

Christian Decision Making

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Leader's Guide

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Note: Additional teaching options are offered in this guide that are not in the student's guide. Teachers may wish to use them in place of or in addition to the option given in the student's guide.

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Lesson One

What Shall I Do?

Worship

You are looking for six requests from Psalm 119:124,125,133.

1. Lord, deal with me in love.
2. Teach me your Word (decrees).
3. Give me discernment.
4. Help me to understand your Word (statutes).
5. Direct my footsteps.
6. Let no sin rule over me (and divert me from your path).

If we are to manage our lives well, we need to know God's Word.

Studying God's Word

Decisions, decisions

1. Joseph had to choose whether or not to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife.
2. King Saul had been trying to kill David. David knew he was next in line for the throne of Israel. He could have reasoned that the sooner he took the throne, the better. David had to decide whether to fulfill God's promise by killing Saul or to let God fulfill his promise in his own way.
3. The people in Corinth were faced with a difficult decision. It was not a matter of absolute right or wrong. In some situations it would have been all right for them to eat. In some situations it would have been wrong. "What principles should guide our decision?" they wondered.
4. Paul was faced with a planning decision. When should he visit the Corinthians?
5. As far as we know, Paul and Barnabas had no specific direction. They had to decide where the Lord wanted them to do missionary work.

All these people had to make decisions. Some were clear-cut decisions; others could be decided on the basis of clear principles; while others would require human judgments.

His Word in My Life

Option 1 (in student's guide)

The purpose of this option is to get the class thinking about the different types of decisions they face in life.

Lesson Two will discuss decisions where God has clearly revealed his will. Lesson Three will discuss issues where God has given us principles that could lead to different decisions in different situations. The remaining lessons will deal with general decision making, particularly in areas where God has called on us to use our sanctified judgment and common sense.

Option 2

Look at each of the decisions the people in the previous Scripture sections were forced to make. Pick one or more. Construct a hypothetical situation today in which a person would be forced to make the same type of decision.

This option is similar to the first, except that it makes the situations hypothetical.

Our decisions are important

1. The individuals in the previous passages would certainly be personally affected by the decisions they made. However, others would be affected by them also. (1) Potiphar's wife, Potiphar, and the entire household would have suffered if Joseph had given in to Potiphar's wife's request. (2) David's men and the believers in Israel were blessed by David's trust in God. (3) The faith of weak Christians was at stake. (4) How Paul handled his decisions would have a tremendous impact on the Corinthian church. (5) God wanted his elect found and brought to faith. Paul and Barnabas needed God's guidance to lead

them to people who would hear and believe their message.

Too often we think only of ourselves when we make our decisions. We need to remember that others are involved. We will want to make our decisions with them in mind.

2. 1 Peter 1:8,9—Peter reminds us that we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. All our decisions relate in some way to our remaining on the path to eternal life. God, who set us on that path, has a great interest in our decision making. He will help us make the right decision.

Romans 8:28,38,39—Paul notes that all things work together for our good. If God allows us the freedom to make decisions that will affect our faith, he will also guide us to make decisions according to his will.

Philippians 1:20-26—Notice how closely Paul's life is bound up with the Philippians' spiritual welfare. He is confident he won't die because God wants him to do more mission work.

His Word in My Life

Option 1 (in student's guide)

They will want to consider their own faith and the faith of their children. Also, they will want to give a witness to friends and relatives. A long drive to church is a great witness.

Or, they may feel they have the time and ability to start a new church in their area. They should be concerned not about their own convenience but about their faith and the faith of those who are watching what they do.

God lights the way

Psalm 119:105

1. God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. The psalmist pictures a person walking along at night with a lantern lighting the path immediately around him. This illustrates that God illumines enough of our path in life to keep us going in the right direction.

2. When we walk down a path at night, we trust the path is there even though our flashlight doesn't reach very far ahead. God reveals enough of our path so that we can walk ahead safely, but not so much that we can see our future.

Matthew 1:18–2:23

1. This is truly an example of God guiding a person step by step. God told Joseph to go ahead with his marriage plans with Mary. He and Mary made the trip to Bethlehem but couldn't find a room. An animal stall would have to do for the birth of the Savior (Luke 2). Then God tells Joseph to escape to Egypt and stay there. Finally God told him to return to Israel, and he resettled in Nazareth.

Possibly Joseph could not handle all the news of his future. Perhaps information about the visiting Magi would have corrupted him or a "death threat" would have made him disobedient to God's directions. Of course, this is conjecture. But it illustrates why God may not reveal to us certain facts about our future.

2. Joseph and Mary needed only to trust God's Word and obey it. They probably knew this passage of Scripture: "What does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 10:12).

His Word in My Life

Option 1 (in student's guide)

Most will answer that God has guided them one step at a time. The leader should encourage discussion on the role God's promises have played in the class members' lives.

Option 2

Discuss the question "What effect would it have on me if I knew the future?" Consider various aspects of your life—place of residence, marriage partner, length of life, job issues.

Apply some of the following negatives to the life issues listed above.

- Knowledge of the future could be frightening, paralyzing a person into immobility.
- It might suppress a person's obedience to the Word.
- It could lessen our trust in God or make us irresponsible.

Lesson Two

Absolute Right or Wrong

Introduction

Often people agonize over decisions to which God has given them a clear answer. The purpose of this lesson is to help the class isolate those kinds of decisions and arrive at God-pleasing solutions.

Studying God's Word

Make decisions based on God's Word

1 Timothy 5:8

1. Paul is instructing the church members to show love for their own families by caring for them and not putting the burden for their care on the church or someone else.
2. The meaning should be clear. God intends that families look after their own members to demonstrate the bond of love that unites us all in Christ.
3. This is the positive way of saying what 1 Timothy 5:8 has taught us. God gave us parents and grandparents who took care of us when we could not take care of ourselves. To cast them off when they are no longer able to care for themselves is a sin.
4. Fathers (and mothers) have a responsibility to care for their families. They also have a responsibility toward relatives who need their help.
5. Fathers do not have an absolute right to decide how they want to use their money. God says that their families come first.

1 Samuel 31:4 and 2 Samuel 1:5-16

God does not permit us to justify the murder of someone else as an act of mercy.

1. Saul sought to escape further pain and torture at the hands of the enemy by asking to be killed.
2. Yes, this is an example of mercy killing. No, it is not justified. Saul had no way of knowing what the future would bring. He is an unbeliever and wants to take the easy way out.
3. The Amalekite hoped to ingratiate himself to David by falsely boasting of having killed the mortally wounded king. However, his report backfired. David had him executed on his own admission of killing "the LORD's anointed." David considered it murder!
4. We do not belong to ourselves. God bought us for himself with the blood of his Son. Since our bodies belong to God, we should treat them as he wishes.

His Word in My Life

Option 1 (in student's guide)

God alone has the right to take human life. Read Deuteronomy 32:39 and Psalm 31:15. The Bible does not permit us to arbitrarily decide to take the life of a wounded or terminally ill person.

The right-to-die movement has caused much confusion. From public opinion polls, it seems that a majority of Americans consider suicide a morally right option for someone in great pain. The fallacy of this is that we can medically control pain with drugs.

Common sense teaches us that there are situations when medical care should be reduced or stopped to allow a terminally ill person to die.

Decisions on whether pornography is harmless, whether two people who are married are free to get a divorce if they have trouble living together, whether drugs that harm the body are acceptable to people who choose to use them are other examples of where clear-cut issues are made difficult.

Option 2

Why does God permit suffering? Read the following passages:

Acts 14:22

Hebrews 12:5-7

James 1:2,3; Hebrews 12:11

Philippians 1:12

This option may be used if the class is interested in pursuing this issue. A solid overall view of why God sends suffering will help a person make God-pleasing decisions regarding how to handle suffering in his own life or in the life of a loved one.

Acts 14:22—Remember that you are still living in a world of sin. There is no perfection here. We must go through much trouble on our way to eternal life.

Hebrews 12:5-7—He may be sending fatherly discipline into that person's life.

James 1:2,3 and Hebrews 12:11—Suffering is also an exercise of our faith, a test. The beneficial result is that it drives us into the Word for study and help (Psalm 119:71).

Philippians 1:12—God may want to use your suffering so that other people are blessed.

Beware, Satan tries hard to influence your decisions

Genesis 3:1-7

He led her to doubt God's clear words that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was wrong. Eve was told that she would become like God if she ate from the tree.

2 Corinthians 11:3

Satan wants to blur the clear testimony of the Word of God and lead us to believe in a lie and not trust in the truthfulness of God's plan of salvation.

Matthew 23, selected verses

1. Verses 2 and 3—The Pharisees were not practicing what they preached.
2. Verses 16 to 22—By making their own rules and creating exceptions to God's Word, they played a game with the truth. For this Jesus scores them as blind guides.

3. Verses 23 and 24—They fastidiously gave a tenth of their garden herbs, but ignored matters of justice and mercy.

All these practices made it impossible for the people to make God-pleasing decisions on how to worship and serve God.

Romans 12:2

1. The pattern of this world is evil. See Galatians 1:4 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. The pattern of this world molds people's minds and values. For example, the trend to be politically correct, the acceptance of homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle, or the tolerance of sexually suggestive humor in television sitcoms are elements of the pattern of this world.

This pattern makes it harder for Christians to distinguish right from wrong.

2. Christians are able to stand against the obvious frontal attacks of evil but in small ways are undermined by the assimilation of cultural changes, such as television, movies, and value-neutral education. It is relatively easy to oppose the obvious frontal attacks but not so easy to oppose Satan's subtle teachings and suggestions, which are often espoused by those who call themselves Christian.

His Word in My Life

Option 1 (in student's guide)

The culture of the 1950s would have rejected abortions as morally unacceptable. No civilized society kills its babies.

Satan has successfully changed the cultural values of our citizens and even influenced much of the church to tolerate and even defend abortions.

Forty years ago the television and movie industry could not have produced its present programming. The moral values of our society have deteriorated. So have the moral foundations of education. Divorce for other than Scriptural reasons and homosexuality have been accepted by many churches. Many liberal churches have supported heathen religions, giving them a legitimate place as avenues to the true God.