

Wise Decisions / Introduction to Proverbs

Schoolgirl 1: Do you have a coin I could borrow for a moment?

Schoolgirl 2: Sure, why?

Schoolgirl 1: I can't decide whether to go to class or go for a swim. If I can't make up my mind I toss a coin. Heads I go swimming, tails I go to school!

Schoolgirl 2: OK...How does that method work out for you?

Schoolgirl 1: Oh, half the time it's good, half the time it's bad, and half the time it probably didn't make any difference anyway.

Schoolgirl 2: Maybe you should go to class. I'm thinking your fractions need a bit more work! ...three halves?

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy. Did you just hear those girls? ...That's *one* way to make decisions! But I'm not sure that it's a very *good* way! We'll be talking more about that later. And here's Carol: hi Carol, how are you?

Carol: I'm well, thanks Tammy. How are *you* doing? It's good to sit down together for a chat today.

Tammy: Carol and I have been thinking about how to make wise choices in our everyday decisions. We decided to do some simple research - we just asked a few of our friends how *they* make decisions. We were surprised at the different ways, weren't we Carol? One woman said: 'I just go by instinct. I trust my inner feelings, and do what seems like a good idea at the time.' Do *you* do that?

Carol: *Sometimes* I do - especially if I have to make a quick decision. I think 'instinct' often means we use our training and past experiences, without having to think it all through logically. That can be useful in a crisis.

Tammy: But sometimes we don't realize how our 'instincts', or first reactions, are influenced by our *feelings*. Instinct is usually based on what's happened in the past. Or we can be influenced by people around us without realizing it. I might make a silly decision because I want to please someone I like. Or my decision might be affected by something that happened in the past. One of my friends said she never trusts bald men - but when she thought about it, it was only because she had a bald teacher who bullied her!

Carol: Don't ignore your feelings though. Emotions can be an important part of our decision making. For example, if you love animals you may decide to work with them even though you could make more money doing something else.

Tammy: I'd say we should always take notice of our feelings when we make decisions about friendships or marriage. (smile)

Carol: Some of our friends said they try to get lots of information before they make a decision. I guess it's good to know the facts. For example: if you're thinking of growing food to sell, you would find out what food is popular in nearby markets. There's no point planting an orchard of figs if the local people don't eat them. You'd find out what grows well in your area, and how much water the crop needs.

Tammy: Or if you're a tailor you'd look at what's in fashion. You wouldn't make all narrow sleeves if the fashion is for wide sleeves this year.

Carol: Would you do research to decide whether to marry someone?... Maybe, if you didn't know them for long. You'd try to find out whether they are kind to their family, honest, and hardworking. Do they run after many partners? Are they bad-tempered or violent when they don't get their way? Do they believe the same things you do? Would their family be good to you? (*Production teams - ask culture-appropriate questions*)

Tammy: That sounds a good idea. But another friend said, 'I hate making decisions. I just do what I always do - then I know what to expect. If I find something I like, I just stick to it. I stick to my daily routine. Then I don't have to think too hard' What do *you* think about that method?...

Carol: That probably works for lots of everyday things - like what coffee you drink. You don't want to constantly be making decisions about little things. But if you never make any changes, you could get bored, and you probably miss out on some good opportunities.

Tammy: I knew a man who tried to take a different route to work every day, just for variety!

Carol: But you *do* need to have a good look at what you do from time to time...not necessarily take a different route to work every day!

For example, do you plant the same vegetables every year? No, you change them around so the soil keeps its fertility, and you get a variety. Do you teach your children the same way when they are 15 as you did when they were 3? No, you change according to circumstances.

So we may not like change, but we need to consider it sometimes. If we don't change, we can't improve. Maybe we should stop and look at our goals and what we're doing at least once a year, and see if we need to make some *new* decisions.

Tammy: I notice that I often don't make changes till I really *have* to, till it's too painful to stay the same. Sometimes things have to get really bad before we're willing to look at how we're living, and see the need to change. I've heard so many stories where one marriage partner kept asking for changes to be made...like for their partner to help them more with chores...but when nothing changed, they eventually decided to leave. Their partner was suddenly willing to change...but by then it was too late! We need to listen to each other and talk about things before there's a crisis. So making a regular time to look at what's happening in our lives would be really valuable.

Tammy: Good idea. So what have we talked about so far? It's good to consider our feelings and first reactions. But it's worth taking some time to find out more information before we make decisions.

Carol: Yes, and we also talked about being open to make changes; don't wait for a crisis to force you to change. While we listen to this music, maybe you could think about what else we can do, to make good decisions.

Tammy: This is *Women of Hope*, and we've been talking together about how to make wise decisions. One point was to do some research and find out as much as we can about the situation. So what else would you do?

Carol: I find it helps to ask advice from people I trust. Who would *you* ask for advice? I think that's especially important when it's a very important decision...or a very emotional one. Ask for advice, and opinions, consider them carefully, but you don't *have* to do what others tell you to. ...Make your *own* decision.

Tammy: And when you have different options to consider, it's often good to get in a group and think of lots of possibilities, even quite unusual or crazy ones. We call that *brainstorming*.

Sometimes crazy-sounding ideas can lead to really clever ones. Then you can decide which of your ideas are good and practical.

Pick which option looks like the best one. Then you can try to work out the advantages and disadvantages. This can be hard, so ask yourself some questions ...like:

What would be the costs of making this decision... What might I have to give up? Who else will it affect?

What will I gain from this decision?

If it doesn't work out well, can I cope with that?

Are the benefits worth the risks?

All business people ask these kinds of questions, but they're good ones to ask when we make our personal, daily choices too.

Carol: But you don't just decide by adding up the number of advantages and disadvantages. Some are much more important than others, aren't they? For example, I can think of lots of reasons why I *shouldn't* go to work on a nice sunny day, but there's one big reason I *should* go - I need to help provide for my family. (Smile) So what sorts of things are most important to *you*? What are *your* big goals in life?...

Tammy: I think we need to ask ourselves – is it right? Would it please God? ...What would he want me to do?

We could ask - would it improve my relationships? ...Would I be using my abilities and my time well?

Or maybe...could it *harm* someone else? It's really important to think about who else will be affected, and what will be fair to them as well as yourself.

The answers aren't always clear, are they? Sometimes it's a decision between two things that are good, or even two things that are not very good, but that's the choice you have to make.

Carol: Usually it works well for me to gather all the facts...but sometimes I'm still gathering information when I should have already made the decision. Someone said to me, 'To *not* decide is also a decision'. If you keep putting it off a decision might be made for you, and it might not be one that you like to have made.

Tammy: I know what you mean! We couldn't decide where we would go for a holiday, until it was too late to make plans, and so we had to stay home.

Carol: But if it's an important decision, I like to take some time to decide, and then wait a day or two to see how I feel. We say, 'Let's *sleep* on it.'

Tammy: Good idea. Because decisions are important, even quite small ones. For example, if I want to get fit, I'll need to make a lot of small decisions, day after day - to exercise, to eat healthy food, to avoid unhealthy habits like smoking. It's tempting to say, 'Oh, this piece of cake won't matter', but every small *bad* choice takes you further from achieving your goal, while every small *good* choice brings you closer. And in the long run, your choices are what shape your character.

Carol: You're so right Tammy. That's why with *important* decisions, the best person to ask for advice is - God! He knows *far* more than we do, and he loves us and wants the best for us.

So...do you pray and ask God for wisdom when you have to make a decision? In the Bible it says: 'If anyone needs wisdom, let him - or her - ask God, who gives generously to all, without finding fault, and it will be given...' (James 1:5) It's so easy to just follow our own desires, and forget that God *wants* to give us his wisdom, because he knows what's best for us. And because God loves us, he wants us to talk to him...even about the little details of our lives.

Tammy: We've been talking about how to make wise decisions. In my family we're actually going through something right now where we have asked God to guide us. Our oldest son is 20 years old now, and he's been thinking about what he should do in the next step of life. Should he study some more, or look for the kind of job he wants to do? He wants to help deaf people, so he's been studying to be an American Sign Language Interpreter - translating what people say into hand signs so that the deaf can understand.

Carol: So how did he decide?

Tammy: Well first, he asked us what we thought he should do, and we prayed together, because he wanted to know what God wants for him. He found out that to do this work he must take several tests to get a license. He applied to do the tests a month later, and they said sorry, those dates are full. But then - they found him a time – in just six days! He felt that God was opening the way for him to do this work...so he had to go ahead, even if he didn't feel prepared. So - he's taking his test this afternoon! I'll let you know how it goes!

Carol: Thanks for sharing that Tammy. Did you notice how Tammy's son wanted to do something for the right reasons, so he asked for advice, and he prayed for God's wisdom? Then he did some research to find out what was needed. When one path seemed to open up, he went ahead, with faith that God would show him the next step. He sounds a wise young man!

Tammy: We have a new friend with us today - Sally, from Australia. Sally is going to join us for the next few times we meet. She'll share with us about a special place we can find wisdom. Welcome Sally, we're looking forward to hearing from you.

Sally: Thanks Tammy; and hello to *you*.

Let me ask you: What do you do when someone gives you a list of instructions? Do you want to throw them out the window and do it all your way? Or maybe follow some – the ones you like – and ignore the rest? What if the instructions were to help you *live*? Instructions about being a wife...a mother...a daughter. Maybe a housekeeper...a neighbor...or a friend. Instructions that are wise, and good, and right? Instructions, in fact, given to you by God?

I have recently been reading from a book in the Bible that I'm finding very helpful. It's like a little instruction book, full of short, memorable sentences – that give practical, helpful instructions about everyday life. It talks about living in families...choosing friends...raising children...spending (and making) money. About food...gossip...work...and sleep. It teaches us what God loves and what he hates. And it describes the natural consequences of foolish and selfish choices. Do you know which book it is?

It's the Book of Proverbs!

Do you know what a proverb is? Someone once said a proverb is a "short sentence of wisdom" ...and the book of Proverbs in the Bible is full of short sentences of wisdom. These are written so that you and I can grow in wisdom and character. It doesn't matter what our situation in life...our education...our age or our experience, we can learn from these proverbs...and we can grow in our relationship with the living God.

Proverbs teach us good ways to live...to love what is good and avoid what is not good. To develop godly character so that we can be blessed and also be a blessing to others.

You know, God is just as interested in the kind of people we *are* as he is in what we *do*.

Just like a house needs a strong foundation, so you and I need to build our character on the strong foundation of godliness and wisdom. With a godly character we can make wise decisions, build good friendships, and be a blessing to many.

God is our Creator and he knows the best way for us to live. That is why God has given you and me the precious Book of Proverbs – his instruction book.

Do you know what people said about God's son, Jesus, as he hung on the cross? They heard his words and saw his character...even as he was suffering and dying, with people laughing at him and insulting him. And they said, "Surely this is a righteous man." Even in his darkest hour his character was clear to all. He was a righteous man...a really good man.

What about you? I wonder if people say that about you?

"Surely she is a righteous woman."

They hear your words – at home, in the street, at the market. They see your character. They watch the way you treat those around you. Your decisions. Your choices. Your priorities. Do they see the righteousness of God in you?

The Book of Proverbs teaches us how to speak and act as Jesus did – with the righteousness of God.

In the next few times together we're going to have a closer look at some of my favorite Proverbs. In Proverbs 23:19 it says we are to "listen and be wise, and keep our hearts on the right path." Are you prepared to listen to the wisdom of God in his instruction book, and keep walking in his path? Then you and your family will be blessed.

Carol: Why *wouldn't* we want to hear God's wisdom? But we can be too proud to take good advice sometimes. Let's be humble enough - and smart enough - to pay attention, and even be prepared to change our ways. Thanks for sharing those thoughts Sally.

Sally: It's a pleasure to be with you. I'll look forward to our next time together. Bye for now.

Carol: Would you like to share something with us? You can contact us at... We'd love to hear from you, and we'll pray for you. Goodbye now.

Tammy: Goodbye my friend, and may God give you wisdom always.