



## **Wise Decisions**

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Well, I don't know if anybody's excited about the New Year, but if you are inevitably you'll meet the old curmudgeon who will say, "Well, that's just another day on the calendar. It doesn't mean anything. Just another day." Or maybe you are that curmudgeon who says that. If you are, I just would suggest you don't toss that attitude around if you're in the presence of Christ. I would just say that's probably not a good idea because the God who created us is a God who created us in a reality to have fresh starts all the time. Matter of fact, he makes you go unconscious every night for a while, and you wake up and you get this fresh start on a new morning, a new day. And then there's this monthly thing that he calls in the Bible the new moons. There's a new month every month. And then there are these seasons that follow one after the next in a mathematical symmetry.

And then we take this whole circuit around the sun in 365.25 days and you have this thing in the Bible called the Feast of Trumpets where you have what is now modernly called Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah, two Hebrew words. "Rosh" is the "head." "Shana" is the year, the head of the year. It's the biblical civil beginning of the year. It's the new year. And there is a new year celebration. It's the Feast of Trumpets. You blow the trumpet, you can't go to work. You can't take a normal day of work. You can do no ordinary work as it's translated in Leviticus 23. And it really is, if you were to summarize it, a day to just pause and kind of reflect, and you are to rethink things and you're to kind of recalibrate. And then, of course, the whole point is you restart, you're going to do a new year and another set of seasons. And of course, in an agrarian society, those seasons are so important. And you start another cycle, another year.

And so if you're going to have that attitude, it's just another day. And I know that January 1st, it is just a day on our civil calendar now in the modern era it is just another day, but it's a day marking the fact that we've come full circle here and the way that we judge time. And that is a biblical thing because God is a God of fresh and new starts. And that only makes sense for us as beings who are made in the image of God. And it's good for us to think about that. Made in the image of God we have a particular ontology, a particular definition of being as human beings made in the image of God, in that we have the ability to not only reflect on our own lives, but be able to kind of, as I put it, recalibrate our lives and make decisions. That's what we are as volitional beings like God, we are able to make decisions that affect kind of how we move into the next season, the fresh start, a new day, a new month, a new year.

And it's a good thing for us to have these times. Even in Scripture we see that new year celebration, Leviticus 23, to kind of rethink and kind of recommit to some things. And I think that is important. And you need to see that volitional capacity that we have, being made in the image of God, is something that animals don't have. It's not like your dog needs a new year to kind of think about, "Oh, did I bark too much last year? And, you know, maybe I should cut back on that." Or, you know, honey bees don't say, "Well, I think our honey wasn't as sweet as it could have been and we should work a little harder at this." Or, you know, horses don't say, "Well, I kind of passed by my friends in the stable too often. I should stop and fellowship



more." They don't need fresh starts. They're instinctual animals and we're not. We're more than that. We're made in the image of God to make decisions, to reflect, to think, to evaluate and to decide here's what I'm going to do.

And I say decide, because the only difference between last year and next year, if it's going to be a better year next year, and I mean that biblically, like you are going to be more Christlike, you're going to bear more fruit, right? You're going to be someone who is, as Paul said to the Corinthians, transforming from one level of the reflection of the glory of the Triune God to the next." Right? If I'm going to be more like Christ and keep making progress in our sanctification, to use theological terms, then I've got to make decisions that are going to help me move in that direction. And so in that regard it's not just another day, it is just another day, I guess in one sense. But it's a day for us, I think, to do what we see as a pattern in the Scripture to stop, to pause, to rethink, got to reevaluate, to recalibrate, got to get kind of reset and then restart, move forward. And so I want to take the opportunity here in the last sermon of the year to spend time talking about our decisions. And I think this is very, very important.

Now, if you're visiting today or you're new, this is not normally the way we preach the Bible. Usually we take one passage. It's the focus of the content of the sermon. Sometimes we even take the structure of the passage becomes the structure of the message. And every other passage we use just elucidates and elaborates on that particular truth. Then we call it expository preaching, where the preacher is just used to give a voice to that particular text. And that's not what we're doing this morning. It's the exception to the rule. And for that I don't apologize, I just want to say that this isn't the normal way to go about it. And I think if you're trained well in expository preaching and you're a good student and a consumer of it, you can take a sermon like this and know that we're staying within biblical parameters to kind of create an outline based on the need, in this case, what is the need to think biblically about fresh starts, new starts? In this case, a fresh start 365 days around the sun to say, okay, what does the Bible have to say about the decisions that compound into moving us into a better place next year? Better in terms of biblical definitions. I want to be more like Christ. I want to bear more fruit. I want to be a better Christian this next year and a better person. Right? That God would say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant." I'd like to move in that direction.

So decisions as a topic what does the Bible have to say? And I've got at least ten passages I want you to look at. I know that's a lot. The sermon will only be about 2.5 hours (audience laughing) but we're going to look at ten passages at least as you see on the worksheet if you pulled it out or downloaded it. And I just want to think in logical chunks here. And I would be remiss and they would sue me for clergy malpractice if I did not start with the foundational, critical decisions that we all must make. So let's start with that. Give it a heading and then let's dive into our first text which is found in Ephesians Chapter 1. And the first heading here, Number One, is we need to make "Critical Foundational Decisions." And you may say, well, I've already made these. Well, great, recommit yourself to them, rethink them, reaffirm them, recommit to them, and say these are the things that as a Christian I know I need to do these things if I'm going to move into the new year with something that is better than what was going on last year.



So Ephesians Chapter 1, let's think of the first and foremost critical, foundational decision everyone needs to make. It's found here in the passage. And as you're going there don't throw a flag Mr. Theologian Guy. Okay, smart guy. I get it. You're going to throw a flag and say what decisions you're going to talk about this particular topic. Don't you know that Ephesians 2 is there? I do know Ephesians 2 is there. I do, I promise, and I know what it says, that "we are dead in our transgressions and sins." I know that. And I know verse 5, I mean even that sense of a passive verb there, that God "makes us alive" together with him "in Christ." I know that.

But in the experience of the human life of us becoming followers of Christ, there is that place where this experience of Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 13 is a reality for us. And so I want to look at this and I want to start with that. I know you don't like the word "decision," but let's utilize it in this capacity because certainly in human experience that's what it is. And if that doesn't mean anything to you and I totally lost you in that, great. Then just forget I said it. But for the smarty pants in the room, I just need to say that much. Okay. Verse 13. Are you ready? Let's read the first one, the first most critical decision of all, Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 13. "In him," right? Here we got a pronoun. We got to go back to the antecedent. The antecedent there is the word "Christ" in verse 12. So, "in Christ," in him, in Christ "you also when you heard the word of truth." What are you talking about? "The gospel of your salvation." So to get right with God to where I don't have to be punished for my sin, I get saved from the punishment of my sins. Okay, I "heard the message of truth," and I hope this is past tense for you, you "heard the message of truth" and someone explain to you what it was to have the good news, the gospel of not having to pay for your sins and to hear "depart from me into outer darkness." I don't want that, right?

What had to happen? Here it goes, comma, "and believed in him." Well if that happened, then you were "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who's the guarantee of our inheritance" until we acquire possession of it "to the praise of his glory" and the praise of his grace which he goes on to talk about in great emphasis in Chapter 2. And it is all of grace, and I get it, it is all of grace. But the thing here that I need to look at is I need to be able to look at my life and say in the experience of my life I had the truth of God's word explained to me, particularly the subset truth of how it is to get right with God. How do I get reconciled with God? How do I get saved from the penalty of my sins? Right? Well, the response needs to be "you believed in him."

Now "believe," I often say, when we study this concept of what it is to respond to the gospel, the good news of our salvation, to believe. Right? It's good that we have this preposition next to it "in him, to believe in him." Because if not, we get confused with some things like in James 2 where even the demons believe. "Believe" is almost too weak of an English word to translate this Greek New Testament word "pisteuō," because it really means something rich and deep, particularly when it's attached to a preposition like the preposition "in." I am believing "in him" for my salvation, which means this is a kind of trust, a confidence that if I don't get punishment for my sins, I know it's going to be because I had a little help from Jesus, but I did a lot of good things. It can't be that. I have to believe in him. I have to trust in him alone to be saved. And I need to look at my life and say have I done that? And I want to



make sure I've done that. And if you've done that, I just want to make sure that in your mind you can say I affirm that this is the reality of my life. In the past, whether it was last week, last year, or 35 years ago, I put my trust fully in him.

Let's put it this way, Letter "A." You need to make the critical foundational decision, and if you haven't yet do it today, to fully trust in Christ. I'm fully trusting Christ. That if I were to die today I know that I would be right with my creator not because I've done good works, not because I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps, not because I tried really hard, but because I completely trust that Jesus lived in my place and that he absorbed the penalty of my sin on a cross. And I'm trusting in his finished work. I'm trusting fully in him.

Okay, this is not a sermon about that topic although I got to start there or I get defrocked, right? I mean, this is important that you know that we have to make sure that nothing else matters in this sermon if this is not in place in your life. And I hope all of you have a testimony of saying, I heard the message of truth, I heard the message of the gospel and God's grace grabbed me and I trusted fully in him. And I can say today I reaffirm and I absolutely recommit myself to trusting fully in Christ. Great. Check. Fantastic. I can't have a good next year without that. Okay? That wasn't hard.

Mark Chapter 1. In Mark Chapter 1, drop all the way down to verse 35. I wanted to say something about if you are a Christian, you're reconciled to God, you have a relationship with the living God, then you had better make this critical foundational decision and you ought to say, I'm recommitting myself to it. I may have made it in the past but I'm going to make it again right now that this has to happen in the new year. Verse 35 is the example of Jesus himself. Did you find the passage? And rising "very early in the morning, while it was still dark he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Okay. Jesus, while unique in the sense that he is the prophet, he is the word of God, he is bringing the message of God, Hebrews 1, "God has spoken" in many portions and in many ways in the Old Testament, but now he is "speaking to us through his Son."

We know he is giving truth, it is coming out of his mouth and he knows the written truth before he came, the prophets. He was there as a 12-year-old, able to discourse with the greatest, you know, biblical thinkers of his time. So he knows the word of God. He is proclaiming the word of God. I mean, he is the embodiment of the word of God. And he's going out now praying. And so those two things need to happen. I'm not the Messiah. You're not the Messiah. You're not the incarnate word of God, so you and I need to study the word of God, and we need to pray, just like he did. As he was praying and expressing his heart to God we need to do the same, and we need to do it like he does it and that is a regular commitment.

Let's just put it this way. Number two or Letter "B," to daily give time to the Bible and to prayer. And I know the Bible is not mentioned in this text, but I have tried to explain to you with a precursor to saying this, why he is not even described as taking the scrolls out into the desolate place. But we're going to need to take the scrolls out into the desolate place, wherever our desolate place is. And you ought to think about that. Do you have in this new year a commitment to know where you're going to meet with God every day? And here's a



time for him when he met with him. Do you know when you're going to meet with God every day, to read his word and to pray to him? And I don't know how you did last year. You had 365 days last year. And if you said, well, I'm committed to spending time with God, reading the Bible, praying, I'm into that. I just wonder, how did that go? Like, if you look back and I'm saying, well, however it went, if it wasn't like stellar and flawless in that time, well then let's move into the new year with a recommitment to that basic truth. I'm committed to every single day having a time and a place. A place that's not interrupted, a desolate place, that's a good thing, a place where you know you can shut out the world and you can read God's word, you can ingest the truth, and you can express your heart to God in prayer. Bible study and prayer, it's the staple of Christian life and it's not going to happen unless you prioritize it and prioritize it means you're going to have to commit yourself to it by saying, I'm deciding to do this afresh.

And we do a lot around here to try to encourage that, right? In our Daily Bible Reading, our DBR, we try to say, do that with us so we can talk about it. We can have it on our minds. This morning we read Malachi, for instance. It's so important in the last chapter of, I mean, we start fresh tomorrow and all I'm telling you is get at least on a reading plan like that, use ours. Please just join us in doing that in the new year, and also pick a book of the New Testament and just study it one verse at a time, one verse a day. Dig deep, get a journal, talk about it. Talk to God about it. Understand it in its context. Get a study Bible. Get a commentary. Do something to dig into the word so that you can be like Jesus at 12 and be able to discuss theological truths with pastors, right? I mean that ought to be your goal, that you can do that because you're studying God's word and you're praying, you got a prayer system, right?

When someone like Jesus encountered and he was going to pray for him he didn't forget. He had a system. He had a pattern. I know that because he taught his disciples in Matthew 6 a method of how to pray. So he had a method. He prayed. He made sure to touch different bases in his prayer life. You need to have that as a commitment. Are you committed in the new year to saying every day, 365 times, I'm going to spend time with God? It is a priority. Now, if stuff comes up, a crisis comes up. Yes. But please make that your commitment. Let's do better next year than we did last year. That's all I'm saying here. Give yourself to that critical, foundational decision that every Christian should have to give daily time, daily time to the Bible and prayer. And I wouldn't mind saying follow the exact pattern, get up before anyone else is up, and find a place that is absolutely quiet and give yourself to that work. Okay. So far so good? Are you still with me on that?

How about First Timothy Chapter 3? First Timothy Chapter 3. Ten primary passages we'll look at. Here's the third one. If I'm talking about Christians who are trusting in Christ fully, spending time daily with him, here's something you must do. You must make this rekindled commitment to decide to make the new year all about this. And I just want to quote one verse here, verse 15. First Timothy Chapter 3. Paul is writing, I guess I should give you 14 to just give the whole sentence here. Paul is writing to Timothy, he's in Ephesus, Paul saying, "I hope to come to you soon, but I'm writing these things so that," if I don't, "if I'm delayed," verse 15, "you may know how one ought to behave," I love this, "in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."



Now we often rush to the last phase, "a pillar and buttress, holding up the truth." It is a place where the truth is there on display. It's like the lampstand picture of the Church. It's like a lampstand, it's shining brightly. And there it is. And here it is, it's described as a household of God, a church, the church of the living God. Okay. Church. The word church, I know you've probably heard it explained in its component parts. Ekklesia is the Greek New Testament word, "Ekk' is "out of," "Kaleo" is "to call," ekklesia. Great, that's fine. But the way that it's used, right? Those component parts are interesting "to be called out," but the way that it's used is to describe as a noun the assembly of people assembling together. The church is an assembly. And if you say, I'm a part of the church, I'm a part of the household of God, the church, I would say this: how can you be a part of the church if you're not churching? What does that mean? Assembling. How can you be part of the ekklesia if you're not ekklesing, you've got to gather. You have to be a part of the church.

I mean, it's a contradiction. It's like people saying I'm a follower of Christ. And you say, well, let's look at your life. Are you trying to follow Christ? "Nah, I don't want to follow Christ. I do what I want." Well, you're not a follower of Christ if you're not following Christ, right? And you're not the church if you're not assembling. Right? How are you part of the assembly of God if you're not assembling? You have to get together and assemble. And that is the house of God. That's where the "pillar and buttress that holds up the truth" is, and it's talked about, it's taught, you know, people are they're given to that job, right? That we say you don't work in the marketplace or in the fields. You go and you just study and pray and lead and you teach and you teach teachers, and you get people in the church to be all about holding up the truth so I can go to church and have the truth explained. I can have it applied, I can have it understood. I can have it broadcast. Let's go to the church where we assemble with the church of the living God. It's a household of God. This is my family and I need to be there.

Let's use the word "congregation," let's use it as a verb and make our third point, Letter "C." What you need to do is to consistently congregate with your church, because you're really not a part of the ekklesia if you're not assembling. Right? So I need to assemble. And if I said, okay, you had 52, let's just look at the weekends, 52 opportunities last year to assemble with your household of God, the faith, the family of God, your sub-congregation, if you will. And that means that, of course, the Church of God is the whole thing out there. But of the 114, 118 times the word ekklesia is used in the New Testament, I mean, about 90 plus times are used describing a particular church in a particular place. The church in Ephesus, the church in Philippi, the church in Colossae. And here this is your church, I assume, unless you're visiting, this is your church. And I'm saying you need to commit yourself in the new year to say I am going to congregate with those people. I mean, in the same physical space with them, and I'm going to do it "all the more," to quote Hebrews now, "all the more as I see the Day drawing near."

The smarter you are in Christ, it doesn't follow that the less you should be assembling. Or the longer you grow in your Christian life, the less you need to be at church. "The more," the Bible says, "we see the Day approaching," which is assuming the time of your maturity and your sanctification, you should be doing it all the more. The urgency of being congregating in the church is so helpful when I even see the picture of it, it holds up the truth. Because the Bible



says, and Jesus says, the world is run by the evil one. First John 5, where "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Second Corinthians 4:4, "the god of this world." Well, there's a little flock, Hebrews 12 Jesus called them, of Christians, and that little flock it congregates together in a place where the truth is upheld, like the light shining in a dark place. All around is hostile to Christian truth but in that one place Christian truth is expounded upon all the time. You ought to be there. You ought to be there physically, and you need to say out of every opportunity I have to assemble with my church, I'm going to take advantage of that like I never have before.

Which, by the way, when that becomes your commitment there are a lot of decisions that surround that, that start to get really clear. Should I buy that cabin up in Big Bear? Should I buy that boat and put it in the harbor in Dana Point? Well, not if the only time you can use it is the weekend. Not if it means you're not going to assemble with your church. This is going to help sort out your priorities. And if you want to do the fundamental, critical, central decisions every Christian should be making, to fully trust in Christ, to make sure I'm spending time with God every day. Well, the next thing is making sure we're assembling together regularly all the time. And that just needs to be your commitment.

Is it convicting enough or am I meddling in your life enough here with this? It only gets worse. First Peter Chapter 4. First Peter 4. At least this one it feels like a little worse. Go to First Peter Chapter 4. And again, these are like foundational, fundamental. These should be no surprise to you. But all I'm saying is let's do the work of what this sermon is intended to do and that is let's recommit ourselves to this. Yes, I'll do that. Yes, I'm fully trusting in Christ. Yes, I'm going to spend time with God. I want to spend 365 days making sure I have a time carved out every day with God and I want to be at church every time the doors are open and it applies to my age group or whatever or my station, I'm going to be there. Great, good.

One more thing as it relates to fundamental critical decisions you got to make. First Peter Chapter 4. Let's start in verse 10. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another." Well, there's the command. "Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace." Now God gives his grace. And now this is an allusion to First Corinthians Chapter 12. He gives his grace into every believer's life in a varied way, in different ways. And in those different ways they all now have a stewardship to utilize what God has invested in them for the good of the church to quote First Corinthians 12:4. I want to be used by God. And if I thought about assembling and utilizing my gifts in the church, well, of course I'm going to do that. And to be a good steward I've got to do that.

And that's why this morning I did not wake up and say, I kind of like the cloudy weather, and I hear there's big surf and I'm just going to go down and I'm going to eat a breakfast burrito, and I'm going to skip church this morning. Mike Fabarez did not wake up this morning thinking about skipping church today. Because if I did you would notice. Right? If I said I'm not coming, I better announce that, like, days in advance. Right? And my staff would like it to be weeks in advance. It would be good to know if someone else is going to have to fill your role on a Sunday morning. Right? So all I'm saying is I know I can't just skip our time together because of this Letter "D," which is I have to, I put it this way, diligently steward my gifts in the church.



So you need to diligently steward your gifts in the church. So you need to say, I have a role to play in the church and I need to fulfill it.

It's one of the reasons if Letter "D" is in place, I don't even need to talk about Letter "C," because of course you're going to be here because you got a role to play here and you're going to fulfill that role. And you don't come just as a passive recipient of the good things that happened at church, you are now a contributor to the good things that happen at church, and you have a role to play. Now, that doesn't mean every time the doors are open, you're fulfilling that role, right? But it does mean that you know that I have a ministry post in that church. It could be something like you're working let's say you're working in the Compass Connect table out there trying to give people who are new to the church the right information about who we are and answer questions. If you decided, hey, surfs good, kind of nice, I'm going to go out and kind of watch the waves destroy the coast today, and I'm going to have a breakfast burrito, and I'm just going to skip church this morning. If you're working the Compass Connect table, you better call someone, right? Because they're expecting you to be there. And there will be a hole, right?

It may not be as obvious to everyone in the church if I didn't show up, but there's going to be a lack. And you need to say, well, that's why I can't just skip it. I have a role to play there. Even if you're working in the parking lot, directing traffic, whether you're a greeter or an usher, right? Whether, think about this throughout the week, whether you're on the prayer team or our care team or our cards of encouragement team, whether you're hosting a small group in your house, right? If you didn't show up, if you were out driving around, like the small group shows up, they can't even get in your house, right? You need to have a role, a ministry post, I like to call it. And you know what your role is. And some of you going into the new year you just every now and then showed up for something said, well, I can volunteer to do that, I guess. But you don't have a ministry post. Can I just challenge you to move into the next level of fruitfulness and maturity and reflecting the glory of Christ in your life by having one, by you saying I'm going to be more diligent to steward my gifts, how God has invested in me, his grace, so that I can be useful in the church.

I'm going to work with the youth in the church. I'm going to volunteer to lead a table discussion in our college program. I'm going to work with the Awana program this year. I'm going to teach Sunday school. I'm going to do whatever it is. It may be as simple as a one-on-one Partners discipleship relationship. But again, if you don't show up for that, it matters. And that's why I'm saying everyone needs a ministry post. Keep reading. Right?

I don't care what it is. You ought to be fully in, verse 11. "Whoever speaks, as one who speaks the oracles of God." In other words, an oracle of God, like a brand new thing. It's like you didn't know it and then here comes the speaker pulling back the curtains and you seeing it. It has to do with the way you do it. In other words, I should be up here preaching as though this is the most important sermon I've ever preached. Right? When you're leading you should do the same thing. You should have this sense of this is so important. There should be an enthusiasm and energy and importance and urgency to it all. And so it is. If you got a speaking role, do it like with all of your heart. Do it like it matters. And if you serve, look at the





second half of verse 11, "as one who serves with the muscles of God; like you got the strength of God," You're serving like a crazy person the way you serve, right? "In order that in everything," like if everyone does their job and has a ministry post and they enthusiastically tackle that, think about it, "in order that in everything," I mean from the prayer team to the ushers to the small group leaders, everything, "God may be glorified," that there's this sense of like, wow, that's important. That's big, that's fantastic. That's glorious. "Through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." That's right.

So here's this picture of a church that is functioning, a glorious church that's firing on all cylinders. Why? Because everyone's got a ministry post. Every real Christian who has trusted in Christ, not only spends time with God every day, they're coming to everything, and then they know what their role is when they get there and they have a role to play. It doesn't mean every time the doors are open they have a particular role in that service, but they know how they contribute to the church, right? And I even use that phrase when I think about finances. We read Malachi today about everyone should be contributing their financial resources, some proportion of it that you decide that you give generously. The church is glorious when you give not just your resources monetarily, but when you give your effort and the things God has invested in you, your skills, your gifts. And when the church is working like that, this would be the most amazing church in the world if everyone who was saved here says I'm all in. If I'm going to serve, I'm going to serve like it's the most important thing I can do, and I'm going to be committed to that.

The church is better, but that's not why I'm saying it. I'm not saying it as a leader of an organization. I'm saying it as a pastor for your spiritual good. If you want to go from whatever you were last year to something even greater next year, these are four fundamental, basic commitments every person must make and you need like redecide these all the time. I decide today to trust fully in Christ. I decide today to spend time with God every single day. I decide today to be an active participant in my church, and I'm going to serve there and use my skills, my gifts, my time, my energy, my resources to do something great in my church. The church just becomes what it should be. And you become the kind of mature, Christ-honoring person that you haven't been in the past, at least to a new level. Okay, that's a sermon in itself, but we like to preach several sermons in one sermon slot, so let's keep going. That got a groan from you and not a laugh. I realize it wasn't funny. I never try to be funny, but I thought I'd have a little bit more levity in your response.

Number Two, let's talk about "Necessary Directional Decisions." Okay? Let's just create this category here and just think logically and pastorally. You come in a church, you're a Christian. Okay. These are four foundational decisions you need to make and keep on making. There are some decisions here. Two of them I want to look at that relate to the direction of your life. Let's just talk about walking into January 1st. You're going to walk into a new year, right? And basically you ask God what am I going to do? Like I got 12 months, I got 52 weeks, I got 168 hours every week. I got 365 days. I'm going to walk into this and assuming Christ doesn't blow the world up before December, I'm going to go around the sun one more time. What am I going to do with this time? Right?



You're going to make decisions about your daily schedule and you say, well, I've already made decisions about that because I've chosen what I'm doing with my life. Right? But I'm just saying, let's just think about that and make sure that's something that reflects the biblical priority. So jot this reference down. Let's go to it. And then we'll fill in Letter "A" when we talk about directional, necessary directional decisions. Go with me to Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. Here's a passage that reminds these Thessalonians that they have no excuse at all if you're a Christian to be an idle person. You should be busy at work. Verse 11, "For we hear that some among you walk in idleness." You're not busy at work. You get up and walk around, but you're just "busybodies." You're not doing any work, any productive effort. There's no labor here that results in something good.

"Now such persons we command and we encourage." That's a weak translation of a word that's translated variously "Parakaleō." It would be better translated "exhort." At least it has a little more teeth to it. The idea is we come alongside of you and direct you to do this. That's what the context of this particular usage of the word parakaleō means. "Now such persons we command," this is required, and we just firmly take you and push you in the direction "in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." Now that's the end of this inclusio that we see starting in verse 10, which is if you're "not willing to work, you shouldn't be allowed to eat." You got to work. And while we're talking about gainful employment, at least that's the subject that you should have a job that gives you a paycheck that allows you to buy your own sandwiches. That's the idea here. It just goes beyond that when you think about the concept of labor or work.

Because you could say I've saved up a lot of money or I work some job, I got this big pension, I don't need to work, I got money. You cannot say that you don't need to work just because you're eating just fine without a paycheck. Work is a pre-fall gift of God. It's the way that God made us. As I quoted often this last month or so in the sermons, I just keep getting back to this for various reasons. The passage where Jesus says, I'm always working. Do you know why I'm always working? "Because my Father is always working." Why? Because God is a God who works. He does things that produce something productive. They do something useful. The work, the effort, the labor. And I'm saying I don't care if you're retired. It doesn't matter that you don't need a paycheck. I don't care if you're the, you know, the heir of a mass fortune. You should be doing something with the next 365 days that's productive.

I put it this way, Letter "A," you need to make this necessary directional decision of doing honest work. Whatever it is. You don't need a paycheck? Great. Then you got more options. But it ought to be honest work. It ought to be good work. It ought to be work that you look at the end of the day and say this was something productive. I did something here. And you can say, well, I'm old. You know, I don't have any strength left. Well, I don't know how to put this. I put it offensively last night. I don't know how to put it, but I would say this. Great. You can't bear the weight of responsibility maybe you had when you were 35. Fine. But you got to do something with your time. You've got to take your time and say how can I be productive here in something that's honest and good?



Obviously, there are things you can't do, right? You can't sit around and say what am I to do next year? I'm going to be a bank robber, right? No no, no. This is honest work. This has to please the Lord and quiet work, I like that. It's not like you're just making a splash. Well, I want to be on, you know, America's top models or something, right? You don't have to be famous. You don't have to be an influencer. You just need to do work. Quiet work. Whatever it takes for you at the end of the day to say, like God, I am doing something that is good, that it's more than just sitting around passively and being entertained all day long. And I just want you to work, honest work. I need you to take this job seriously, whatever it is. Raising kids, right? Whether you're retired and you're doing X, Y, or Z, maybe you're throwing yourself into ministry at the church. Great. Make sure your work though is good, honest work and you're actively doing something. Like don't be passive. Continue to do something with the capacities you have until you can't do anymore. And at some point you can't do any more. There's not much of your life left, I suppose, at that point, and then you won't be here much longer anyway. But the point is work until you can't work. I don't know. That's partially as offensive as I got last night. It was more worse last night. Last sermon of the year. All right.

One more passage and we'll get Letter "B" here. Colossians Chapter 3. I struggle with which passage for us to look at to make this point clearly. But this point is made throughout the Bible and here's a passage that makes this very clear. And I would love for you to jot down, if you've jotted down that passage, make sure you jot down Exodus 31 verses 1 through 7 as well, and I'll tie those together once we read Colossians 3. Colossians Chapter 3 verses 23 and 24. "Whatever you do," it says, "work heartily."

Now, I don't know if I've read this enough for you and tried to give you what this literally says. The Greek language here uses the word "Psychē. Psychē is a Greek word for soul. And basically it says work with soul. That's not like funky soul. That's just like work with your inner life completely in it. Now the context here is really just secular employment, gainful employment. So we're not talking about First Peter 4, and yet it's the same concept. It's like if you're going to serve in church serve with all your might, serve like with the muscles God supplies. You know, speak as though you're pulling back the most important message and having people's light bulbs come on and stuff that is just going to blow their minds with importance.

Same thing at work. Put your whole soul into it. Right? Do it with all of your soul, literally. "Work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." And if you really think you're doing this for God, even if it's your projects at work. You're thinking about the projects that I'm doing. I got a client or I got a boss that I'm submitting this to. But I'm doing this work and I'm doing it as though I'm presenting it to Christ. Right? You picture that just coming out of the Christmas season. You picture those wise men, the magi, bringing their gifts and bowing down before, you know, this toddler, this baby Jesus. And you think about the picture of them giving it is such a reverential scene. Well, think of your work that way. If everything you thought of in your work that Christ is the client, that Jesus is the one who is the beneficiary, that you're giving this work, this effort, you're selling this widget for the good of Christ. I don't know. If you just could put that in perspective it would change the quality of your work. Yeah, you'd put your whole heart into it for sure.



Knowing, by the way, it's ultimately not your boss who is signing your paychecks. It's the Lord who is going to sign the most important paychecks. "Knowing that from the Lord," verse 24, "you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving," the boss, the Lord, "the Lord Christ." That's the biggest mind-boggling thing that we can, from God's perspective, be seen as serving him in our jobs Monday through Friday or whatever your work schedule is. That's a great thing and it will change the way you work. I put it this way, Letter "B," you need to maximize your usefulness, which for part of this is you just throwing your heart into your work, doing it well. And the other part is sometimes just aligning my gift set with the opportunities. I mean, maybe you should change jobs. Maybe this isn't the best job for your gift set. I don't want you to keep changing jobs every 24 months, you know, like a lot of people trying to find the perfect job. I mean, they're looking for a loud life, not a quiet life. I'm just saying just make sure you're trying to align your opportunities to work with the most productive and useful, you know, thing that your life can do.

I think of... I'll throw in another passage, Jeremiah Chapter 1. When God is calling Jeremiah to go speak before Israel, I just love the way he sets it up by saying, hey, "You're born for this. Before you were ever born this is what I set you apart to do." I just love to find that thing, wouldn't you? And I don't want to endlessly search for it as though it's some, you know, so soul-fulfilling like I found myself in my job. But I will tell you this. It's good to wake up and go to work and think I know that God designed me for this. It's kind of the Chariot of Fire moment, right? "I feel God's pleasure in this when I do it. There is that sense of aligning what I am and who I am and who God made me to be with what I'm doing and that would be great, that would be ideal, not that every day at work feels that way, but I do want to be as productive as I can because I'm throwing my heart into this and I'm thinking about Christ as the beneficiary. And I'm also thinking about Christ as the boss who's giving me the ultimate paychecks. That's a great way for my work to become something, as the reformers and the Puritans like to say, something sanctified, my work becomes something holy at that point.

And I'd love for your directional decisions of what are you going to do this year. Speaking of the major things that you're called to do as a worker, right? Whether it's a mom or whether it's a, you know, whatever your job is and say I'm going to work at this with all of my heart and I'm going to see God being glorified. And the reason I had to write down Exodus 31 is because here's a passage about Moses having the furniture of the Tabernacle constructed, and it talks about two guys in this passage who are filled with the Spirit of God for the work that they were doing. They were artisans. They were masons, and they were, you know, they worked with wood, they were carving things and they were building and constructing things.

Now think about that. That's just a neat concept that when I'm offering my work to God and I'm thinking consciously about doing whatever I'm going to do in the next 365 days, and I'm saying my work-a-day life is going to be directed toward God. It's almost this reciprocal experience of God now saying I'm going to fill you. I'm going to work within you as my child, my adopted child, to work in you. The third person of the Godhead is going to fill you to do this and to do it for his glory. I just love that picture, that kind of synergistic picture of God infusing his Spirit in people with the talent and the work and the effort and the drive to



accomplish things that ultimately get delivered to him as a gift, an offering of praise that I want my work to please and glorify God. So look that passage up this week. It is such a great text, those first seven verses to think about a guy carving or pounding, you know, pegs together to construct something in the Tabernacle. Ultimately God saying, this is like a God thing. I'm working in that person. All right, necessary directional decision.

Now, I think about decisions in the new year. You probably think about the crossroads and let's get to that. You've got things that confront you. You got an illness and the doctor says, well, you can do this, this and this. Well, how do I decide? You got a young family saying, well, should we have kids now or next year or the year after? Or we can't have kids, should we adopt or should we just go through life without kids? Should we move to Nebraska or should we stay here in Orange County? You got plenty of situations that arise. Alluring opportunities. They want to give you a raise, but you're going to have to move, you know, to Florida or whatever. So what do I do with those options? Right? Those are decisions. You're going to have a bunch of decisions you don't even know about. All the decisions that I just talked about, you know you have those decisions to make in the new year. These are decisions you don't even know what's coming. Or maybe you do know because you're in the middle of it and you got to decide by January 20th whether or not you're going to do this, that, or the other with your job or your house or your money or your health decisions. Okay. How do we make those decisions?

Well, as Christians, of course, the underlying predicated assumption is you'd like to please God in this because you're a Christian, you live for God's glory. Okay. That's good. That's assumed. It's assumed that you're praying. But here are the deliberating questions you should be asking. Four of them. Okay. And the heading here is making wise circumstantial decisions. So that's Number Three. Let's make some "Wise Circumstantial Decisions." Just like we have to make those critical foundational decisions, those necessary directional decisions. Am I talking fast in this sermon today? Feels like it. Is it faster than normal? A lot to say.

Number Three, "Wise Circumstantial Decisions." Okay, let's do that. I'll try to slow down and then we'll stay an extra half an hour. Again, there's no real hearty laugh to that comment. (audience laughing) Kind of a groan. Here's the first thing and let's turn to this passage, because it's so important. All these passages are important, but Psalm 119. We're talking about wise circumstantial decisions, Psalm 119. Drop down to verse 29, just in the middle of this acrostic poem. And those little headings, by the way, are just names of Hebrew letters, all in order. "Aleph," "Beth," "Gimel," "Daleth." We're in the middle of "Daleth" here. "He," "Waw," "Zayin," it goes all the way down to "Taw." That's the Hebrew alphabet. And all these verses here, each of these verses in that section starts with the same Hebrew letter. Most of you know that. But if you didn't we're killing time to have you get to the passage.

So let's jump in the middle of "Daleth," verse 29. Let's just read from there. "Put false ways far from me." I don't want to go down the wrong way, the wrong path. I don't want to be a false way, a dumb way, a stupid way, a foolish way. What I'd want is to be "graciously taught the law" of God, the rules of God, the precepts of God, the truth of God's word so that I don't go down the wrong path. So God, be gracious to me. Open my mind to understand this. Teach



me what I need to know so I don't go down the wrong path. Verse 30, "I have chosen the way of faithfulness." That's why I'm making the decision here. I want to choose the right way, the biblical way. And that's why "I set your rules before me."

Okay, so we're right now on Number Three Letter "A," let me give you the wording for Number Three Letter "A" and see the correspondence to Number One Letter "B." All right. Are you ready? So Number Three Letter "A" is this: I need to ask the question, the deliberative questions I ask to find wisdom in the circumstantial crossroads of my next year. Here's what I need to do. I need to ask what are the biblical boundaries? What are the biblical boundaries? So jot that down. And when I think about that, how can I get good at knowing the biblical boundaries? Well, Number One Letter "B" and Number One Letter "B" is if I'm a Christian, I better spend daily time every day in the Bible and in prayer. And if you do that, you're much more apt to know what the Bible has to say about whatever topic it is that you're facing because you know what the Bible says. And that needs to be the rules that you set before, what does God want from me? And you need to say, I'm choosing to be faithful to those rules.

Verse 31, "I cling to your testimonies O Lord; let me not be put to shame!" I don't want at the end of this to have something that I'm feeling bad about, because I went down a false way. I want to know your testimony. I want to hold tightly to those. And I love this picture, verse 32, "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart." Now that's a tough little Hebrew phrase there. It probably means not when, as in a conditional clause, but as, like as you are making me, as you give me the ability, as you give me the capacity to do it, I'm going to run in the pathway of your commandments.

So that's where I get this point, right? This question. What are the guardrails? What are the curbs? And I need to know, like I can't decide, right? If I'm talking about family planning, I can't go and kidnap a child. But that's outside the boundaries so I'm not going to do that. Maybe I'm talking about adoption. And even the curbs get to where I've got to really analyze those, even about reproductive science. There are some things there I got to sort through, but the commandments I need to figure out what the boundaries are, and then I want to run in the middle of those as God gives me the strength to do so.

Keep going into the next letter here. "He" verse 33 spelled H-E, which you would say "he," but in Hebrew, "Hey." Hey, that's a good... I just realized that it's a great letter to have in your arsenal. "He" verse 33. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes." Teach him, I want to know. "I will keep it to the end." I love that. You need to decide ahead of time as you look for the truth of God's word to help you with that decision, to know what's out of bounds and what's in bounds, I need to say I'm going to keep it to the end. I don't care if things get harder. I don't care if I'm more tempted to do something other than that. I'm going to keep it to the end. "Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart." Put a pin in that for a second, I'll come back to it.

Verse 35, "Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it," I want to have that, I want to be that, I want to be in the middle of your will. "Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain!" Now the bottom of verse 36 and the bottom of verse 34, let's tie those



together in our thinking, right? "Not for selfish gain." Selfish gain is something that no one can really see. They can see symptoms of it. But selfish gains mean in my heart I'm wanting this for the wrong reasons. And so when I look at that phrase in verse 34, I want to "observe your law with my whole heart." That's starting to get past just the action, right? Like, should I kidnap a kid or should we adopt a kid?

Now what are my motives for this? And I think here's the thing you can say, well, biblically, is it biblically allowed to move to Nebraska? Well, nothing in the Bible says you can't move to Nebraska. You can move to Nebraska. It's biblically allowed. There's nothing against that. Some states, maybe you can't. I'm just kidding. (audience laughing) Yeah, I can get in more trouble with that. I don't just want to look at the action. I want to look at whether the biblical commandments affect my motives and of course they do. What are some motives that are out of bounds? So I'm not just checking God. Here I have two ways I can go in this course of action on my medical crisis. Or here are two things I can do with buying a house in the next year, right? There might be pathways here, but I want to check not only what's allowed in Scripture, but I want to say, okay, it's within the boundaries of God's commands. Great.

Now what is the motive? Because there are things like greed that instantly make the right thing wrong because the motive is wrong. There are things like fear that make the right thing wrong because the motive is wrong. Right? Then it's like anxiety, envy, covetousness, competitiveness. There are a lot of things that take the right thing and make it wrong because the motive is unbiblical. So I just need to make sure that I'm checking not only the action, is it biblically allowed, but the motive, is the motive biblically allowed? Is it right? And checking our motives is a hard thing to do. Very hard. But we need to do it. We need to ask is this biblically allowed. What are the biblical boundaries of not just my actions, but my motives?

And then just keep reading here for just a minute. Verse 37, "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things." I don't want to go off the offramp I don't need to be going off, "and give me life in your ways." I love that. I want the whole pathway here to be life. I want it to have a good, lasting effect. And I just think that concept of life, it's a big and broad biblical concept, but I want this thing to go well the whole way through.

So let me just add another layer of this. I want to know the biblical boundaries, not only for the action, is it biblically allowed, but the motive? Is this the biblically right motive? But I also want to look at the effect. What's the effect of my decision? Right? You can make decisions that are biblically allowed and you can make decisions that you think my motives are good, but you look at the effect and what it does to other people, what it does to your family, what it does to your time at church, what it does to your ministry and you say no, too much negative collateral impact here. So therefore the impact of this becomes an unbiblical thing and therefore it's not a wise decision. So decisions, think about this now, being biblically like affirmed and ratified by the Bible, need to go past the actions, to the motives and to the impact and the effect. All right.

First Corinthians Chapter 16 verse 7. I won't even turn you there for the sake of time. But it's one of the many examples in Scripture where Paul says, here are the things I think are



biblically right. And then he says, and here's what I'm going to do because this is what I want to do. And he's not saying it because he's being selfish. He's saying it because that's how God often works. Letter "B," let's put it this way. You need to ask, Number Three Letter "B," you need to ask what do I want to do? And as a Christian that's a good thing for us to ask, as long as we're not asking it in a disconnected vacuum. Like I'm just asking what do you want to do? Like I wouldn't write a Christian book on deciding the will of God or why is decision making having chapter one be "do what you want to do." That'd be stupid, right? Don't do that. You need to make sure that you have a lot of other things in place.

But if all those other things are in place and you think about, well, should we have kids, should we not have kids? Should we buy this house or should we not? Sometimes you get down to the allowed, the impacts are not bad, the motives are good, right? I'm doing the right things with my work and my spiritual life. Should I do it? Well, sometimes I have to ask, well do you want to do it? Because God's going to work through that often because of our gift set, it leans toward particular desires. And so there's nothing wrong with that. I could elaborate on that and I have in other places, but I do think that's a very important point. What do I want to do? Sometimes what I want to do is wrong and we got to know that.

And I love the fact that I have given you Second Thessalonians 1 verses 11 and 12, which at least let me quote it. There's a great line in there when Paul prays for the Thessalonians and he says this, "May God fulfill every resolve for good that you guys have." That's just great. It's a great line. In other words, if you want to do this and it's good, I just pray that God would let you just do it. And I just oftentimes it's that desire to resolve to do something good. What is your resolve to do good in the new year? Well, may God allow you to do it if in fact it's within the biblical boundaries, actions, motives, and impact.

Letter "C." Go to First Corinthians Chapter 7 with me real quick. In First Corinthians Chapter 7, Paul is talking about marriage and he's saying to people who aren't married who are having some spiritual guidance in terms of saying if you're really spiritual you shouldn't get married, you shouldn't need to be married, because godly people, you know, aren't interested in romance and sex and so you shouldn't be either. And Paul has to correct all that saying, no, no, no, no, no, right? Singleness, if you're content being single that's good. That's a gift from God. But there's another gift too. And the other gift is marriage. Marriage is a great gift of God. And he gets down to right out of the gate just in the first opening argument, do you want to?

And so we've got basically what we've come up with so far, biblical boundaries. In this case, is it allowable to get married? Is that a God thing? Is it biblically allowed? What are the boundaries? And the answer is yes. And then he says, do you want to do it? And the answer is yes. And so you're thinking this whole chapter is going to be a green light on marriage. And then he throws this monkey wrench in verse 26. Look at it. He says, "I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Don't seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife." Now wait a minute. That's not right. You just said it's biblically allowed and you've said if you want to do it you should do it. And then you just said, but now's not the time. That's a bummer. Okay.





So Letter "C" it's a good question to ask. Is it the right time? Right? Is this the right time? You've got to ask that question. And the present distress I think is bigger than just hey, you know, it seems like people are stressed out these days, so don't get married. I think this has to do, if you look at the date of the writing of this book in First Corinthians, corresponds with Nero being on the throne and probably already showing his intentions to persecute the Church and break out in massive persecution. And so Paul's saying, it's probably not a good time right now to plan a marriage. So why don't you just put dating off for a little while because this is not the right time? There's a present distress going on. We don't have the historical exactness. We have to guess at what that is. But it does remind me that sometimes it's the right thing, it's biblically allowed, and I have a desire to do it, but it shouldn't be done now. And that's okay. There's a season for things to quote Ecclesiastes and everything has its season and sometimes it may not be a season now to do it.

Two words that will help you with this. Toddlers and teens. Let's talk about that really quick. Toddlers and teens. Toddlers. Parents of toddlers. Right? Wink at me if you're parents of toddlers. Here, let me ask you experts currently parenting toddlers. Okay. If a toddler latches onto something that he or she wants, let me just ask you this question, when do they want it? People couldn't even answer loudly because they are so worn down by their toddlers. (audience laughing) But those of you who have rested since you've had toddlers, when do those toddlers want what they want? Now. Right now. I want it right now. Why? Because they're toddlers. They're not mature. They have no self-control. They want it now.

Remember the tendency that we have in our immaturity to want whatever is pleasant, whatever is good, whatever is pleasurable, we want it now. And sometimes we have to fight that because we have to say is this the right time? This will be hard for you to say no to something you say is biblically allowed, and I want it. Hard for you sometimes because you'll see that what's happening is you've got some spiritual toddlerliness going on in your life and you need to say, God, give me self-control. Give me patience. How hard would it be for the people who so far are on the edge of their seats in church as this chapter is being read? Great. I know exactly who I want to marry and just I needed to know that it was biblical and I wanted it. Let's go. And he goes not now, but not now. It's like groan! Okay, toddler Christianity is not where you want to live. You want mature Christianity. So just remember toddlers.

Teens, parents of teens. I don't want to ask as a parent of teens, but parents of teens, let me ask you this about teens. If teens know they have something to do and it's unpleasant, when do they want to do it? Never, right? At least not today, I know that. They don't want it today. They want it later. Okay. So, teens, a good example, not every teen, but teens they'd rather procrastinate if it's an unpleasant thing. And I'm just saying again maturity says don't live as a teenager as a Christian. You need to live as a mature Christian and sometimes the season is now and it's unpleasant.

I think of the passage I was just quoting the first part of in First Corinthians 16, where Paul says, the next thing he says after saying, I want to, you know, I didn't want to just pass



through, so I want to do it here. He talks a lot about his wants in First Corinthians 16, which are all part of God's will. And God was revealing his will through Paul's wants. Here is the next thing he says, "a wide door for effective service is open to me, and there are many adversaries." Well, the whole point of bringing that up is his plans are affected by the open door of opportunity and he's going to walk through that door. And yet, he says, and "there are many adversaries." Now ask a teen. Right? Open door, many adversaries. Well, then, let's not do it now. I don't want to do it. So let's see if the adversaries can go away. And all I'm telling you is the right thing to do may be now. And yet, as it's going to be harder now, it'll be easier later. Sometimes do not procrastinate. Sometimes wait. And I can only tell you that circumstantially if I knew what your circumstances are. Okay.

Letter "D," maybe that'll help because you think, well, I don't know which. Great. Here's Letter "D," and I know you've heard this before but most of us are not good at it. Letter "D." You need to ask this question. What do wise Christians think I should do? What do wise Christians think I should do? Proverbs Chapter 15 makes that so clear. Verses 21 and 22, many passages will say the similar thing, and that is this: you better have an abundance of counselors. "You better have many advisors." You're going to have "success if you have many advisors." If you don't, the fool just goes ahead and does whatever he wants, right? He doesn't stop to get counsel. It's the wise person, the "man of understanding," who's going to stay on the course because he's got "many advisors" helping him know what the right thing to do is.

And I know you know this. You were taught this. If you ever heard a sermon in junior high about decision making you've heard get wise counsel. But here's the problem. A lot of us are like Rehoboam who always try to seek the exact people that we think will give us the answer we want. And all I'm telling you is stop trying to select the people you... When someone says, I'm moving to this place and I start doing a little digging, is now the right time? It doesn't seem like it. Is your motive right? Well, all the things you told me it sounds like your motives are wrong. And what's the effect? It sounds like the effect is bad. Yeah, but I still want to do it because it's biblically okay and I just want to do it. I want to do it. Then I say, have you asked anybody about this? Right? Moving to Nebraska, let's say. And of course they said, "Well, of course I did. I asked, I asked my wife, who was born in Nebraska, and her family's there and she wants to go. And I asked the biggest, you know, Nebraska Huskies fan I know. And they all said I should go." Okay, well, you've got to ask not just the people you know are going to affirm this.

When Rehoboam went out to get advice about what to do when he found himself the king now after Solomon, Solomon's son, he ended up messing everything up because he only went to select counselors to ask because he knew they would give the answer he wanted. So you need to say to people who you don't even have any clue what they would say, but you know they're wise Christians and you need to ask the question, "Hey, as a Christian, what do you think I should do about this? Let me take three minutes and just tell you the situation. Now, can you just tomorrow come back to me and tell me what you think I should do?" If you just did that with a little less cherry-picking of the right people, and you just found people who



you just think are godly, well-versed, biblically-grounded Christians, you would have so much great objective counsel in your life to help you make this decision.

Someone came up to me after last night's sermon and just affirmed this with a great story on the patio, something he just went through all the steps. They were all right. In this last step he got, he asked two godly guys that he knew. I don't know if they were in a small group or what. They went away, came back and just said exactly what he knew in his gut, deep down, somewhere in his conscience, the Spirit was already just chipping away at this, and they came back with objectivity and said, "Nah, this does not seem right." And BAM, here he was saying I was biblically allowed. I wanted to do it, but this was clearly revealed just through the counsel I had this was not the right time to do it. So helpful, so good. But you got to pick people indiscriminately almost as long as they're godly, wise, Christian.

Now here's the problem with this sermon. You're going to go away thinking this is a lot of work, man. And I just think there's got to be an easier way. And I can read a Christian book about the will of God. And all you got to do is it just says basically don't do anything unbiblical and do whatever you want. And I'm saying that's the wrong approach. And here's why it's the wrong approach because of Ephesians Chapter 5. Ephesians Chapter 5 verse 15, in the old translations used to translate this first phrase with the word "circumspect" or "circumspectly," walk circumspectly. Now that old word is not used much anymore, but if you had to, if you sat there in a SAT trying to figure this word out, it probably wouldn't be too hard to figure out the component parts in English, right? Circumspect, right? "Circum" is around, "circle" is "around, circum. And then "spect" like "inspection" or just to, you know, "speculate" or to, you know, "spectacles" is "to look. Literally "to look around."

And the Greek phrase in this New Testament verse, it basically says when you're going to take your next steps, when you're going to walk in the path, make sure you're looking all around like at what steps to take. And I know that because it's followed up with this phrase and it says try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Now in Matthew 7, when Jesus said the narrow road that we're on is hard, and the wide road that everyone else is on is easy, here's one of the things that certainly he meant because there's a new component in your life, you want to please the Lord, right? Non-Christians don't want to please the Lord. They want to please themselves or their best friends. We want to please God but we want next year to be better so that God can say, "well done, good and faithful servant," that we're more godly, we're more fruitful.

Well, to do that, you need to be circumspect. You need to look around. And before I take that next step, is this the step that I think the Lord would want me to take? Now you can say, well, I don't want paralysis by analysis. And I'm going to say this, well, there better be a stutter step at least. And there ought to be a lot of analysis that's going on to make decisions about your job, about your family, about where you live, about what you invest your money in, about what you do for ministry. Yes, you've got to analyze it and it's going to be more work. And Jesus warned us the narrow road is hard, and it's hard because we're living for Christ now. And that means you can't do this intuitively. You've got to look to God's word. You've got to look to godly counselors. You got to look to the precepts and principles of God's word. And that's



going to take more effort. I just hope that something in this sermon is going to help you to understand that this is going to be a process that you need to give yourselves to. Made in the image of God, you can do this by God's grace. He can help you do it well.

And I will say just one last thing from Proverbs Chapter 3 verses 13 through 16, 17, 18, that whole section there. You want to talk about the great thing about doing this is that when you look back at the year that comes up, if we live through this next year, you're going to look back and you're going to see the blessings that come with making wise steps. When God gives you understanding to invest your next 12 months well, you're going to say there's no better way to live. This is the right thing. I'm going to look back and say, it looks like, God, you help me walk this path well, my life is reflecting Christ's character more. I am being more fruitful and nothing is going to be better than that. Just read that passage at some point today. Proverbs Chapter 3, start in verse 13. That whole section there about having understanding and wisdom, and what a great thing it is to be graced with that and to be able to look back and say these decisions this last year were wise. God wants to give us that. Let's have you stand and I'll pray to that end. And may we have a fruitful, wise, productive New Year.

Pray with me, please, God, we do ask for wisdom as James 1 says, we know you want to give it to your children. You're not a God who shames us with reproach when we come asking. God, we are people who know you're generous. We want to ask you without any doubting. And that's not just going to come through osmosis. You're going to have us work and be diligent students of your word. You're going to have us get up sometimes early in the morning before dawn just like Jesus did. We're going to have to pray and we're going to have to study. We're going to have to seek godly counsel. We're going to need to be in church. We're going to make sure our heart is trusting in you and then God as we make decisions about when to retire, when to take a job, when to have a child, when to buy a house, whatever it might be, even small things. Should I take this promotion? Should I move my office? Should I buy a new piece of furniture? God, sometimes we just need to stop and just say, God, what is pleasing here to you? What are my motives? What's the effect of all this? And God, to think in a way that might make us be the kinds of people who make decisions more like Jesus would in our context. So help us please God this year to please you in all these things, more than we did last year. I pray you'd be honored not just by us individually, but by our families, by our small groups, by our sub-congregations, and by our church. May our church be a stronger, better, more godly place reflecting your priorities and your values.

In Jesus name. Amen.