

**Decisions, Decisions,
1 Samuel 30:1-8, Acts 1:15-26**

Brothers and sisters did you – ever have to make up your mind? The scriptures that we read this morning were two examples of some major decisions that people in the bible had to make and I wanted to read them to set the stage for our discussions about decisions.

Now I'm not sure if it was a major decision for you to be here this morning or not but regardless, you being here is a decision. In fact it's the result of many decisions. I'm not sure if you thought of it like that, but You decided, you made up your mind to...

- to get up this morning,
- on time
- what you are going to wear
- what to eat for breakfast
- to have had a shower and brush your teeth (at least I'm hoping you did and so is the person sitting next to you)
- to go church

- where you are going to sit

and on and on it can go. In fact, we can trace where you are now, sitting here this morning back to all sorts of decisions that you made before this morning, to days, weeks, months, years ago – perhaps back to a time you made *“a decision to follow Jesus.”*

Life is full of decisions, decisions that we have to make, from little mundane ones, like which pair of socks should I wear? all the way to big important life shaping ones as in who I should marry? In this regard we know that we can make good decisions or bad ones.

So, it seems pretty obvious to us that decisions are important, because they affect our lives and the lives of others around us. (like not showering or brushing our teeth)

Now, since we recognize this, most people take the prospect of decision making seriously, and there's a ton of useful and helpful information out there about decision making.

And, following up from last Sunday's message about apps on smart phones, I bet you there's an app that you can download to help you with decision making.

But there's one question that all this information and technology forgets to prompt us to ask, and that is... *"What does God have to say to us in scripture about making decisions?"*

Brothers and sisters, the bible itself is the best app for making decisions because not only is it full of God's truth and wisdom, which you might rightly guess are very useful in decision making - it also shows us the big picture in which we make those decisions. Context is a huge factor in making decisions – and only the bible contains God's perspective on our context.

So what does the bible say about decision making?

The first thing we discover is that God has given us the capacity of making decisions as part of our calling to be stewards and rulers over his creation. In the Garden of Eden

God brings the animals before Adam, and Adam decides what they shall be named.

"Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name."
(Genesis 2:19)

We also discover that when Adam and Eve rebelled against God they used their decision making capacity to disobey Him.
"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Genesis 3:6)

The result was that sin and evil entered into our world and affected everything – our decision-making capacity included.

Did you know that without God choosing us and sending His Holy Spirit to do His unseen and mysterious work in our hearts

and minds and spirits, that we will not decide to believe in Jesus or follow Him, or put our trust in Him? In fact you will decide to do anything else instead...

In fact, when it comes to how sin affects our decision-making capacity in regards to God's plan of salvation Eph 2:1 tells us that we were dead,

That's why God decided to send a savior, his son Jesus Christ – because fixing things wasn't as simple as just convincing people to decide to love and serve God again.

Jesus Christ needed to take on our human nature – decision making capacity included, and restore it, turn it back around towards God, and then when this had been accomplished, he sent the Holy Spirit to begin working on this in all who believe in Him, so that what was accomplished in Christ would be started in us.

So that's where we find ourselves today – as people who have been enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, and empowered to

make a decision to follow Him. And we are people who have the Holy Spirit working in us to transform our decision-making ability so that more and more, we can make decisions that are pleasing to God, decisions which honor him and serve Him and show that we fear Him.

That's good news, isn't it? It certainly is but... brothers and sisters, many people I know get hung up on this news. It becomes a source of anxiety and stress instead

Maybe you can relate to Joe's story?

Joe is not a Christian, rather he's an average Joe – he's basically a good guy, works 9 to 5 in an office, married with 2 kids, loves his wife and takes good care of the kids. He's done well in life and his career and things are going along well – until God chooses Joe and starts to work in his life.

After the Holy Spirit regenerates Joe's heart, Joe is able to respond to the gospel message, and he makes a decision to follow Jesus and Joe becomes a Christian.

He sees how shallow and empty his life was before he made a decision for Christ, he recognizes he is guilty of ignoring God and not believing in Him, plus a few other things he's not proud of.

And in the early years of being a new Christian Joe is experiencing wonderful things in the faith and God seems to be so close. In everything Joe does now he's extremely concerned that it is what God wants him to do – especially because He's lived for so long ignoring God and not obeying him.

So, Joe is constantly wondering if he is really doing what God wants him to do. His pastor has said that being a Christian is often not about choosing between what's right and wrong, but between what's good and what's best!

So, Joe is concerned about this, not only because he loves God but because he knows that one day he will give an account of his life to God. *"For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:"**"as surely as I live," says the Lord, 'every*

knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' "
So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.
(Rom 14:10-12)

God is going to say to each one of us: "You were created to be my representative on earth, to steward the creation. So let's look at your record, explain to me why you lived your life the way you did. Tell me why did you do what you did with the resources I put you in charge of?"

So Joe is rightly concerned about making decisions which please God, and we should be too!

Now, after a few years have passed and Joe has been a Christian for a little while, life continues on and Joe has been thinking about buying a bigger house. And after looking around for a little while he's found one that he likes in one neighborhood, but... there's another one he also likes in a different location.

So Joe is faced with having to make a decision.

Which one should he buy? But as a Christian Joe is also thinking, which one would God be pleased with? Which one would God want me to buy?

So Joe asks around at his church for some advice and these are some of the answers he gets back.

- 1) Pray and read the Bible
- 2) Ask What would Jesus Do?
- 3) Look for divine signs
- 4) What does your heart, your head tell you?

But brothers and sisters, Joe is still confused because none of these methods are really any help to him.

Joe has been diligent in praying and reading his bible on a daily basis for the last number of years. He knows it quite well, but he still hasn't found the chapter and verse which instructs him to buy the house in Tuscany as opposed to the one in Elbow Valley.

In fact, in reading the bible Joe has noticed that Jesus didn't own a home. So if he asks "*What would Jesus do?*" he ends up wondering what Jesus' lack of property means for himself and his family.

And Joe has also noticed – like we may have in reading our scripture passages - that Jesus and other people in the bible seemed to be able to ask God about choices and decisions and God would answer them with some sort of sign.

In our scripture readings this morning we see David consulting God about a decision by having the Priest bring the ephod. The ephod was a breastplate that the Priest wore – and it was also where the Priest kept the Urim and Thummim, objects by which the Priest would consult and discern God's will.

We don't know much about them – but the Priest would use them to determine how God would answer on a particular question – and in David's case the answer came back "go and pursue and overtake and you will be successful."

And it was this long-standing Priestly practice that was behind the Apostle's decision to pray, ask for the Lord's sovereign guidance and direction for who should take Judas' place – and then basically pick straws to see who God would choose.

And so Joe, like many of us, wishes that God would just *"give him a sign"* in this sort of way but what sort of sign would it be? The old covenant is fulfilled, the Urim and Thummim are not how God speaks to us on matters anymore.

And most of us would probably keep wondering if it was truly God or just random chance if we tried to flip a coin or pick straws to make a decision – not to mention it just doesn't feel very spiritual or divine anyways.

So, would meeting his future next-door neighbors at the grocery store be enough of a sign for Joe? Would finding out that the previous owners were founding members of the church he now attends be the sign he's looking for? Praying and flipping a coin? Heads its Tuscany, tails its Elbow Valley and if the coin stands on its edge – he'll buy both!

Does it need to be something more biblical - like God speaking to him from a burning bush on the front lawn of the house he should buy? None of these seem very probable or credible for Joe.

So, as Joe contemplates all of this, wondering about signs (signs and wonders!) he finds himself thinking about how he really likes one house because it looks so nice and its got all the things he's really wanted in a house. But the other one is a far better investment with a greater future property value increase.

So now Joe is thinking *"maybe I'm being vain and greedy in considering these options."* He knows that his sins are forgiven, but he still wrestles with his sinful nature and he know this affects how he feels and thinks. He's not certain how pure his motivations are and whether or not he's just rationalizing things. He knows he can't trust his heart or his head to always want to make decisions that please God – sometimes they are self-interested.

And this is why we see both David and the disciples asking God, inquiring of God, about the decisions they had to make in the scripture passages that we read. They wanted to make sure they were acting in God's interests – not in self-interest.

And God answered David and the disciples... however he's not answering Joe in the same way. So, what is Joe to do?

Brothers and sisters what would you, what should we do when we come across situations like these where God doesn't seem to give an indication one way or another about we should decide? We need to make a decision, because that is what God created us to do!

Remember – decision making is part of our calling as stewards, as rulers over the earth. That is why the Holy Spirit is transforming our decision-making capacity, so Paul writes to the Philippians 2: 12-13 *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with*

fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

You see when we first become Christians, whether we are young or old, and we experienced God guiding our decisions. It was kind of like having training wheels on a bike.

But in order to help us mature spiritually and do what we were created for, God backs off and encourages us to make decisions on our own, and that can be a bit scary at first. This is what Paul is talking about telling the Philippians to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. He's weaning them off his assistance so they learn to make godly decisions in the fear of the Lord on their own.

So, brothers and sisters, as you grow in your walk with God and He does this in your life you might find yourself reacting in certain ways.

You may find that you need to fight against perfectionist tendencies, your fear of failure, or that you may not want to

take responsibility and have to deal with the consequences of your decisions. But it is necessary to overcome all these in order to become a mature Christian, a mature steward of creation. (which is not the same as being a mature adult)

Now please don't misunderstand me – I'm not saying that we can't or shouldn't ask God for guidance, or insight, for big things or little things – in fact the only reason we are on our current path to step out of the PCC is because we had been praying for God's guidance on our future and He gave us clear discernment in group prayer that we needed to step out in faith and leave.

What I'm saying is that when we have asked for guidance and God is silent, it is to help us mature and put into practice what we have learned and what He's clearly spoken to us about faith, following Jesus, right and wrong, and wisdom in the past, and in the scriptures.

So what is it that we need to have learned? Well let's go back to our friend Joe and see what he's learned.

Joe's pastor sat down with him and explained how to proceed in circumstances like this.

First, Joe has learned that he needs to keep reading Scripture, just as he has been. But instead of looking for specific instructions in these kinds of situations Joe needs to learn some of the correct guidelines for understanding scripture and applying it to his life. Then he will understand what God wants to say through scripture when it comes to things like Jesus not owning property.

He's also realized that he needs to see the big picture in scripture, not just little verses here and there. When he discovered the big picture, he realized – as we have, that we are stewards. That God expects us to use our capacity for making decisions and that we need to mature in this.

So now Joe realizes that the bible addresses his question of where to buy a house in terms of stewardship, in terms of using his possessions to participate in the Kingdom of God, in terms of how he can share his faith with others.

So, Joe is now reflecting on the questions these principles raise and will be making his decision in light of them. In this way Joe is discovering what the Psalms mean when they say: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* (Psalm 119:105) Individual verses are like laser beams – but the whole context of scripture is like a flood light, helps us see!

Second, Joe now understands that because he is a steward and he has a calling from God, that God has given him particular gifts, talents and abilities and the decisions he makes need to take these into account.

For instance, Joe is good at fixing things, and he enjoys this and one of the homes he is looking at has that potential for him to work on that. It's also located in a neighborhood where Joe has learned they are in need of people to volunteer in the community association, and they organize food bank drives and they are in need of someone to help out with the outdoor rink in the winter, some other things that Joe is passionate about, and good at.

So Joe is discovering an application of Rom 12:6 as it says *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith."*

And instead of looking for "signs" Joe now looks at his **circumstances**. From reading his bible Joe understands that God is always at work, especially when it comes to ordinary everyday events. When Joe looks around at his family and sees that his two children need more space as they grow, they can't continue to share a room as brother and sisters as they continue to grow older and become pre-teens.

Having separate rooms is not only going to reduce teasing and fighting, it's appropriate for their privacy and respect. Proverbs 24:3 say *"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established..."*

And Joe also sees that a move will help his wife be closer to her work. No more long commutes and his gas costs. So, less stress on his wife and overall, less stress on the family. As Proverbs 21:9 says *"Better to live on a corner of the roof than*

share a house with a quarrelsome wife.” Happy wife – happy life! Now Joe is discovering what it means to live skillfully in God’s world – to be wise.

Finally, by reading scripture to get the big picture Joe has discovered that instead of revealing a specific plan for your life, the bible describes God’s mission in our world and as you read about it, and you learn about yourself as a follower of Jesus, get to know your gifts and see things from the Holy Spirit’s perspective - you get a vision of how you can specifically participate in God’s mission.

Joe has always envisioned being able to invite and host groups of people at his home in support of his church’s small group ministry, youth ministry, or just making it available for social events so that people with no church background can connect with his church and hear the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, its good and helpful for you to know that even small things like this can be a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in John 14:12 *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has*

faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things [further] than these”

So which house did Joe end up buying – I’m not sure... but I do know that he now has a much better foundation to make a decision as a mature Christian than he did before!

And I’m confident that he, and you, will be equipped to make decisions that are pleasing to God, that will fulfill our calling as stewards of creation, and are greater things that what Jesus did, now that we understand what the bible says about our decision-making ability.

So, brothers and sisters today this all means that you now have another decision to make – but... this one should be easy.

Will you continue to get hung up on how to make decisions, or will you follow what the Lord’s spoken to you through his word about making decisions this morning?

I’ll let you decide. Amen.