

LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS

How to Make the Right Decisions

(Session 1)

BIG IDEA: GOD HAS GIVEN US PRINCIPLES BY WHICH WE CAN MAKE LIFE'S DECISIONS. BY FOLLOWING THEM WE CAN AVOID MUCH TRAGEDY AND HEARTACHE.

Do you think this lesson adequately accomplishes this purpose statement? In what ways could you do a better job of accomplishing this purpose?

PURPOSE: BY THE END OF THIS STUDY YOUTH SHOULD BE MOTIVATED TO SEEK GOD'S WILL AND KNOW PRACTICALLY HOW TO FIND IT.

REMINDER: God doesn't clearly line out a step by step method of determining His will in the Bible. The following principles are rooted in the Scriptures. But let the Spirit guide you as to which points to emphasize. Perhaps you will discover other Biblical teachings that apply as well. You are

responsible to come before God and His Word and to accurately teach the flock He has put under your care.

INTRODUCTION

SKIT TIME!! A week prior to this session, ask several youth to prepare a skit around the following theme: Three different youth approach a crossroads, one at a time. The first walks to the crossroads muttering, "What to do. What to do. Should I major in Math? Or train to be a chef?" The next comes to the crossroads talking about his need to decide what to do during the Winter holidays: go skiing with his church group or on vacation with his family. A third is trying to decide whether or not to ask a girl to marry him (you can add humor to this one by having a guy trying to decide which girl in the youth group to marry.) All stop at the crossroads trying to decide which way to go (which decision to make). The first checks his horoscope in a newspaper. It reads, "Don't take on problems that you can't easily solve." "Problems I can't easily solve? Of course! Avoid the Math major! Chef's school, here I come!" He walks on. The second asks the advice of the third person and then decides to go with his family on the vacation. The third casts a dice and decides on a girl.

After the skit, talk about the importance of life's decisions. There is a way of abundance and fullness (see Psalm 84:11), but there is another way that looks right to us, but ends in destruction (see Proverbs 14:12). Have youth reflect on this Proverbs passage and give examples of people they know (don't give names) who made decisions that had bad

ACTIVITY! Ask your youth to write down one or more decisions they will need to make either soon or within the next couple of years.

consequences.*

PRAYER: (I usually pray that God will guide us in this crucial study. Then, I give everyone a moment to pray 1 - for God to open their hearts, giving them attentive spirits and 2 - for God to speak through me as I teach.)

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Transition: "Before we prayed, you wrote down some decisions that can't be entrusted to the roll of the dice. As we look to God's Word for direction, think of your specific decisions and how these principles may apply."

I. PREREQUISITES TO GUIDANCE

When some people come to major crossroads in their lives, like deciding on a college major, or choosing a life's mate, they all of a sudden take an interest in getting God's input. But God doesn't commit himself to guide just anyone. If you want God's direction, ask yourself these three questions:

A. ARE YOU SAVED? (John 3:16; Acts 2:38)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

If you are not God's child, you have no assurance that He will guide you. His Holy Spirit indwells His children and gives them instruction and guidance.

B. ARE YOU OBEYING WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW TO BE HIS WILL? (John 7:17; Prov. 3:5,6)

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Prov. 3:5,6)

ILLUSTRATION: Famous author Mark Twain once said, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand."

In other words, if you are praying that God will guide you into wisdom for an exam at school, but you know that #1 - you would cheat if you could get away with it, #2 - you're not talking to your little brother because you refuse to forgive him for something, and #3 - you

Proverbs 3:5,6 – This classic verse on guidance shows that we must trust and know God, if we are to expect Him to straighten our paths.

Heart = "with the whole conviction and force of the mind, absolutely."

(Toy) The Hebrew word "refers to one's emotions...but more often to his intellect (such as understanding, discernment, reflection, or will."

(BKC) Our intellect can be blinded by passion, temptation, and ignorance. We must wholly trust Him.

Lean on = "not 'incline'" (Kidner), but "to lean with the whole body on something, in order to rest upon it..." (Keil)

Acknowledge = "...not a nod of recognition but an intimate knowledge of God." (BKC)

"Quite simply 'know', which contains not only the idea of acknowledging, but the much richer content of being 'aware of', and having 'fellowship with'." (Kidner)

Make your paths straight = "The metaphor is derived from the preparation of a highway..." (Toy)

Thus, you might say that God bulldozes our paths, removing difficulties and hindrances. This verse appears to say more than just that God will direct us. He will clear out a road before us. And as confusion about which way to go represents a hindrance, He will show us the way.

care little for following God's will in other areas, then don't expect God to rush to your aid.

C. ARE YOU WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS WILL, WHATEVER IT MAY BE?

“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (Jn. 7:17)

ILLUSTRATION: One guy prayed for God to give him his girlfriend back. But he wasn't praying for God's will, even if His will might be for them to stay apart. When his girlfriend didn't come back, he had very little interest in following God.

TRANSITION: Before we go on, look at the situations where you need to make decisions. Are you fulfilling the prerequisites?

II. PRINCIPLES OF GUIDANCE

A. TALK TO GOD. (Jms. 1:5, Mt. 7:7-11)

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (Jms. 1:5)

HINT: If you have personal examples of answered prayer, use them instead of mine. Yours will pack a stronger punch.

ILLUSTRATION: One day a teenager prayed on his knees by his bed about which college to attend.. He suddenly remembered a course catalog which a person had given him some time before. As he read it he began to get excited, because the college seemed to offer exactly what he was looking for. He eventually attended that college, and the decision began with that prayer. But after praying, he applied other principles of guidance before making the final decision.

On Mt. 7:7-11: The verb tenses indicate: “Keep asking”, “keep seeking”, “keep knocking”. In vs. 11, the “if” is a first class condition, meaning “since” (Key). “Evil,” in comparison to God (McNeile).

But some people don’t want to talk to God about their future, because they fear He will spoil their dreams. One teenager felt that if he put his plans in God’s hands, that God might take away his dream of being a pilot. But look carefully at Mt. 7:7-11. God gives good gifts to his children. If being a pilot is best for you, then you will be a pilot. If not, He has something even better. Trust Him!

B. GO TO GOD'S WORD.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Tim. 3:16,17)

HINT #2: Make sure the students see these verses. The Word of God has power. Perhaps hand out a verse for each principle, and before you describe the next principle, let a youth read the verse. Then, let the youth group try to discern what the principle is that relates to finding God's will. In this way, they learn to apply the Scriptures for themselves.

ILLUSTRATION: Two Mormons came to a young man's door, urging him to read the Book of Mormon and pray that God would reveal to him whether or not it was God's Word. They said to claim James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God,...and it will be given to him.”

But he knew that praying and waiting for a subjective confirmation is not the only way to find God's will. He wisely told them, “According to Galatians 1:8, even if an angel from heaven told me a message that contradicts the gospel as Paul preached it, I shouldn't believe that angel. So, since the gospel according to the book of Mormon contradicts what we read in the Bible, I don't have any business asking God to give me a warm feeling if it is true.” It would be like someone urging me to steal some candy, and when I objected, he says, “Will you at least pray about it?” God's will concerning stealing and the facts of the gospel have both been clearly revealed in His Word. I don't need to ask God to tell me something a second time, that He's already told me in the Scriptures.”

"Should I date this person that my parents don't want me to date?" Look at Colossians 3:20. God's Word has already given you the answer.

CONCLUSION

Think of the decisions that you wrote down earlier. Have you truly prayed about the decisions? Do you know any biblical principles that would affect the decisions?

Do you remember Proverbs 14:12 from our introduction? Read it again. Many young people are making decisions tonight that will have either good or bad consequences for years to come. Let's commit ourselves to make wise decisions in line with God's will.

PRAY

Next week we will talk about other principles that can help us avoid the traps set by the world and the Enemy.

SHARPENING YOUR AX
INTRODUCTIONS
(Part 1)

Ken Davis, a master communicator to youth, says that your first 50 words are the most important words of your message. Like a juicy worm is to a fish, your introduction should be to your students. It should capture their attention, hooking them to your line for the duration of your message.

Best bets:

- * A captivating illustration.
 - * A true life story of someone who either applied or failed to apply the principles contained in your message, with startling consequences.
 - * A personal illustration of the topic's importance to your life.
 - * Some dramatic statistics.
 - * A drama.
 - * A clip from a movie.
- A song, played with words projected on a screen. Could be either a secular, popular song, or Contemporary Christian. And be a good missionary: make sure the style is indigenous to the natives!
- * A good joke.
 - * A meaningful activity.

Evaluate the drama that I suggest. Can you make it fly? Do you think it will both capture their attention and whet their appetite for a message on God's Will? If not, dump it and choose your own!

LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS

How to Make the Right Decisions

(Session 2)

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the meeting, hide a bar of candy somewhere in the meeting room. It should be wrapped in a package with the words "God's Will for Your Life" written on it. When it is time for the lesson, tell the students that God's will is hidden somewhere in the room, and it's their duty to find it. When someone comes back with it, ask, was it exciting to find God's will, or a drudgery? When you found it, was it something good? (Review Psalms 84:11). God has good things for us. Following His plan is an adventure. Let's continue learning how to discover His good will for our lives.

**(See Alternative activity in the "How I Taught It" section at the end.)*

(Review key points from last week.)

C. TAKE TIME TO SEEK WISE COUNSEL.

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (Prov. 15:22)

ILLUSTRATION: One person who works with prisoners said that most people he knew in prison were there because they thought they had to have something now. Don't be impatient, especially with big decisions. Take time to get input from others.

1. THOSE WHO KNOW YOU WELL

ILLUSTRATION: When a young man seriously considered asking a girl to marry him, he asked a couple of mutual friends what they thought of the relationship, and what would be their strengths and weaknesses if they were to marry. The friends encouraged him that they were right for each other, but were also honest to point out areas that would be frustrations. Their encouragement gave him a green light to pop the big question. And the problems they foresaw gave him a more realistic view of what to expect for the marriage relationship.

This would especially include your parents. Even if your parents are not Christians, they have a perspective on your needs, desires, strengths and weaknesses that perhaps no one else has. Failing to seek your parent's counsel on major decisions would hardly seem consistent with the fifth commandment:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land"

which the LORD your God gives you.” (Exodus 20:12)

2. EXPERTS

If you are considering pursuing a certain vocation, talk to people who are in the field to see what it is like and how you can best prepare. Some vocational guidance tests can help narrow down your interests and aptitudes.

Also, read good books by experts. For example, although almost every couple begins marriage "in love" with each other, about half of the marriages don't last. And how many of the other half have a decent relationship after several years of marriage?

So, if marriage and dating are important to you, read several good Christian books on the subjects. People fall in love all the time. But people don't usually fall into a good marriage. A good marriage takes learning and growing and effort.

3. YOUR CHURCH (Acts 13:1-3; 15:22,28)

Note: I well understand that different denominations will define some of these gifts in different ways. If you want to deal more in depth with this, I leave it in your hands!

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” (Acts 13:2)

Have you thought of going to people in your church for counsel? In a biblically based church you have many gifted people who can help you. The gifts of pastor, teacher, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and prophecy may give you loads

of insight (See Rom. 12, I Cor. 12,14, Eph. 4.) There are leaders who are responsible to *“watch over your souls”* (Heb. 13:17). (See also Acts 13:1-3 and 15:22,28 for examples of God leading through the local church to send out workers.)

And just think, within the walls of your local church, if you added up the total number of years the congregation has lived, you have thousands of years of successes, failures, lessons learned, and wisdom from people who have weathered tragedy, lost girlfriends, found husbands and wives, accumulated fortunes, lost fortunes. And some of them would be glad to tell you what they've learned.

D. CONSIDER YOUR GIFTS AND DESIRES (Psalm 37:4; Romans 12:3-8)

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
(Ps. 37:4)

Sometimes decisions lead to frustration because people find themselves pursuing dreams that God never equipped them to fulfill. If you're five foot one and can't

jump, consider that God probably didn't intend you to make your mark on the basketball court!

When youth express an interest in Christian ministry as a vocation, I tell them to get involved with different kinds of ministries now. By doing this, they begin to find what ministries God has equipped and motivated them for.

E. CONSIDER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES (Romans 15:23-24; I Corinthians 16:8,9)

“But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.” (I Cor. 16:8,9)

Note Paul's reasoning process in Romans 15:23-24 and I Corinthians 16:8,9. Apparently he didn't get a vision to choose these directions. He had not been able to get to Rome because he was called to establish churches where they had not been established. Rome already had a church. But since it was time to move on to new areas, it would be convenient to drop by Rome on the way to Spain. It was convenient and he wanted to see them. He needed no vision. It just made good sense in the light of his circumstances.

Some of you will go to a community college because it offers the courses you want and costs less money. You're open to any college or no college, if God so directs. But unless He halts you with a vision, you're going where it makes the most sense to go, in the light of your circumstances. Your circumstances can include financial limitations, abilities and disabilities, current commitments, good timing, etc.

Often, people simply draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper, listing the pros on one side and the cons on the other. Go with the choice that makes the most sense, unless God distinctly directs you otherwise!

F. ESTABLISH PRIORITIES BASED ON BIBLICAL PRIORITIES (Mt. 28:18-20; Mt. 22:34-40; I Cor. 16:8,9; Acts 14:19-22)

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,....” (Mt. 28:19a)

But considering our circumstances doesn't necessarily mean that we always choose the easiest course. While Paul was in the city of Lystra, men from Antioch and Iconium came and stirred up people against him. The angry mob stoned him and drug him out of the city, thinking that he was dead. Talk about rejection! If you were Paul, would you ever go back to Lystra? Someone read Acts 14:19-22, to see where Paul went next. (Read the verses.) Can you believe it! He goes straight back to the places where people wanted him dead! Apparently, while safety and comfort are factors to consider when making a decision (like which hotel to stay in), sometimes they need to be set aside for the higher

calling of reaching the world for Jesus.

It would seem that Paul knew his giftedness and calling, and unless God miraculously directed him different, he charted his course by asking, “Where is the greatest need?” And “Where can I unleash my gifts to make the greatest impact for eternity?”

ILLUSTRATION: Josh McDowell asked a Christian student about his future plans. The student said he was studying medicine. To which Josh replied, “Oh, medical missions?” “No,” the student replied, “But if God opens the doors, I’ll certainly go through them.” “Opens the doors?!” Josh exclaimed. “Right now there are thousands of doors open. He can’t open them any wider! Why don’t you start praying like this, ‘Lord, I’m headed into medical missions. If you don’t want me to go, please close the doors.’”

ILLUSTRATION: With no clear direction from God as to where he should spend his life ministering, a college student named John decided to find the place that had the greatest need, and a place where probably no one else would go, unless he were to go. He would go there unless God directed otherwise. He has been serving as a missionary to a tribe just south of the Sahara Desert for the past 14 years (from 1983 to present).

ILLUSTRATION: C.T. Studd had it made. Raised in luxury, admired as a British athletic hero, financially secure with a half a million dollar inheritance (a tremendous fortune in today’s dollars), he gave up fame and fortune (giving away his entire fortune), to impact China, India, and Africa (working with cannibals!) for Christ. He once said,

*“Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell.
I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell.”*

Oh that some youth out of this group would make this their ambition!

CONCLUSION:

Now, think about the decisions you need to make. Have you taken into account the great priorities of Scripture? Perhaps some of you realize that when it comes down to it, your decisions all revolve around your interests, your fulfillment, and meeting your needs. But the quickest road to misery is often found when you are in the driver seat. God has the best for you, but you will only experience His best with Him driving. I’ll give you an opportunity to pray silently, asking Him to take the wheel and direct your life. **PRAY.**

There are many traps people fall into while seeking God’s guidance. Don’t miss next week as we discover what traps to avoid.

SHARPENING YOUR AX
INTRODUCTIONS
(PART II)

In lesson two I begin with an activity. It relates to the topic and serves to both illustrate and motivate the students.

Think about this introduction in relation to your youth. Could you adapt or revise it to make it better? Would another introduction be more effective?

For thought: Is it effective to use introductory activities, jokes, or personal stories that are not related to the topic? Many speakers would answer "yes." They find unrelated material effective in "warming up an audience," particular an unfamiliar audience.

Some travelling speakers may find several "introductions" that never fail to win an audience. They may use them prior to any number of topics. Students listen more attentively when they feel closer to you. Often, some jokes or entertaining personal experiences can jump start a relationship with the audience that will pay rich dividends at decision time.

But remember, unrelated games or stories will not introduce your topic. Think of them as a warm-up, not an introduction. After warming up the audience, you will still need an introduction to sell students on the topic. In teaching my local youth group each week, I generally begin with an introduction rather than a warm-up.

LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS

How to Make the Right Decisions

(Session 3)

INTRODUCTION

Some youth may want to discuss some of their decisions out loud and get input from the rest of the group as well as you. Any such discussions would take this series out of the theoretical and make it intensely practical.

We've been talking about principles of discerning God's guidance, and have thought of several decisions that each of us need to make, in order to apply these principles. So, we're not just talking about theory here. We're talking about how to make that decision that's been on your mind ("Where should I work this summer?", "Should I go to that party, or go visit relatives with my family?") Has the series been helpful so far?

Today we will look at some common mistakes people make in seeking God's Guidance.

Activity! Divide into small groups, giving each group this list of statements to evaluate. "Appoint a secretary and have him or her put a check by the statements that represent good principles of decision making, and an "X" by the ones that represent questionable techniques.

- *"I'm not deciding on a college major until I 'find it in the Scriptures'. After Ralph prayed about whether to attend the University of Georgia or the University of Chicago, he opened his Bible at random to Leviticus 2:14, where Israel is commanded to offer "grits of new growth" to the Lord. "Since people up North seldom eat grits, I knew God was directing me to UGA.*
- *"I would go visit my grandmom in the nursing home, but I can't justify going to see her when I could be witnessing to my lost friends. You know, the Bible says I should go into all the world, preaching the gospel."*
- *I'm worried sick about this decision. If I eat the Quarter Pounder, I'll get too many grams of fat from all that beef. On the other hand, the Big Mac has too much dressing and stuff. Oh, I don't want to miss God's best on this decision!*
- *"I just know she's the girl for me. Sure, everybody's against the relationship, but I feel in my heart that it's right."*
- *"I'm not making a decision about college until God gives me a 100% certainty that I'm making the right decision. Every time I start to make a move, I have second thoughts. That can't be of God. I know, I know. Classes start tomorrow. Maybe I should just get a*

job until God gives me a total peace about where to go.”

- *“Hey Bob, this guy came to my door with a deal that looks incredible! If I just pay \$500.00 down and sign a commitment to pay \$50.00 a month for the next year, I can have any car from his used car lot. And I know that he’s got some fantastic cars. But he’s at the door now and tells me I’ve only got this one chance to sign up. I can’t call him back later, since he can only take so many people. What do you think?”*
- *“So everybody thinks I should be a pastor. And I just know that God’s pulling me that direction. But if I were to do that, I’d be miserable. I know it sounds bad, but I’ve only got one life. And I want to spend it doing something fun.”*

Set a time limit for their small group discussions. And don’t have them immediately discuss their answers with the entire group. Instead, refer back to each statement (in order) as you teach the following principles. Ask the entire group what they they think might be wrong with each statement.

*** Don't take Scriptures out of Context.**

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15)

(Before mentioning this title, read again the first of the above statements. Ask, “What do you think might be wrong with his approach?” You might even get some discussion. Then, launch into this principle. Follow the same pattern for each of the following points.)

ILLUSTRATION: *It is said that a guy was seeking God's will and decided to just flip through the Scriptures and read where his finger landed. First, he opened his Bible randomly, put down his finger, and read "Judas hung himself." Interesting, he thought. So he opened his Bible a second time and put his finger on these words: "Go thou and do likewise." He did it a third time and read the words, "What thou doest, do quickly."*

As silly as this illustration may seem, some people do seem to approach the Bible as something magical. For instance, if you open your Bible one morning and read of King David choosing a wife don’t assume that you will meet your future wife today!

Some people expect God to “give them a Scripture” to confirm decisions. What they mean is that they read a verse and see in it something beyond the natural intent of the text, concluding that God is speaking to their specific circumstance. For example, Howard is praying about asking a girl to marry him That day in his devotions he happens upon King David choosing a wife. Wa la! A confirmation! Or is it?

Although I can’t say that God will never speak to anyone in this way, but let me give you a few cautions:

1. God never says in His Word that this is His normal method of directing His people. In

fact, I can't think of any biblical character who got direction this way!

2. I've seen many poor decisions made with this method. In fact, one godly couple both found "confirmation in the Scriptures" that they were to marry. Yet, God ended up leading them different directions.

* Don't Emphasize Some Biblical Priorities to the Neglect of Others

In an earlier lesson we gave some examples of people making great sacrifices in order to fulfill a great biblical priority: impacting as many people as possible for Christ. But some Christians suffer from tunnel vision, getting all caught up in one priority to the neglect of others.

Robertson McQuilkin used to say, "It's easier to go to a consistent extreme, than to stay in the center of biblical tension."

ILLUSTRATION: Remember C.T. Studd, the guy who left fame and fortune to impact China, India, and Africa for Christ? The one who said, "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell."? I think he blew this principle in his latter years. You see, he was an extremely disciplined guy and felt like the priority of evangelism was so great that everyone should spend all day doing the work of the ministry. He began work at 6:00 AM (having already had his devotions) and worked eighteen hour days. That's fine. But I think he blew it when he expected everybody else in his mission to do the same. When the missionaries in his mission wanted to have special prayer for revival, he said, "I don't believe in praying during work hours. Let's have a meeting at 4 A.M."

With his tunnel vision focused on work, he imposed his personal standards on others, drove people looney, and brought such disunity among his team that he almost destroyed the whole mission. His death probably saved the mission. But if he had only balanced his zeal with such teachings as Romans 14:17 ("...for the kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.") and Mt. 22:39 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself.") I think he would have touched more lives. (From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya, by Ruth Tucker, Zondervan, pp. 263-268)

ILLUSTRATION: I believe that Dr. Robertson McQuilkin found the balance. As president of one of the world's top missionary training centers, "Columbia International University", he was poised to lead the school into the next century with his proven leadership. But when his dear wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, he had to make a difficult choice. She began to lose her mind and would be content with no one else but Robertson. But how could he quit his effective ministry? In his own words, "When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, "in sickness and in health...till death do us part"? So, he left his successful career to care for his wife at home. This great intellectual, this effective leader, began to employ his talents in feeding, caring for, and comforting his wife. (From the booklet, "Living by Vows", by Robertson McQuilkin, Columbia Bible College and Seminary.)

Gifts and ministries are important, but I Corinthians 13 interrupts a discussion of spiritual gifts (chapters 12 and 14) to remind us that love is more important. In fact, if we display incredible gifts of faith, so extraordinary that we can move mountains, but fail to love, we are nothing (vs. 2). And if we are so zealous for the things of God that we sell all our possessions to feed the poor, and sacrifice our very lives for the cause of Christ, but don't have love, it profits us nothing. (vs. 3) So don't let one biblical truth consume your life, without keeping it in balance with others.

*** Don't Fall into Worry.**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6,7)

According to Proverbs 3:5,6, God will make His follower's paths straight. Philippians 4:6 says to pray about everything and be anxious for nothing. God is not in heaven pulling His hair, frustrated that you have not yet found the right girl or guy or what college to attend. He knows that we are but sheep, and as our shepherd He is committed to lead us. After we do our responsibility for finding God's will, relax! He will lead.

*** Don't Put Total Trust in Feelings.**

Don't discount your feelings. God often uses them to lead us. But beware of assuming that your feelings always indicate the will of God for your life.

ILLUSTRATION: When the pastor of a very large church decided to retire, many pastors called the church saying that God had shown them that they were each the ones who God wanted to become the next pastor. Apparently, even strong Christians can be deceived by feelings!

*ILLUSTRATION: A godly college student, who has since become a career missionary, learned to distrust his feelings in his dating life. More than once, he **felt certain** that he had found the woman of his dreams. He **just knew**, more than once, that he had found the right one. Unfortunately, the girls didn't share his feelings. His feelings were leading him down a wrong path. And I can't imagine how any of these former girlfriends could be as perfect a match as the girl he finally married.*

*** Don't always expect absolute certainty.**

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;....” (II Cor. 4:8)

When we think of the Apostle Paul, we tend to think of a guy who always knew where he was going. Facing opposition, sure. But confidently knowing which way to take at each

crossroad he faced. But II Cor. 4:8 blows that picture. (Have someone read verses 7-10.) Now, look more carefully at verse 8. The word could be translated “perplexed” or “bewildered.” And it’s in a tense that means it was not a one time event. He *often* felt like this.

God never says that we should expect to feel 100% certain about every decision before we make it. Often we make decisions based on the best evidence that we have at the moment, taking into account relevant biblical principles. If you experience “cold feet” the day before your wedding, relax! If you wait for a 100% certainty that never fluctuates, you may never get married!

If an application of all principles still leaves you with two or more equally desirable options, yet a decision must be made, consider drawing lots. The New Testament church used this method when they had to choose one of two equally qualified men to replace Judas and become an apostle (Acts 1:21-26).

Other people “throw out a fleece” in an uncertain situation.

ILLUSTRATION: *When Billy Graham was approached about starting a national radio program, he didn't really want to do it, but couldn't be positive it wasn't God's will. So, he responded this way to Walter and Fred, who kept pestering him about the opportunity: "All right, fellows," I said laughingly, "if before midnight tonight I should get \$25,000 for the purpose of a radio broadcast, I'll take that as an answer to prayer and be willing to do a national broadcast."*

"The thought was so incredible to them that they laughed along with me before heading for the airport. But by that evening, an incredible \$24,000.00 had come in! But they were still \$1000.00 short. Upon returning to his hotel about eleven-thirty p.m., the desk clerk gave him two letters. "Postmarked two days earlier, they were from people I hardly knew. Both said they believed we should go on the radio and that they wanted to be the first to contribute. And each enclosed a \$500 check!"

"Then, when I turned to go to the elevator, who should be standing in the lobby but Walter and Fred. They had been ready to leave at the airport, they said, but something had told them not to get on the plane." Thus began Billy Graham's "The Hour of Decision" broadcast.

On II Cor. 4:8

Definitions: “*Perplexed*” - “Be at a loss, in doubt, uncertain.” (AG) “In the papyri it was used of one who was ruined by creditors and was at his wits end.” (MM, from Key).

Translations: perplexed, but not in despair/ bewildered, but never at our wits' end/ are hard put to it, but never at a loss.

Commentaries: “...at a loss, but not at a hopeless loss.” (Moule) “...constantly doubtful what way to take, and yet always finding some way open. The word *aporeo* means to be at a loss what to say or do...” (Charles Hodge).

“The Apostle is speaking the language of experience, and, what is more, of *constant* experience...” Paul was “confused, but not confounded.” “As problems and oppositions close in on him from all sides the Apostle is perplexed, at bay, not knowing which way to move; but, notwithstanding this, he is never in a state of hopeless despair.” (Hughes)

*** Avoid being rushed into major decisions.**

“It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.” (Prov. 19:2)

Have any of you been confronted by people who present you with “opportunities” that you must decide upon immediately? Sometimes, they are trying to sell you stolen goods. Usually, they don’t want you to go home and think about it. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. Few decisions can’t be put off until we have time to think about it, pray, and get some wise counsel.

ILLUSTRATION: Remember, smart carpenters measure twice and cut once, whereas foolish carpenters measure once and cut twice.

*** Don't think that you need to know all of your future now.**

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’” (Jms. 4:13-15)

God usually gives us the light that we need now to make the decisions that we need to make now. It’s okay to set long range goals, but always keep them flexible.

ILLUSTRATION: Some will object, “I want to know now who I will marry and what my job will be.” But think of your journey in life as a trip at night in a car. You turn on the headlights and suddenly realize that they don’t shine all the way to your destination. But you don’t cancel your trip. Why? Because as you put the car in gear and begin to drive, you find that the further you drive, the further you are able to see. God usually doesn’t want us to see the end from the beginning. Perhaps this keeps us from worrying about things that we have no business worrying about.. (See Matthew 6:44)

Why do you think I left this point for the end? I try, if possible, to end with a challenge to those who are not serious about following God. It is easy to move from a point like this into a time of prayer where students can silently express to God their need to follow Him more fully or to accept Him as Lord.

*** Don't be deceived into thinking that anything is better than God's will.**

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”(Jn. 10:10)

ILLUSTRATION: Danny Jones, a missionary to Slovakia, used an object lesson

that you may want to use here. Take two pieces of raw meat. Put one in the refrigerator and leave the other out to rot. Wrap each one tightly in plastic and wrapped them nicely in wrapping paper. Label one "God's Will" and the other "Satan's lie". On the outside they look equally appealing. At this point in the lesson, ask two volunteers to choose a package to open (without seeing the labels. When the stinky one is opened and the student groans, all the youth group will want to see what he or she got. Then, open each label and discuss how so many things in life look good on the outside, but turn out to be rotten on the inside. Often, only God knows the difference.

CONCLUSION

Challenge youth to commit themselves to seeking God's best for their lives.

PRAY

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS YOU COULD USE

- 1. Jan wants to marry a non-Christian girl. What principle(s) would you use to help him make this decision? (See II Corinthians 6:14-18)**
- 2. A stranger shows you a beautiful watch, which he says is worth \$250.00. He will sell it to you for \$25.00 if you pay him immediately. You have the money on you and you want the watch. What should you do?**
- 3. A person suggests that you check your horoscope before deciding what to do this weekend. What will you say?**
- 4. Some people say that God has a very specific perfect will for each person's life; for instance, one person to marry, a certain place to live, a special job. Others say that there may be several options that could be right for you, as long as you don't violate any biblical teaching. What do you think?**

"DIGGING DEEPER" QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- 1. Some groups would say that God uses people with the gift of prophecy to give direction to churches and individuals. Others would say that since the Scriptures have been completed, there is no longer a need for this gift. What do you think and why?**
- 2. Do you think God's will is always very specific (only one person for you to marry, only one type hamburger he wants you to eat for lunch), or do you think that sometimes God offers you a range of options, any one of which would be consistent with his will?**
- 3. Is "the call of God" to be a vocational Christian worker (or to a certain ministry) discerned in a way differently than other major decisions?**

YES: We have the example of the Apostle Paul, who had a dramatic calling to his ministry. The call may differ from person to person, but without an unmistakable “call” to ministry, a person may back out later when the going gets tough.

NO: a. The Bible never says that the calling of Paul is normative for all Christian workers.

b. Paul was not called to a vocation as much as a ministry. He sometimes supported himself as a tentmaker. Some people feel they have settled for second best when they can’t raise enough support to minister full time. But Paul didn’t seem frustrated about his tent making. And he didn’t seem to consider it to be inconsistent with his call.

c. Often, when questioned more deeply, ministers who emphasize their “call” describe it in terms very much consistent with the decision making process as we described it in this lesson.

Recommended Reading for Leaders:

Biblical Ethics, Robertson McQuilkin, Tyndale House, 1989, pp. 507-535. The most balanced, biblical and reasonable presentation I have seen. McQuilkin is one of the clearest thinking interpreters of the Scripture that I have found. He recommends **Knowing God’s Will: Biblical Principles of Guidance**, M. Blaine Smith, InterVarsity, 1979.

Decision Making and the Will of God, Garry Friesen, Multnomah Press, 1980. Argues against the view that God has a “detailed life-plan uniquely designed for each believer that must be discovered in order to make correct decisions.” (p. 145) McQuilkin (above) argues against this position, but the book is still helpful in cautioning us against some of the extremes people seem to go to in decision making.

Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God, Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, LifeWay Press, 1990. A very popular study course which emphasizes discerning what God is up to and getting involved with His work, rather than planning our own ways and asking Him to bless them. Many have been brought to a closer walk with Christ through this study. His approach differs at some points from my approach. Which do you think is more consistent with Scripture? Why?

Overhead

**LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS
HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS
(SESSION I)**

INTRODUCTION: "THREE YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS"

"No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." (Psalm 84:11)

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

I. PREREQUISITES TO GUIDANCE

A. ARE YOU SAVED? (John 3:16; Acts 2:38)

B. ARE YOU OBEYING WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW TO BE HIS WILL? (John 7:17)

"It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts I do understand." (Mark Twain)

C. ARE YOU WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS WILL, WHATEVER IT MAY BE? (John 7:17)

II. PRINCIPLES OF GUIDANCE

A. TALK TO GOD. (James 1:5)

"Praying About College"

B. GO TO GOD'S WORD. (II Timothy 3:16,17)

"The Mormon Challenge"

CONCLUSION: "Back to Your Decisions"

ACTION POINTS:

*LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS
HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS
(SESSION II)*

INTRODUCTION: "The Excitement of Discovery"

C. TAKE TIME TO SEEK WISE COUNSEL. (*Proverbs 15:22*)

**** THOSE WHO KNOW YOU WELL***

"Deciding on a Wife"

**** EXPERTS***

"Beyond the 'In Love' Syndrome"

**** YOUR CHURCH*** (*Acts 13:1-3; 15:22,28*)

D. CONSIDER YOUR GIFTS AND DESIRES. (*Psalm 37:4; Romans 12:3-8*)

E. CONSIDER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES. (*Romans 15:23,24; I Corinthians 16:8,9*)

F. ESTABLISH PRIORITIES BASED ON BIBLICAL PRIORITIES (*Mt. 28:18-20; Mt. 22:34-40; I Cor. 16:8,9; Acts 14:19-22*)

"Medicine, or Missionary Medicine?"

"John Follows The Greatest Need"

"C.T. Studd Sacrifices All"

ACTION POINTS:

**LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS
HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS
(SESSION III)**

CAUTIONS:

- **DON'T TAKE SCRIPTURE OUT OF CONTEXT.** (II Timothy 2:15)
"Go and Do Likewise"
- **DON'T EMPHASIZE SOME BIBLICAL PRIORITIES TO THE NEGLECT OF OTHERS.** (Rom. 14:17 balanced with Mt. 28:18-20)
"A Missionary Gets Off Balance"
"A University President Finds The Balance"
- **DON'T FALL INTO WORRY.** (Proverbs 3:5,6; Philippians 4:6)
- **DON'T PUT TOTAL TRUST IN FEELINGS.**
"God Wants Me To Be Your Pastor"
"Godly, But Led Astray By His Feelings"
- **DON'T ALWAYS EXPECT ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY.** (Acts 1:21-26)
"Billy Graham Throws Out A Fleece"
- **TRY TO AVOID BEING RUSHED INTO MAJOR DECISIONS.** (Proverbs 19:2)
"Smart Versus Foolish Carpenters"
- **DON'T THINK THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ALL THE FUTURE NOW.** (James 4:13-15)
"Driving With Limited Distance Headlights"
- **DON'T BE DECEIVED INTO THINKING THAT ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN GOD'S WILL.** (Jn. 10:10)
"Which Gift Will You Choose?"

ACTION POINTS:

Student Sheet

**LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS
(HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS)
SESSION I**

INTRODUCTION: "THREE YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS"

(Psalm 84:11, Proverbs 14:12)

I. _____ TO GUIDANCE

A. ARE YOU _____ ? (John 3:16; Acts 2:38)

**B. ARE YOU _____ WHAT YOU ALREADY
KNOW TO BE HIS WILL? (John 7:17)**

*"It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand
that bother me. It's the parts I do understand." (Mark Twain)*

**C. ARE YOU WILLING TO _____ HIS WILL,
WHATEVER IT MAY BE? (John 7:17)**

D. _____ OF GUIDANCE

A. TALK TO _____. (James 1:5)

"Praying About College"

**B. GO TO _____ . (II Timothy
3:16,17)**

"The Mormon Challenge"

CONCLUSION: Back to Your Decisions

ACTION POINTS:

Student Sheet

**LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS
(HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS)
SESSION II**

INTRODUCTION: "The Excitement of Discovery"

C. TAKE TIME TO SEEK WISE _____. (*Proverbs 15:22*)

***THOSE WHO KNOW YOU WELL**

"Deciding on a Wife"

***EXPERTS**

"Beyond the 'In Love' Syndrome"

***YOUR CHURCH** (*Acts 13:1-3; 15:22,28*)

D. CONSIDER YOUR _____ AND _____. (*Psalm 37:4; Romans 12:3-8*)

E. CONSIDER YOUR _____ IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES. (*Romans 15:23,24; I Corinthians 16:8,9*)

E. ESTABLISH _____ BASED ON BIBLICAL PRIORITIES (*Mt. 28:18-20; Mt. 22:34-40; I Cor. 16:8,9; Acts 14:19-22*)

"Medicine, Or Missionary Medicine?"

"John Follows The Greatest Need"

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* **TRY TO AVOID BEING _____ INTO MAJOR DECISIONS.**
(Proverbs 19:2)

“Smart Versus Foolish Carpenters”

* **DON'T THINK THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ALL OF YOUR _____
NOW.** (Jms. 4:13-15)

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* **DON'T BE DECEIVED INTO THINKING THAT ANYTHING IS _____
THAN GOD'S WILL.** (Jn. 10:10)

“Which Gift Will You Choose?”

ACTION POINTS: