run along but then you let go and it's good for just a second, and then they realize, "Wait a minute, no one's holding on anymore." And they crash immediately. At least that's how it was for me. But then it begins to catch along and instead of holding on you're just running along beside. You're not giving direction, you're not pointing them, turning the wheel for them, but you're keeping your eye on them and it gives them the confidence to be able to ride.

And I believe the same idea is the way that God keeps God's eye on us. That in our lives we have the opportunity to choose, to follow after God, to turn away from God, but God gives us wisdom to decide and God has God's eye on us. Walking with us, along with us every step of the way. God will teach us

about the direction that we should go, God will keep an eye on us. Walk with the wise, ask and God will give you wisdom.

And the third thing is this, just decide. When you have a decision to make in your life and you're agonizing, "Should I go this way or should I go that way?" Ask for wisdom, walk with the wise, and then just decide. Sometimes I struggle with the question, "Well, how do I know if this is from God? I'd this open door, this possibility, the way that my heart is desiring, is this from God or is this from the forces of evil?" Sometimes it's hard to know. Use the bible as a guide. When we look through the scriptures there are certain things that are very clear that God says, "Don't do those things." And also we look to the scriptures and God says, "Well, always do these things." And whenever God speaks in a clear way our response is to follow after that. But what about when there's not clear direction in scripture? What about when there's parts that seem to be in conflict? Well, God gives you the wisdom to decide.

There are so many different things that we can get all worked up about and God says, "Decide. I trust you. Make a call." This is what Paul did. In 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 3, Verse 1 we read this, "So when we couldn't stand it any longer, we thought it was a good idea to stay on in Athens by ourselves." Paul is seeking God's direction for his life from his ministry and he says, "We thought it was a good idea." We thought about it, we considered it, we thought it was a good idea. We thought it was a good idea.

God didn't give them the exact road map ahead, God didn't say anything, we just made a decision, and there are times when you just have to make a decision. Where you just have to take the next step forward knowing that you have lived as faithfully as you were able to to this point, and the very next step you're seeking to live as faithfully as you can as well. And in that God gives us the wisdom to make decisions, and in that as well God will continue to walk with us, God will never leave us or forsake us, but walks with us every step of the way. And even if that step, you find later, is one that was leading you away from God, God continues to lead us closer and draw us back to the path that God might have in mind for us. God gives us wisdom, God gives us the ability to decide, and the good news is that God is watching over you. God has God's eye on you and walks with you no matter what the future may hold.

So walk with the wise, ask God for wisdom, and decide to take the next faithful step into what God has for you. Will you pray with me? Oh God, we confess that sometimes we struggle to make decisions, and we want your direction. Help us to trust in your wisdom, to follow your goodness, and to live for you all of our days. We offer ourselves to you in Jesus name. Amen.