

Proverbs

Wisdom and Decision Making

June 2, 2017

Hey fam! My name is Jake. I'm one of our church planting candidates, which means I may plant a church one day and I'm hanging out with Midtown staff trying to learn everything I can about church planting before that happens. So now I've been on staff here at Midtown for the last 6 months and am loving it, it's been so much fun.

For some of you, you may know me best by my daughter, Caroline. She has her own Instagram account. She's typically the loud child begging Host Team for a donut every Sunday.

For others, you may know my wife, Lucy. She was involved with Midtown early in college when she was a brand new Christian and stuck around for several years and was a LifeGroup leader for a while before we met.

In fact, I thought I would share with you how we met. We were both on staff with the same college ministry, I was working at Western Kentucky University, she was working at Duke University. Once a year, there's a regional winter conference that all staff are required to attend.

Now, typically we have to get there a full day before students do, so we can help set up. But this one year I decided to miss that first day so I could spend time driving down with the guys in my Bible study. Which seemed like a completely inconsequential decision at the time. Now, during my bachelor years I wasn't the most well-dressed - Shocker, right??- Goodwill was my clothing establishment of choice, but I decided to wear my one good dress shirt and my one good pair of pants that day I arrived at the conference, can't tell you why I did it - just felt like The Good Pants sort of day. And then, I don't know why but I put on this leather jacket that made me look like I just walked off the set of the movie Grease. So me and my group of students roll up, and before you could register for the conference you had to get in a single-file line and wait your turn before you could go into the next room to register. At the front of the line before you could go into the next room, there were two staff members that would only allow a handful of people in at a time to go register and then cut the line off. Well, when we get up to the front, security stops the line right at me. And you know who that staffer was who was acting as the campus ministry bouncer of registration day? Lucy. That's right, it was the first moment I ever met my wife. And she thought to herself, "Whoa! Who's this cool leather jacket guy with such nice pants!" We met in that little spot in that hotel lobby in Greensboro, NC. In fact, it was that same spot in that lobby exactly one year later at that conference I got down on one knee and proposed to her. (She said yes.)

Now I want you to stop and think about that moment with me for a second... How many decisions, affected the timing of us meeting? On our drive down, we stopped for lunch and probably a bathroom break or two. I chose how long we wanted to sit and enjoy our gas station subs or how quickly we were going to get in and out of there. If I had been just one person ahead or one behind in that line, I would've just breezed right past her. We wouldn't have had those few minutes to make small talk and introductions.

And to think all those tiny, seemingly insignificant decisions that led up to that encounter. And fast forward almost six years and now we have two tiny children that exist.

This morning we're discussing, "What does the Bible have to say about making everyday decisions?

Before we begin I want to make an important distinction. Often when people preach sermons or write books on how to know God's will for your life, they often are referring to those significant, major decisions like who are you going to marry one day, what career path should you follow - but the truth is those choices, while important, make up only a tiny fraction of your life. There's so much more in between the margins. Our lives are composed of hundreds of daily tiny, sometimes tedious decisions that and big decisions that, over a prolonged period of time, can set the trajectory for your life.

It's not just, "How will I make these big decisions down the road?" but it's also, "How will I make all of these decisions day-in and day-out?"

Or as one person said, "It's not about the big moments. It's about the moments in between the big moments."

So what do we do with that?

This morning what I want us to do is look at a specific part of Proverbs that speaks into our decision making. If you have a Bible turn with me to Proverbs 16.

Proverbs 16:1-3

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

In all three of these verses there's something pretty revealing - who is behind all of our decisions? Who cares about our choices? The LORD. But notice, in our English Bible's "the LORD" is in all caps, now the author is not shouting at us. That would be jarring. there's actually some pretty big theological significance going on in the Hebrew.

In the Old Testament whenever the name of God is evoked the speaker would select a specific name to call God in Hebrew in order to highlight a particular attribute of His character. Sometimes God in the Old Testament would be called in the Hebrew Adonai - which means Master and it would highlight how we are to serve Him. Sometimes called would be called Elohim - which highlighted His majesty especially in creation. Here in all three verses of Proverbs 16 the author says LORD in all caps which in the Hebrew means Yahweh. What did that highlight? Intimate relationship. The author chose a name that emphasized covenantal friendship.

This happens similarly in our own lives. How you address someone reveals your relationship to them. If someone addressed my wife as Mrs. Blair I would think, "You must not know each other very well, the name you called her sounds like you're a complete stranger." If someone addressed my wife as "Luce" I would think, "Oh because you called her that, you must be a good friend of hers." But only one person on the planet gets to call her, "My boo." That's me. I have a unique relationship with her that no one else has. You don't have that privilege, only I get to call her that. If you do, I will fight you.

So here the author evokes the name Yahweh - the covenant-keeping, relationally-loving God of the universe. The God of love who stooped down to become friends with sinners like who you and me. This is Yahweh, this is the LORD. Only His people got to call Him that, no other people group on that planet had that privilege, to confidently say that God was their friend. That He was for them.

And that's the context of our trust.

And once we start to see the significance of this unique relationship, we also begin to understand the beauty of God's Lordship in our lives. If He is who He says He is, then He's worth following. If the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe went to such great lengths to know your personally - then He's someone worth obeying.

When we begin to understand God's covenant Lordship in our lives, what this does is it goes against three major enemies we all face in our everyday decision-making: anxiety, apathy and autonomy. So I want us to look at each one and how they reject God's Lordship.

Enemy #1 – Anxiety

The first is anxiety. Anxiety is, "a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome."

With all these daily choices we make we're always asking so many questions. Questions like, "How do I know for sure that I'm making the right choice?" and "What if I'm missing out?" can plague our decision making.

Culturally we even have a term for this. Decision paralysis. And I didn't know it until just recently, but this can actually be a psychologically diagnosed disorder. The medical term is "aboulomania" which literally means in Latin, "without will." It's becoming a big epidemic in our society.

There was a TED talk delivered in 2005 called "The Paradox of Choice," and in it this psychologist was speaking about all of the decisions we make on a day-to-day basis. He said that our culture is swimming in this idea of trying to maximize our individual freedom as much as possible. And he said, if you want to maximize your freedom we do it by maximizing our choices. In other words, "I am most free, when I have the most options in front of me."

The paradox then lies in the fact that you have all these options that it becomes totally overwhelming and it creates this decision paralysis. The speaker went on to say that maximizing choice has not made us freer but more paralyzed, not happier but more dissatisfied.

How it impacts decision-making: It's because of this constant fear of the unknown that we are hindered from making decisions. If Drake's philosophy of, "You only live once," is true, then how can you really know that you're making the right choice? What if I chose wrong?"

So there's a movie that comes to mind about all of this just to freak us all out, from the late 90s called *Sliding Doors*. Did any of y'all see that? The premise of the movie is all about what would happen if this character took the subway on time versus if she missed it. The rest of the movie spins out into these two alternate scenarios - one where she actually is fulfilled and finds the love of her life and one where she is miserable and spoiler alert she dies and it's super sad. The whole idea is this big "What if? What if we were just one slight event away from making the best decision or biggest regret of our life?" It's so easy for anxiety to haunt us.

Here's how you'll see this show up: When people ask you how you're doing, you might find yourself saying you're overwhelmed a lot. When people ask who you are you might answer, "Stressed. Busy." and sell it with an eye roll and a big exasperated sigh.

Personally, I wrestle with anxiety about the future quite a bit. I always want a plan. I love me a good spreadsheet. When I have a chart or a list in front of me mapping out everything I am going to do that day, it is life-giving. If I could have a spreadsheet where I could map out the itinerary for the rest of my life, I would be so happy. But often I find that that's just not reality. I have two kids under the age of three, one of them is in-process of being potty trained, the other loves to try to stand up and then fall flat on his face - and the daily responsibility of being a dad at times is way more than I planned. On top of that I'm in ministry where there always seems to be a hundred tiny details and problems to work out. Oh and also, life happens.

How it rejects Lordship: Ultimately the root of anxiety says, "I want to be in control of my life and I am limited in my ability to do so. And I'm anxious because of it."

So that's the first enemy to our decision making: Anxiety.

Enemy #2 – Apathy

The second enemy of decision making is apathy. Apathy is a "lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern." Apathy says, "Why bother? What's the point? If God is in control and He loves me, can't I just take it easy? If God is so sovereign and in control do I really need to be bold and put myself out there? Can't I just play it safe?"

Often people who are apathetic are marked by long stretches of boredom. This plays itself out through disengagement at work or in your relationships with others. And we can see this especially through media consumption. "I'm bored so...what's happening on my phone right now? I know I just checked 30 seconds ago but maybe something happened while my phone was in my pocket because my phone's on silent. Wait. Is my phone on silent? Maybe I should check. And while I'm checking I might as well do a quick Facebook skim just to see." Or maybe you binge watch a Netflix show and when you get done you don't go "Hooray. I've really accomplished something." you go "is there another show I can binge?"

Think about it, when we are bored we go to entertainment or social media to cure it, it doesn't seem to cure our boredom for that long - it's so temporary. Which in turn creates a deeper boredom and apathy so we need more entertainment to momentarily cure it, and the cycle goes on.

How it impacts decision-making: The danger with apathy is that when it sets in we will always choose the path of isolation and least resistance. We will view the best decision as the one that doesn't take the risk.

Here's how you'll see this show up: We just leave decisions unmade. Our lives can be marked by a general sense of procrastination. You struggle with being a disciplined person - whether it's diet, exercise or anything else that will cost you something even though they're such benefits to it in long-run.

How it rejects Lordship: Because what's going on underneath our apathy is this notion that our comfort is of the highest concern. Apathy rejects God's Lordship because it implies that God does not know the best way you should spend your life, only you can decide that.

Enemy #3 – Autonomy

This relates to the third big enemy of decision-making: autonomy. One could even say that autonomy is at the root of both our anxiety and apathy. Autonomy says, "I get to choose what makes me happy. No one else

should ultimately have the right say what's best for me but me." This is every Disney movie you have ever seen. It's also most every rap song you've heard. It's all about rejecting the haters and being that true you inside of you. Disney princesses and Gucci Mane are pretty similar when you think about it.

How it impacts our decision-making: We can see how this impacts our decision because autonomy doesn't take decisions to God, or other people for evaluation and wisdom. We just trust ourselves a ton to do what's right. We think like Proverbs 16:2 that "our ways are totally pure." Now we may talk to people about a decision but really we want approval out of it, but if they disagree or show concern that we made the wrong choice then it must be because they don't really know the real you.

How it rejects Lordship: Underneath our autonomy, at the root, is this desire for you to ultimately be at the center of your own life. It does not take God into account or if it does then God is only used as a means to approve of our decisions or lifestyle. It's an overt rejection of wisdom being rooted in the fear of the Lord.

What we need to do as God's people when it comes to these enemies of anxiety, apathy and autonomy is to look to Jesus, how He destroys those and how in the process He frees us up to make everyday decisions.

Jesus's life was not marked by anxiety. Instead He poured His heart out to his Father through prayer in every situation and in so doing His life was marked by peace.

Matthew 6:10

Your kingdom come, Your will be done.

Jesus recognizes He's not the one in control, His Father is, so Jesus is not anxious.

Jesus was not marked by apathy but was driven by the Father's purpose and call for His life.

John 4:34

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Jesus was not marked by autonomy but submitted everything to the Father.

John 5:19

...the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

He didn't succumb to false emotions, passions or lust like we would.

Jesus's proper perspective to His Heavenly Father and LORD was what guided all of His decision-making. And in these decisions He made throughout His life, it didn't lead Him to this easy, financially-abundant, cool pseudo-hipster, hashtag live authentic, early retirement life that some of us dream about. Rather, His decisions, led Him to the Cross to purchase me and you.

It's because of the Cross and the empty tomb that all these things that marked Jesus's life can be true for us too:

- Jesus is our **assurance**. The Cross and the empty tomb are proof that God is good and sovereign and when we let that sink into our hearts it begins to dissolve our anxiety.

- Jesus is our **purpose**. The Cross and empty tomb are evidence that all of history is culminating to every tribe, tongue and nation confessing Jesus as Lord and He lovingly invites us in on that to make Him known in our city and our world and when we set our minds on that it kills our apathy.
- Jesus invites us into **family**. It's through the Cross and the empty tomb that Jesus can usher us into right relationship with God to where we can with confidence call him our Dad and that we can worship Him with brothers and sisters from all walks of life. And when we give ourselves over to these relationships it begins to melt away our autonomy.
 - This is true freedom. Not to live a life without constraints but to live your life under what you were always designed for: relationships. To be both known and loved by the God of the universe and with others who love Jesus.

So with all of that in mind, what I want to do is give us a helpful rubric by which we go about making everyday decisions. Once we understand God's Lordship and how Jesus frees us up, there are some real practical ways God gives us as His kids to make decisions: God's Word, God's Spirit and God's people. Now here's the thing: all three of these markers are all on the same team. They all work together which means if there's conflict in any one of these three, then something might be off.

In the Bible God is a self-disclosing, self-revealing God who is knowable and goes to great lengths to be known and the formation of the Bible is evidence of that.

So for us, to know God's will is to know God's Word. If God knows what's best for us and He's already revealed it are we paying attention enough to listen?

As you're making decisions some questions to ask are:

- Are there verses that steer me in one direction or another?
- Are there any verses that clearly say what I am doing is unwise?
- Am I daily in God's Word? (It's not that I have a posture of reading the Bible when I need to choose something, but am I regularly in this posture towards God?)

In the Old Testament God's power and presence was so intense - that to encounter God back then was a terrifying ordeal - and now the Bible says that same Spirit of God dwells inside of us and draws into fellowship with God daily so that we can experience deeper relationship. Romans 8 even talks about we don't even know the right words to pray and yet God's Spirit working in us helps us in our prayers to bring us closer to God.

Some questions to ask are:

- How much am I generally in prayer and how much have I really been praying about this decision?
- Are my feelings against a certain choice because it goes against what's comfortable for me?
- Am I asking the Spirit to reveal my true motives?
- Am I currently walking in a lifestyle of sin that would hinder my prayers?

Jon unpacked this last week - the importance of community. To surround yourself with wise people who are also actively reading their Bibles and praying and growing in their love towards Jesus. And when we apply community to decision-making there's such a beauty in this because God loves us too much to leave us on

our own in our choices. He lovingly provides us brothers and sisters in life, church family in older seasons of life to help speak into and steer us into making wise choices.

Some questions to ask are:

- Who are those people in your life that speak into your life and steer you in your choices?
- Do you have people who will tell you the hard truth you don't want to hear even though you really need to hear it?
- When was the last time you brought a major decision before wise godly people who knew you to speak into it?

So I've got some homework for you...

Take the decision. Carve out time to pray about it and ask God's spirit some questions. "God would you help me see my own motives for this? If I'm blind to how sin is leading me in this, please show it to me. Are there any ways this decision might hurt me or others that I'm blind to?" Go to the Bible and look up verses related to this issue. Then take it to community.

Who not only had a view or a voice into your decision but actually had a vote. What if you approached them this coming week and said, "Hey I have this big decision and this is where I'm leaning but you all love Jesus and I am prone to be selfish because I'm a sinner. What should I do?" And then, do to what they decide.

I know that sounds crazy. You might immediately begin objecting, "Whoa. Who the heck are they to decide what's best for me? They don't know me." But shouldn't they? These are the people you're suppose to live life with. What your reaction would indicate is that you may not fully be invested in godly community as you thought or a part of you is hiding from them so that they don't truly know the real you.

Bring before them a decision that you're wrestling with and invite them to speak into and give some authority into it. Those questions might include asking your life group:

- "Should I date this person or not?" And tell your LG, you have permission to be tough with me. Or it could even be, "Am I in a place to even be dating anyone?"
- My time with Jesus isn't great, will you take a look at my schedule and see how I'm wasting my time?
- I'm tight on finances, here's my budget, can you speak into this?
- My kids baseball games are the same night as my LG, what do I do?
- How should I approach retirement one day?

And tell them, "Please speak into this. We're on the same team. You have permission to be tough with me because we're family. And a good family loves each one another too much to see us make unwise decisions."

Imagine what God could do in your LifeGroups if we did this! God could destroy some major control and comfort idols in our lives if we began having this attitude. We would begin to see that life is not about us - it's about the people we do life with as we live on mission in our city to love Jesus and make Him known.

To wrap up our time this morning, look back at Proverbs 16 one more time. And notice specifically how the passage ends in verse 3 - "commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established".

We make our decisions but it's who's God behind it all. And because of that there's such tremendous freedom. Some of you here today need to hear this because you just need to make some decisions already. You sit around waiting for life to happen when the truth is God is calling you to get up and go.

We decide but God's behind it all.

In looking back with how I met my wife. All those decisions leading up to meeting her felt like I was the one making all these tiny decisions, and yet I can see so clearly now that it was God at work the whole time.

It's the exact same principle when it comes to us: every moment it looks as though you made the decision. But then you look back and you see it was God at work in your life. And because of that there is complete confidence to be had in God and His Lordship over you. He's got you. He's on the throne. He's in control. So go. Make decisions. And trust the Lord that He knows what He's doing.