

How to Make Right Decisions

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Scripture: James 1:5; Philippians 2:5

I WISH to speak with you today on a very practical subject. As a matter of fact, all preaching should have practical applications, for Christianity is a way of life which really works - when it's worked. What I wish to talk with you about is how to make right decisions. And for a text on which to develop this thought I turn to the epistle of James, the first chapter, where it says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally ... "

"Well," you may say, "now you're really getting to me, because wisdom is what I need." Maybe you will say, "I've got to admit that I'm not too bright. You would know how inept I am." You might go even further and say, "Actually, I hate to think of the stupid things I do."

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Now I want to tell you that I, for my part, have been positively amazed - and I'm not just being modest, either - by the stupid things I have done across the years. Dale Carnegie, who wrote the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, was a great friend of mine. He told me once that he thought he'd write a book which would be entitled *Stupid Things I Have Done*, by Dale Carnegie. I told him the difference between him and me was that I'd have to write a whole series of books to encompass the subject.

How do you get wisdom? This is the proposition. And the way the Bible answers it is by saying, "Ask God for it. He is liberal and will give it to you." And a person cannot make right decisions consistently except by step by step book up his wisdom and stepping down his stupidities. In the long run you determine what your life will be by your decisions. Your decisions, little and big - and you never know when a little one is a big one in its consequences - will add up to what you become. It is a fact that you can decide yourself into failure or into success, into mental turmoil or into mental peace, into unhappiness or into happiness.

A man remarked to me, "Let's face it: goes the way the ball bounces." I don't go for any such idea as that at all. There is a deeper reality. You and I can decide to a large degree which way the ball bounces. We can control the bouncing of the ball of life's circumstances and outcomes as we learn the art of making right decisions.

Repeat: If any man lack wisdom, let him ask God (really ask, believing), and it will be given him. Believe, that there is an answer for you and that

God will give you the wisdom to find that answer. People who have become great people have been those who discovered that God will guide in all the problems of their lives. And they have discovered that they can know guidance. This is no theory. I have seen it work in practice so many times that I could summon hundreds of witnesses to corroborate it. Let me call up a couple:

SOME years ago I had a very pleasant friendship with the founder of the Kraft Foods Company, Mr. J. L. Kraft. He was a very dedicated Christian, a great Baptist man. He really loved the Lord Jesus Christ. And he was tremendously astute mind. He was a truly remarkable individual, with a simple faith but a wise faith. And I got to talking with him one time about his early days.

Like a great many Americans, in the great tradition that has been a wonder to the world, Mr. Kraft at the bottom. All he had was an old wagon and called Paddy and an idea about the processing of cheese. And he went out and peddled his own cheese. Then he got two or three helpers. He told me that he was at the brink of failure in those early days. He said, "I go home at night not knowing where I was going the materials I needed. But I always talked to God about it. I told God what I needed. And I asked Him for help to build up this business so that I could do a little for Him in the world. And," he said, "God always me and God built my business."

He soon noticed, he said, that if he thought he have an answer to a problem by, say, nine o'clock Thursday morning, God might not give him the answer on Monday or on Tuesday or on Wednesday, but if he

really did have to have it at nine o'clock on Thursday morning, he then had the answer. And if he didn't get it by nine o'clock Thursday morning, he would find out later he didn't need it then. And when he did need it, God got it. Via Kraft held the principle that if you need wisdom or if you ask for it and believe that there is an answer it will come. He was one of the strongest personalities I ever knew because of his absolute, unshakeable conviction that there was an answer and that God would give it to him. "Things didn't always turn out right, hotted, but I was able to get rid of quite all the error in me. But to the degree to which you live with God, to that degree does error drop out and truth remain." I have seen this demonstrated in more ways than one and in some rather remarkable ways. For example, one night in Chicago I boarded a plane to go to Minneapolis, and a widow rose not a very long flight. When we were air borne she came and sat down beside me and said she had a problem she would like to discuss. I said, "It had better be a little problem, because before I would be at Minneapolis." "I would get," she said, "it's a big problem to me. It's this: I've been dating two young men and they both tell me they're in love with me and want to marry me. The problem is, I don't know which one to take." She told me a little about the two young men and how she felt about each one - or thought she did. "Which one would you say I'm in love with?" she asked. "How to look, this is not exactly in my line. Why don't you write to Dear Abby?" "Because I've got you right here, Dr. Peale, and this

bothers me."

"Well, you've asked me, so I'll tell you. I don't think you love either. I wouldn't marry either one."

"But," she exclaimed, "I've got to marry one of them! I'm twenty-two years old!"

"Oh," I said, "don't let the little matter of being twenty-two bother you. I still have an eye for feminine beauty and I think you'll find somebody you don't, they're all blind."

"You think I'll find the right one?" she asked anxiously.

"If you go at it the right way," I replied.

"What is the right way?"

"Well, first," I said, "you must have a clear idea of just what kind of man you want. Make it specific. Can you describe the kind of man you want to marry?"

"Well," she said, "I want him to be nice looking."

"To equate with your own looks, he would have to be. What else?"

Her face grew serious. "I want him to be a good man, a clean, decent person. And I want him to have a lot of fun in him. Also, I want him to be a man who believes in God."

"Sister, you're all right," I said. "You've got a head on your shoulders. Now what you should do is take that picture and hold it up to God and just believe, and that man will be drawn together in God's good time. But let's face it," I added, "maybe the man God brings you won't be handsome. Remember, the homely ones often turn out a lot better than the glamor boys. So don't press the Lord on that good-looking business. Be willing to settle for the answer you get from Him."

"I never thought of praying about a thing like this."

"Well," I asked, "aren't we supposed to pray about

important things? And what could be more important than your lifelong companion, who will also be the father of your children? Isn't that something to pray about?" Then I really went all out. I said, "Every day as you stand at the top of the steps of your plane I want you to visualize that sometime the perfect man for you will walk up those steps and right into your life."

"Oh," she said, "do you think he will?"

"Why not? In any case you'll meet him some place."

And she did. It wasn't on the plane. He didn't walk up the steps of her plane. She met him at a church party while spending a weekend at home with her parents.

"You know, it's wonderful the way things work out," she wrote to me. "The minute I saw him I knew he was the one. He didn't know it - then. But it wasn't long before I got through to him and he knew it too."

EVERYBODY has a problem. And there is an answer to that problem. There is an answer to yours. So believe in that answer. Confide your desires to God, but be willing to take what He gives you. And believe that He will give you wisdom.

Often we think of Christianity primarily as giving morality, or as giving sustaining strength in sickness or trouble. And it does give moral strength, it does give comfort and peace alone. But it also makes people wise. The more you live it, the more you have in you that mind which was in Christ Jesus our Lord. And you develop perceptiveness, astuteness, understanding, so that you have the wisdom out of which comes right decisions. We can be healed of drunkenness, we can be healed of stupidity, we can be healed of dishonesty, and we can also be healed of ineptitudes.

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The second thing is to bear in mind that you never arrive at a truly wise decision unless it is a right decision. A wrong decision cannot turn out right, because it is wrong. Only a decision based on ethical rightness can be a wise decision. You may use some clever forms and get a clever result for the time being, but it will not hold if it has error in it. So be sure your decisions are basically right.

J. Arthur Rank, the great British producer of motion pictures, who is also a devout Christian, holds, they say, that the first principle of a decision is to consider: right or it is wrong? It is said that oftentimes when Rank is with his associates and they are considering a problem, though he may be surrounded by fifteen or twenty men in a room, he will go into what he calls "the silence." He has a remarkable ability to isolate himself behind a barrier of silence even in the midst of confusion. At these silences he asks himself this question: "Is this decision we are about to make a right one or a wrong one? Is there anything wrong about it, however small? It doesn't make any difference whether the amount involved is six thousand pounds or sixpence. The decision will turn out right unless it is right.

There are a lot of people in this world having trouble with decisions they have made because they made them knowing that there was wrongness in them. Most people today know when a thing is wrong and when it is right. They may contend that they don't know. They sometimes maintain that there is a big gray area between the two and you can't always tell what is right and what is wrong. I deny that. Wrong is wrong. You can squeeze it and get the black out of it and make it gray, until it almost gets to the edge of white, but it never does get quite white.

It has still got too much gray in it, which means basically it has got too much black in it. Right is right and wrong is wrong!
This country, incidentally, grew great through following this principle. When I went to school we knew, because we had people teaching us who knew, and we had a culture in this country that knew. That was before we had these characters like the present-day publishers of porno graphic literature and other such people who have undercut the American conception of ethical values. But any body who really seeks the truth still knows what is right and what is wrong. If he doesn't, then he'd better ask the Lord for wisdom, because when you admit an unethical factor into a decision you get unethical and unethical results. The thing isn't soundly based and it won't hold up; it will let you down badly just when you can't afford it.

A FRIEND asked if I would stop by and talk with him at his office. He said he wanted me to help him with a business decision. Since I knew what business he was in and that I knew not the slightest thing about it, I said, "Bible don't know anything about your business. Why don't you want me for a business decision?"
"You know about God's business, don't you?"
"Well, a little," I replied.
"Well," he said, "this is God's business. Come on down. I'd come to you but I've got a lot of papers and charts on this matter that I want you to see."
When I sat down with him in his office and he started describing his problem he used so many tabulations and diagrams that I was lost. I found myself mumbling at intervals, "Yes, I see. I see." But actually all I saw was

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an isolated fact here and there. Bill produced a sheet of paper with a tentative outline and a list of pros and cons lined up in two columns. "Please take a look at this," he said.

I read it through carefully but still had no grasp of the total problem. "Look, Bill," I said, "I know less than nothing about this technical problem. But the thing I can do is pray that you get the right insights and guidance."

"I'd like to do one better," he replied, "- we'll pray together, but first let's have a few moments of mind emptying. I know I'll never get the proper answer unless I first get all preconceived notions out of my mind. And two empty minds will be even better than two sat there trying to get minds blank. Bill then prayed aloud: "Lord, our minds are emptied. Please fill them with truth about this situation. I don't want to make a mistake. Show me the right answer. Or show me the man, so he can show me."

We sat for another five or ten minutes in silent prayer and reflection. Then suddenly I remembered something I'd seen in one of the columns on that sheet of paper. I said "Let me look at those columns again, Bill - these pros and cons he showed them to me I said, "Now, Bill I don't know anything about it and it's all pretty involved, but this is the point here which bothers me. If you'll give me saying, it looks a little shady." And I handed the sheet back to him, pointing to the item I meant.

Bill stared. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Here are known in nothing about my business, yet when we've emptied our minds and prayed, you put your finger on the very thing that has been troubling me the most. Now surely you wouldn't spot it by your own intelligence alone. (It was) certainly a fact, and I knew that better than he did."

must be spiritual guidance," he said. "It just has to be. And it proves to me that this item has changed. Privately I've been trying to convince myself it was not unethical and really nobody's affair but mine. It would mean a little extra money, you see, if I let it stand. But I've been kidding myself. Sit comes. And now we've got a decision that is absolutely clean."

And as the results later demonstrated, it did seem he'd had the benefit more than his son. God's guidance for the amended answer (minus the shady item) worked out beneficially for him and everyone concerned.

OUR lives today are the result of the decisions we have made over twenty years, thirty years, fifty, sixty, as the case may be. What is your life going to be five years from now? The decisions you make in the next five years will determine that. Remember, you can decide yourself the failure or confusion or unhappiness but he who humbly admits that he lacks wisdom can find it turns to God who gives liberally. If you really ask Him, believing, God will fill you with perceptive understanding and reduce the error and enhance the rightness. And that you will make right decision after right decision and your life will be right. And when it's right, it's good and joyous and creative.

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, help us, we pray Thee, to adhere to justice and goodness and honor and rightness, knowing that as we do so we will make decisions more solidly based and our lives will become increasingly creative and satisfying and pleasant. Thee For this we give Thee thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

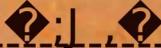


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