

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Decisions: How To Make The Right Choice

Unedited Transcript

Matthew 26:36-44, 4:1-10; Hebrew 4:15; Proverbs 3:5-6, 16:1-4, 21:30; Philippians 4:13

Good morning, men! What I'd like to do first this morning is show you something new that's going on that can help you in your walk with Jesus as a disciple and in helping other men become disciples, too. We just updated the Man in the Mirror website (<http://www.maninthemirror.org>), so if you were to go on to Man in the Mirror, you would see all of this, but go ahead and leave it at the top, Brian. The first thing you see is we help men disciple men, four ways you can take the next step, find out how. So let's click on that, find out how, and that takes you to <http://disciplemen.org> where you will see these four entry points. So there's four ways that we can get more involved together. Let me just overview them before you click. Our vision is to help every church disciple every man and no matter where you are in your journey of discipleship, we want to help. So these four things you can do: grow as a disciple, make disciples, build a ministry to the men in your church, or help other churches disciple men.

So let's just click on grow as a disciple, let's say that would be the place where you wanted to get more involved. You click on that button and it says thanks for your desire to grow, you can become blah blah blah. Then, all of these different things that we can do to help you immediately on the right, get the discipleship blog, use our daily devotional, view this Bible Study; well, you're here so you don't need that. Something to honor your spouse, the 25th anniversary edition of *The Man in the Mirror*; we've got lots of different kinds of emails depending on where you are, and then the search capability. On the left hand side, you can sign up for a series of emails that will just acquaint you with some different things that will be very helpful for you to know as you grow as a disciple.

Let's go ahead and look at the second button then. Notice at the top right there's grow, make, build, help, so we'll just click on make. So the same thing if you want to make disciples, how you can start a Man in the Mirror Bible Study on the right hand side, and a few other things. Also you can register for some emails. Then, let's click on build. Let's just say that you want to build a ministry to the men in your church, we can show you how to do that. There's several things that you can get acquainted with right away on the right hand side or you can sign up to get a series of emails that will be very helpful on the left hand sign.

Then if you want to help other churches build ministries to men, you can click on that and that's a redirect to <http://areadirectors.org> where you can investigate a full or part time paid or volunteer career at Man in the Mirror, and there's all the details. So if you're interested, check it out, we hope you like it!

Welcome to our visitors this morning! If you're visiting us for the first time, we're here every Friday except the Friday after Thanksgiving and after Christmas, and we'd love to have you any time that you are available.

Let's go ahead and do a couple of shout outs. The first one goes to Iron Men (thank you Brian, by the way) of Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Paso Robles, CA. Did I get that right? I did Google Translate this morning! 12 men who have been meeting for 3 months on Sundays at 7:30AM using the Video Bible Study. Led by Stephen Willweber and we are looking for an Area Director for the Paso Robles area.

Then also Evangelical Church Lus Di Mundu (light of the world) in Willemstad Curacao, Netherlands Antilles. I looked that up on Google Translate, also, I just can't remember what I heard! 9 men who have been meeting for a long time, but they are reconstituting, so they've been meeting the last two months at the church on Thursday nights or Saturday mornings using the Video Bible Study. Led by Richard Maria and we currently do not have International Area Directors. I hope I pronounced your last name right Richard, I rolled the R but I'm not sure what language you speak out there. We are so honored and grateful to have both of your groups with us, so I wonder if you men would join me in giving a warm Man in the Mirror welcome to these two groups? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome! Glad to have you guys with us!

The series is The Man in the Mirror. We're moving now into a new section. The first message is entitled Decisions: How to Make the Right Choice. Over the course of the year, we only make two or three major decisions, most of us, if that many. How many of you get the weekly reminder email about the Bible Study? How many of you don't get it? If you're interested in getting that, give me your business card or something with your email address on it, and we'll send it to you, but we do send this out and if you're online, you can go to the manage subscriptions page and sign up for that, too. But you're probably already getting it, otherwise you wouldn't be watching today, I'm guessing. Anyway, this is where I really try to introduce the topic of the day and try to create a little gravity for it, and that's what I said in the opening line, most of us we'll only make a handful of truly major decisions in the course of a year. These are the decisions like do I change jobs? Do I take the job that wants to move me to another city? Do we buy a new home? Do we have another child? Do we have a child? Do we adopt a child? Do I go ahead and declare bankruptcy and start over again? Do I hire this person or not hire this person? Do I let this person go or keep them even though they're disruptive to a point where it's kind of borderline? All kinds of major decisions.

So what I would like to do as we begin this morning is you no doubt have a major decision that you are facing right now, so let's just let that be the shadow case for the lesson this morning. As we go through this, what we want to is show you a Biblical process for making major decisions, one that will hopefully give you the wisdom that you need. If you're decision is a moral choice, you don't need my help, you don't need the help of the other men at your table. If it's a choice between right and wrong, you already know what to do. I guess there is a choice, will I obey God or not, but the vast majority of these major decisions that we have to make, there is no prescription in the Bible for them. Do I marry this woman or that woman? You're not going to get the Bible saying I told you so! So what I want to do is show you this process, lay it out for you, and you can operate on this big decision you have in the background.

Gravitas: a process that is barely understood

First up though, we've got to cover this, the gravitas of this. Decision making is a process that is barely understood! This is Bass and Stogdill's *Handbook of Leadership*. You see how thick that book is? You see all the post-it notes in there? Those are my post-it notes, and there's a note on each one of those because I've read this entire book! This is seven thousand five hundred summaries of articles on research and monographs, all academic research on leadership and decision making. The editor of this book comes to the conclusion that he could not find a single set of common traits or processes that describe how executives made their decisions. One Fortune 500 CEO said that I'll be darned if I have any idea how we make our major decisions around here! It's a process that is barely understood. Not only that but many major decisions turn out wrong! So Peter Drucker in an article that he wrote for... I forget, but I think it's the Harvard Business Review, it's in the book... and he reported that this guru of all management of all time, said that among the most effective people making hiring decisions, 1/3 of those decisions turn out to be good decisions, 1/3 turn out to be mediocre at best, and 1/3 of them are outright failures! In my Ph.D. studies in organizational change, I discovered that 2/3 of all organizational change initiatives, whether it's six sigma or some kind of quality improvement program, whatever it is, doesn't make any difference what kind of program, 2/3 of all organizational change initiatives fail outright, and that's without regard to whether they are public, private, profit, non-profit. It's almost like an iron law.

So there is this staggering amount of evidence that most of the major decisions you're going to make are going to be wrong! Some of you right now are thinking about your wife! So not only is it a process that is barely understood and not only do many of these decisions turn out wrong, but finally, as I have already said, the Bible provides very little direct information about which way you should go on these major decisions. The goal in a moral choice is to do the right thing, but the goal in a priority choice where you have two right options, do I buy the red car or the blue car, the object of making those decisions is to be wise. How can you make the wise decision? In this process of making these right choices, the overarching thing we're trying to do is we're trying to find what is the wise choice.

I said that this is a process that is barely understood, but we can have a goal in mind for it. There is a set of principles that we can apply to it that are Biblical, it's not hopeless. The Bible, Jesus can lead you to the right decision. Let's take a look at Matthew 26:36 and onward. This is Jesus in the garden at Gethsemane, right after the last meal they shared together, and Jesus knows that he's about to be arrested, so he takes Peter, James, and John, and he goes a little deeper into the garden. Then he leaves them and he says stay alert, then he goes and he prays. In verse 39, it says:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me..."

Some of the major decisions that you are facing are not opportunities, they're excruciating problems! Do I have two children that cannot and will not get along? How do I resolve that? Sometimes these problems are cups of suffering. Then, Jesus goes on... take this cup of suffering away from me. Take away this suffering, because that's what I want. My wife is wanting to leave me, and I'm fighting for the marriage, but it seems like I just want to give up. I do want to give up, God take this away from me. That's what Jesus is saying. This is my cup. Jesus said take up your cross, deny yourself, follow me. What is that cross? That's your burden, whatever that burden is. Take it up, follow me, deny yourself. But Jesus says here:

... yet not as I will, but as you will."

God, this is what I want, but even more than what I want, I want what you want. This is the uber principle in decision making, in wise decision making, it's to be able to say God, my wife and I have been trying for eight years to have children. Eight years we've been trying! Lord, we long to have children, yet as much as we want to have children, even more than that we want what you want. So that's the uber principle here in decision making. Notice what happens, this is a big deal because it says in verse 42:

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Then, it says in verse 44:

So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Yet not what I want, but what you want. Not my will, but your will. That's the Big Idea today: **The Goal is always to bring my will into alignment with God's will.** That's the Big Idea! The goal in making a wise decision, making the right decision, is always to bring my will... and man, do I have a will! Some of you are wusses, you don't have a will, you're just kind of meandering along. I'm just joking with you, but some of us have strong ideas and convictions about what's right and what we want to do, and how we want to leave the world a better place; what we want to accomplish, our desires, our ambition. Guess what? Whatever your will is, you can be almost certain it is not God's will. You've heard me say this, the one sentence that I use to best describe my life, it is my theme sentence: because God is good, my life has not turned out like I planned. You no doubt can say exactly the same thing.

Notice three times, three times he talks about bringing his will... Jesus says three times he talks about bringing his will into alignment with God's will. That should not go unnoticed! Jesus wanted something, but three times he asked for his will, but he submitted that what he really wanted more, even than that, was God's will.

How to not make the wrong decision

How to not make the wrong decision is the next thing I would like to talk about. Because decision making is a process that is barely understood and many major decisions turn out wrong, and the Bible doesn't give a lot of guidance on things that are... it's called the adiaphora, the things that are permissible that are not necessarily prohibited or commanded by scripture. Everything else is lawful, that big group of decisions we make. Do I take a job in Lakeland... whatever. Do I start my own business? Do I pour my life savings into this new business venture, do I make that investment? These are things that are not spelled out in scripture specifically, so the best insurance for making the right decision is to make sure you understand how not to make the wrong decision. Are you with me? So this is a risk management deal here, this section; how to not make the wrong decision. There's a scripture for this as well, and it's found in Matthew 4 beginning at verse 1, let's take a look at that. As you're turning there, let us remember that this is an important lesson from Jesus, Hebrews 4:15, tells us that we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we have been tempted, and yet was without sin. So he understands what your major decision is, whether it's problem or opportunity, he understands, and he's given us this fantastic principle.

Now let's take a look at how to not make the wrong decision and once again let's turn to the life of Jesus. So this is the trifold temptation of Jesus. He's out in the wilderness, he's fasting, and Satan comes to him. The first temptation is that he tempts him to do what? To take some rocks and turn them into bread, something like that. So the first temptation here is to go against the word of God. Jesus says do not put the Lord your God to the test. The first principle of not making the wrong decision then is to make sure that you're in conformance with the word of God. Secondly, the devil in verse 5 took him to the holy city and said throw yourself down and the angels will come and rescue you and so forth. Jesus says it's also written don't put the Lord your God to the test. The first way to make sure you're making a wise decision is to make sure that you're in conformance with God's word. How did I say that in the book? I didn't say it exactly like that, I said it better in the book. Of course you can never find anything when you're looking for it... Yeah! Our first step in making good decisions by not making wrong decisions is to live by the word of God. The second principle is to not put God to the test. Don't put yourself in a position through your decisions that in order to rescue you, it's going to take a miracle! I've done that, we've all done that, but we get our circumstances so disrupted that there's no way out. It is going to take a miracle! That doesn't mean that he won't send a miracle, but if you want to not make the wrong decision, don't put yourself in a position where you're testing God. The third way is that he tempts him to worship Satan, and that's the temptation we have, to worship and serve other Gods. The principle that Jesus gives in Matthew 4:10 is away from me Satan! For it is written worship the Lord, God and serve him only! So the third principle of effective decision making is to always worship God and serve him only in your decisions.

So if you don't want to make the wrong decision, the best insurance about it is live by the word of God, don't put God to the test, and make sure you do what you're doing in a way that worships God only. That's how not to make the wrong decisions. The Big Idea again today is the goal of all this is always to bring my will, just as Jesus did, into conformity with the Father's will, God's will.

How to make a wise decision

The third piece of this we'll look at this morning is how to make a wise decision. We've talked about the uber principle, we've talked about how difficult it is to make decisions, we've talked about what Jesus' method is to not make the wrong decision, and now how do you actually make the wise decision; ask your wife. She already knows the answers, so if you're not married, get a wife and then it's all taken care of! Or you could do the following...

Actually, I'll tell you a cute story. I've told it here before many years ago, but I had always wanted a radar detector. I don't even know, I couldn't tell you why I wanted a radar detector. I really don't drive in places where you could even use a radar detector, and I've only had a handful of tickets in my whole life, because I usually outrun the cops! Not really, but I just wanted one. Totally irrational! I get a monthly magazine, and every month it has this radar detector ad on the back cover. Maybe that's why I wanted one, because of the advertising impact, but anyway. With all of that convoluted reasoning, I just thought it would be fun to see the cop before he saw me, something like that. Anyway, I bought one, it came in the mail, and I opened it up and my wife walks by. She says what's that? And I tell her, and she said are you out of your stupid mind? You can't have one of those! You're in the ministry for crying out loud! And I scratched my head, it took me about fifteen minutes to figure it out. So then I was glad it had a thirty day money back guarantee, so I packaged it up and sent it back. So you know, it's not that easy to make a wise decision!

I'm going to give you seven means of guidance. These are even broader than just decision making, and I'm going to draw your attention. You don't need to write these down, you can if you want, but they're also written out for you because on the table is a copy of the article called How to Make Major Decisions. I've been writing these, mostly me, but some by David Delk and Brett Clemmer, for a dozen years, these articles, a monthly article on some men's issue and so you can go to that website I showed you at the beginning, and in the search window you can search for any conceivable men's topic or leadership issue and you'll find some hits. But this was the very first article I ever wrote for the series How to Make Major Decisions. I don't think I changed anything. On the inside on page 2 are the Seven Means of Guidance and the first one is the Bible. This is the single most important question on any major decision: has God already spoken on this issue? Because if he has, then you already know what God's will is. If the goal is to bring my will into alignment with God's will, that means if God already has a will and he's written it down, then that settles the issue.

Second is prayer. Prayer is the currency of our personal relationship with Jesus. He loves it when we love him, he loves it when we talk to him, he loves our being in relationship with him. For Jesus, salvation is among other things, a relationship. It's a reciprocal love relationship. Lovers talk to each other, people who love each other talk to each other. If I'm not talking to you, that means I don't like you. Just kidding! But if we are in a relationship and we communicate regularly, and all of a sudden we're not talking, what do you sense? What do you feel? You miss the person, right? So prayer is a fantastic way.

Then, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in each of us. There are several of his roles that are listed here, but I love this verse, Romans 8:27:

The Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with what? God's will!

What are we trying to do? We're trying to bring our will into alignment with God's will. So the Holy Spirit helps us do that as a means of guidance.

Fourth, conscience. By the way, conscience is fantastic; as a green light, not so good, but as a red light, very good! Because your conscience, especially when you already want something really really bad, you will, because of the flesh, you can kid, trick and fool yourself into believing something, even against your conscience. If it's really bad, sometimes it's referred to as like a seared conscience. Some of you have probably heard that term before, maybe all of you. So use conscience as more of a red light. If you get a check in your spirit about doing something... Yesterday I was in a meeting in Nashville, and we were trying to decide whether or not to add an eleventh principle to a list of distinctives and a couple of us just had a check in the wording, because it looked really good but there was something that just wasn't quite right. Then, after a couple of hours, it was pretty clear what wasn't right, but it was a good red light, conscience.

Then number five, circumstances. Look, if you're five foot six, like to work with numbers, and don't enjoy being around people, you may not be an NBA star, but you might make a great accountant! If you need a \$100,000 mortgage and you've applied for the house you really want, but you can only qualify for \$75,000 mortgage, guess what? You know God's will! God speaks through circumstances. Money is a hand providence. It's not the only hand of providence, but it is a hand of providence. God guides us with these financial things.

Counsel. It was mentioned in the opening video that plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed. Just make sure that you are able to have somebody that you can bounce these

things off of. Probably more than one, especially with somebody really close to you, because they may have a vested interest in the outcome of the decision that you're about to make, so it's a good idea to make sure you have some independent people around. Getting counsel from a wife is actually an extremely good idea.

The final one is the fasting. Brothers, that's what I wanted to say to you about making major decisions this morning. Your major decision, hopefully this will help you. We all make decisions every day all the time, right? One young fifteen year old man was telling me in a story board session I was doing with him, basically we could just make everything about decisions because everything boils down to decisions. We're the sum of the decisions that we make. The Big Idea today, the goal in making these decisions is always to bring my will into alignment with God's will. Father, thy will be done. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, thank you for your word. Jesus, thank you for laying out how you made your decisions and how you avoided making bad decisions and what your ultimate goal was in making your decisions. Lord, I thank you on behalf of these men also for giving us these means of guidance by which we can make better decisions, wise decisions. We just pray for whatever those things are that are troubling these men, my men, your men, that you would give them something here today that would encourage them and show them the way, the process by which they can make a decision that would honor and glorify you and be wise for them. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!