

The Wise Thing – Part 2

CREDIT: “The Best Question Ever” by Andy Stanley

Last week, we introduced you to one critical question that applies to every decision you will ever make, a question that sheds light on issues the Bible doesn’t specifically address. In fact, if you had asked this one question and acted on your conclusion, you could have avoided your greatest regret in life. (For some of you, it might have changed the direction of your life!) Why? Because some of your greatest regrets started with choices that you convinced yourself were good ones.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, [16] Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. [17] Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

- Walk circumspectly – don’t be careless or casual in following Christ, watch your step because it is so easy to stumble, be intentional
- Not as fools but as wise – this is the yardstick we are to use to assess every decision we make, and it leads us to the one question that enables us to consistently apply the commands of the Bible:
- **WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?**

Usually when we are making our choices we run our options and opportunities through a different filter – IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT? The assumption is that if there is nothing wrong, illegal, unethical or immoral about it, then it qualifies as an option for us. If there is no “THOU SHALT NOT,” we assume that God is saying “THOU SHALT IF THOU PLEASE.”

Unfortunately, this kind of thinking sets us up for the real question behind too many of our choices: “How close can I get to the line between right and wrong without actually doing something wrong?” (How close can I get to sin without actually sinning?) And we soon end up asking: “How far over the line between right and wrong can I go without experiencing consequences?” (How much sin can I get away with?)

Every bad decision you have ever heard about could have been avoided if only someone asked, WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?

In light of your past experience, what is the wise thing to do?

In light of your current circumstances, what is the wise thing to do?

In light of your future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do?

Don’t be generic! What is the wise thing for YOU to do?

TIME

When it comes to asking “What is the wise thing to do?” there is no more crucial area than your TIME – because your time equals your LIFE. Once you run out of time, life is over!

Job 14:5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Just the recognition that our time on earth is limited should compel us to evaluate our lives differently – but only if we learn to ask “What is the wise thing to do?”

Have you ever asked, “Where did the time go?” What you are really asking is “Where did my life go?” Time is life and can’t be recovered! This is a principle that everyone figures out eventually, but most of the time “eventually” is too late. It is one of those lessons that, regardless of when we learn it, we wish we had learned it earlier.

1. There is a cumulative value to investing small amounts of time in certain activities over a long period (exercise, practice, relationships, prayer, reading, education, Bible reading, church attendance, etc).
2. There are rarely any immediate consequences for neglecting single installments of time in any arena of life (health, work, etc).
3. Neglect has a cumulative effect (and in the areas that matter most, a burst of energy and activity cannot reverse the consequences that accompany a season of neglect!)
4. There is no cumulative value to the urgent things that we allow to interfere with the important things (“what did you do instead of ...?” – “I don’t know!”). The random pursuits that interrupt our important routines don’t add up to anything except a lot of wasted time!
5. In the critical areas of life, you cannot make up for lost time. (In the world of relationships and spirituality, there are no all-nighters! They are built on small, consistent deposits of time.)

Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Watch out that our culture doesn’t draw you into a lifestyle where your time is frivolously consumed rather than strategically invested.

MONEY

If you had been managing your money according to the question “What is the wise thing to do?” you would be happier. Why? Because you would be free from the unnecessary pressures that come with poor money management.

According to international standards, everyone here is wealthy. But there is a huge difference between BEING rich and FEELING rich. The reason you don’t feel rich is because you don’t actually have any extra cash. You are upside down financially, and someone with less cash but less owing feels richer – and freer – than you!

Most money problems in our country stem from poor financial management, not low income. That’s why the two biggest crises we face today are obesity and consumer debt. We eat too much and we spend too much – neither of these problems is caused by earning too little! But what do we do? We look for someone else to blame!

Why do we make so many poor decisions when it comes to money? Because our culture has taught us to ask all the wrong questions:

- Can I afford it?
- What will the monthly payment be?
- How much can I borrow?
- Is it on sale?
- How much available equity do I have in my home?
- Is it cheaper to lease?

The assumption behind these questions is that if I CAN make it work financially, then I SHOULD make it work. But none of the people trying to talk you into buying all that stuff have any interest in your financial future (only their own). The only person looking out for your best interests financially is YOU – and you must ask a different set of questions!

Our financial plan:

- Earn it
- Enjoy it (present)
- Repay it (past)
- Save it (future)
- Give it (eternity)

God's financial plan:

- Earn it
- Give it (eternity)
- Save it (future)
- Repay it (past)
- Enjoy it (present)

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

God will bless whatever you put Him first in! Where would you be now if you had been asking: “What is the WISE thing to do?”

MORALITY

Nothing has stolen more dreams, broken up more families, and messed up more people psychologically than our tendency to disregard God’s commandments regarding sexual purity. Most of the major social ills in our country are caused by the misuse of our sexuality.

No regret runs deeper than the regret associated with unwise moral decisions. But as predictable as the outcomes are, we haven’t learned very much – lust continually pushes us past the limits of common sense. People are prone to make foolish moral decisions because something always whispers to us that our situation is UNIQUE.

- Nobody has ever felt this way before.
- No one has had to deal with what I have to deal with.
- I can handle it ... I’m not like everybody else.
- The statistics don’t apply to me ... or my kids.
- I know what’s best for me.

As long as you remain convinced that you are unique, you will resist asking “What is the wise thing to do?” But at the end of your life, if not before, you will discover that you were not so unique after all.

The good news is that, while the outcomes of sexual sin are predictable, so are the decisions that set us up to sin sexually. If you are willing to face the fact that your temptations are not unique, you can make the right choices. Don’t trust your heart! Ask “What is the wise thing to do?”

Every poor moral decision is prefaced by a series of unwise choices. “There’s nothing wrong with ...” leads to “I couldn’t help myself ...”

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

To protect ourselves in our culture, it is necessary to make some EXTREME choices. Overreacting? Maybe. But if you’ve ever talked to people who underreacted (and paid dearly), you would understand.

“Regarding sexual immorality, pursue all manner of sensuality and impurity, yet remain faithful to God and your spouse. Husbands, gaze upon women in a lustful fashion until your heart is full, but do not touch that which is forbidden. Wives, dress in a manner that provokes the lustful passions of the men around you, but in your actions remain faithful to your husband.” (from 3 Corinthians, the lost epistle – NOT!)

That’s usually our approach! But Paul said FLEE! Even extreme measures after the fact can’t erase your past, so why not take extreme precautions up front? If you don’t set your standards, others will!

ASKING FOR WISDOM

Asking “What is the wise thing to do?” always reduces my options, but it doesn’t always single one out. What then? What if I’m sincere but not sure? What should I do when I don’t know the wise thing to do?

Emotionally charged environments, or our lack of experience and expertise, or simply our human limitations can sometimes make us feel totally inadequate to decide the wise thing to do.

But the Bible gives us the best-kept secret of wise people. This is how they became wise, and how they continue to appear wise: **Wise people know when they DON’T KNOW, and they’re not afraid to ask for help from those who DO KNOW.**

1 Kings 3:12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, but he insisted that we should always pursue the counsel of others when we are not sure:

- **Proverbs 1:5** A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:
- **Proverbs 12:15** The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.
- **Proverbs 19:20** Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.
- **Proverbs 11:14** Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.
- **Proverbs 15:22** Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

WISDOM ALWAYS SEEKS COUNSEL! But human beings are especially resistant to counsel in the three areas we need it the most – our time, money and relationships. “My private life is nobody else’s business!” That’s true, but the results of our private decisions are rarely private for long. And every decision you make affects somebody else.

PRIVATE DECISIONS HAVE PUBLIC CONSEQUENCES.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

RECOGNIZE WHO GOD IS ... AND WHO YOU ARE NOT! (surrender!)