

## Keys For Living

### Part 4 – Making Decisions

ILLUS – A man had been made the president of a bank at a relatively young age. Not feeling that confident, he went to see the elderly chairman of the board for some advice. “How can I succeed as president”, he asked. “By making the right decisions.” “But how do I make the right decisions?” “Experience.” “But that’s precisely my problem. I don’t have much experience. How do I get the experience so I can make the right decisions?” “By making the wrong decisions”.

Life is all about making quality decisions.

This is our fourth message in our series Keys For Living, and we’re talking today about Making Decisions.

How do we make good decisions?

#### 1. Ask God

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

God’s knowledge is unlimited – He is omniscient.

ILLUS – According to one website, there are probably about 400 billion stars in our galaxy, and the way to estimate the number of stars in the universe is to multiply that number by the number of galaxies. The Hubble telescope is capable of detecting about 80 billion galaxies. So multiply 400 billion by 80 billion and that tells you about how many stars there are.

Ps 147:4 He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.

God knows everything; no wonder He wants us to consult Him when making our decisions.

In fact, the Bible sometimes makes a point of mentioning people who failed to consult Him – kind of a dishonourable mention.

ILLUS – Josh 9:1-14

ILLUS – 2 Chr 16:12-13 And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. (13) So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign.

Because He knows everything, and is perfect in wisdom, God has an expectation that we will always seek advice from Him in our decision making.

#### 2. Seek advice

Prov 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Prov 15:22 Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

Prov 24:6 For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.

The simple message of these Scriptures is: Get advice.

Don’t just go it alone, seek the counsel of others.

That doesn’t mean that you need to ring up all your friends on a daily basis to ask their opinion on what shoes you should wear.

But the more important the decision, the more important it is that you seek advice.

What's the best way to handle seeking advice and processing it once you've got it?

One of the biggest complaints I've heard from pastors over the years is that people come to them for advice, and then don't take a blind bit of notice.

They didn't really come for advice, they came for permission.

There are two extremes in getting advice.

First, to go for advice with your mind already made up.

Which kind of makes it a pointless exercise.

The other extreme is to take the advice of your counsellors without ever thinking it through yourself.

Don't ever think for yourself, just let everybody else decide your future for you.

This is what happens in cults; decision making authority is taken out of your hands.

Neither of these two extremes is healthy.

Let me give you two basic principles when it comes to advice:

#### **A. Seek advice from an appropriate person**

ILLUS – If you're 15 years old, and you're contemplating running away from home, where's the worst place you can go to for advice? Another 15 year old. That's where you get advice like, "Yeah, dude, I reckon leave. And torch the place before you go. Punch some holes in the wall. That'll teach them to tell you to tidy your room.")

ILLUS – If you're experiencing a rough patch in your marriage, where's the worst place you can go for advice in sorting it out? Your friend who's only been married for a year, your other friend who's been divorced twelve times, or your other friend who's never been married at all.

If we want to make quality decisions, we have to be smart where we look for advice.

You want someone with a track record of success in the area where you need advice.

Here's what you look for in a counsellor – wisdom, experience and impartiality.

Three most important qualities:

**Wisdom** – they have a sensible approach to life.

What sort of advice is the 15 year old giving to his friend?

He's just venting his own frustrations with his own parents; he doesn't care if it's in your best interests to punch holes in the walls and leave home.

He doesn't look ahead with his tremendous foresight and see the years of broken family relationships that lie ahead, or the police record, or the guilt.

We'll soon see an example in the Bible of someone who didn't like the good advice he got, so he asked his mates instead.

**Experience** is important too – they must have a proven track record in the area where you are seeking advice.

ILLUS – For instance, you don't go to someone who's been bankrupt three times to get financial advice. Maybe they've learned their lesson. But you don't know that.

**Impartiality** – they don't stand to gain something in advising you one way or the other.

Seek people out who prove by their life that they have something to say that's worth listening to.

And a fourth quality, which isn't absolutely essential if you have the other three, is they have your best interests at heart.

But it's a bonus to have someone who actually cares about what happens to you.

## **B. Weigh the advice carefully**

ILLUS – 1 Kings 12:1-13 Rehoboam wasn't wise when he sought advice.

If you look for advice, think it through carefully.

Don't just dismiss it because it doesn't fit in with what you want to do.

Advice doesn't mean that you have to take it, but at least think it through.

Just because you don't like it, doesn't mean it isn't good advice.

Weigh it up carefully.

## **3. Research**

Did you know that you can get advice from a person without even talking to them?

You might decide that you want to set up your own business.

How do you make a decision on the best way to go about it?

There are plenty of good books with good advice.

Read them, and listen to what they have to say.

## **4. Walking in integrity**

What does walking in integrity have to do with making decisions?

When we walk in integrity, 70% of the decisions we have to make, have already been made.

Let me give you some examples:

- If the checkout operator accidentally gives me \$50 too much change, should I hand it back, or not? If I want to be a person of integrity, that decision has already been made.
- If I'm self-employed and I find a tax invoice on the floor of a store for \$200 worth of stationery, should I take it home and use it to claim a tax deduction? If I want to be a person of integrity, that decision has already been made.
- If I'm staying at a motel, there's a knock at the door, and a young woman is offering her services at a good price, should I accept, or not? If I want to be a person of integrity, that decision has already been made.
- If I'm manning reception, there's a call for my boss, and he says to tell them he's not there, should I lie, or not? If I want to be a person of integrity, that decision has already been made.

These might seem pretty obvious, but so many of the issues of life are affected by whether I want to be a person of integrity or not.

Decisions have already been made because of the type of person I want to be.

How I do my work, how I act as a husband, how I act as a father, a neighbour – many of these areas have been profoundly affected by my choice to be a person of integrity.

Here are three questions to ask yourself to ascertain whether or not a course of action has integrity.

But before I do, let me give you a new definition for integrity.

The dictionary defines it as "uprightness of character", but we are spiritual beings, so I want to add a spiritual dimension to it.

So I've defined integrity as "having the kind of moral character that pleases God."

Here are the three questions that will help you figure out if a course of action has integrity.

## **A. Is it right?**

We've already looked at some situations, but let's bring it down to everyday life.

- Is it right for me to lie?
- Is it right for me to cheat on my tax return?
- Is it right for me to commit adultery?
- Is it right for me to yell at my wife, to treat her badly?
- Is it right for me to neglect my children?

My character defines who I am as a person.

I'm not perfect, but if I want to make quality decisions throughout life, they have to be based on what is right.

## **B. Is it good for others, or just good for me?**

Will my decision be good just for me?

How will it affect others?

Will it only benefit me, and leave others out?

Or worse, will it have a negative impact on others?

Phil 2:4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Selfish decisions don't please God.

When I look at taking a course of action, I have to ask myself the question: Is anyone else going to benefit from this, or is it just going to be me?

## **C. Is it good for the Kingdom, or just good for me?**

And by "Kingdom" I mean the Kingdom of God.

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Jesus had just been telling His followers not to worry about food and drink and clothing, because that's what unbelievers worry about.

Instead, He said that believers should look out first for what's in the interests of God's kingdom.

In other words, don't think first of yourself, and your own needs, and what's easiest for you, or convenient.

But put God first in everything.

So, when I look at taking a course of action, I have to ask: How will this be good for God's Kingdom?

Am I looking out for His interests?

Mat 26:36-39 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." (37) And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. (38) Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." (39) He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

This is how Jesus operated; no matter how tough the decision was, He always acted in the best interests of the Kingdom of God.