

Intro from Proverbs: Decisions. Decisions, Decisions, We all have to make them in life. Some of them seem important. Others seem rather trivial. But one of the most common conversations I have with people is that conversation. How do I make this decision?

While Proverbs cannot make your decisions for you, it can set you up with a wise perspective on the relationship between your decisions and God's work in your life.

The overwhelmingly clear teaching of Proverbs is that our decisions matter. Just not entirely. God makes decisions too and His decisions impact and effect ours in ways we are not even close to being fully aware of. Now, exactly how these two realities impact each other is something beyond our human ability to entirely reconcile so many have been tempted to make one of two oversimplifications.

The first is that “Our decisions do not matter at all.” When you lean into this perspective it can make you passive or filled with a sort of hopeless resignation about your future. The wisdom of Proverbs is that God is developing you to gain the wisdom to want what He wants and Understand more of what He understands. Therefore, the wise embrace the stewardship of their role in decision making,

The second is that “Our decisions are all that matter.” When you lean into this perspective it can leave you crippled with fear. The wisdom of Proverbs is that God's purposes prevail and ultimately are victorious. Therefore we can live without the fearful pressure that everything will fall apart on account of what we decide.

Remember. In teaching us to be wise Proverbs always resists oversimplification because wisdom is complex and deals with the world “as is” in all of its facets.

Yes our decisions are important. They influence how we experience life and what our lives come to be. They impact the lives of others and they carry the weight of making us responsible to God for our actions. They can be foolish and lead to difficulty. They can be wise and cause us to be fruitful in life. But as we will be reminded today from Proverbs our decisions happen in a world where God's providential influence is continually at work impacting the effect of our decisions and bringing about purposes all His own.

In Proverbs we get a general idea of how God's Providence works and helps us to understand the real impact of our decisions - *We learn that God's Providence is a careful integration of our choices that He influences for His glorious purposes.*

When we talk about Providence we are talking about God's benevolent work of ensuring his good purposes prevail. The word Providence describes the God's ability to see the future beforehand. You can think of it as though God is “Pro (ahead)” “Video (the action)”. He is ahead of the action; He understands the future clearly. He has knowledge of the complete impact of every decision as it relates to the decisions of all others in the universe simultaneously. In addition to knowing that massive amount of information. God knows the impact of every possible decision of every possible being in every possible situation and how all the options impact one another such that he never experiences unintended consequences.

Here are some ways that Proverbs teaches us about God's Providence and our decisions...

The Lord has His Own Purposes for all of Our Own Actions.

Proverbs 16:1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

Whatever you come to understand about this subject. It is clear that our decisions are our own, no matter what it is that has come to influence them. But also it is clear that God has the ability to include them purposely in what He is accomplishing.

Proverbs 16:9. The heart of man plans **his** way, but the LORD establishes **his** steps.

You are planning something. But simultaneously God is building something out of the materials of your decisions. Your plans are real, but so are his. You own the impulses of your will and the resulting decisions. God owns the purposes that belong to Him.

That means that simultaneously over one single event, both purposes can be present. It's nothing new. It is at least as old as Genesis. It is exactly what the story of Joseph teaches us.

But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Multiple real purposes exist and are owned over the same event.

Proverbs 19:21. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

Which means we have a great responsibility to act and purpose godliness in our lives. But we can take comfort that God's purposes are not upended by our sin and failure. So when it comes to the results of our decisions. ***We should take less credit and have less fear if we believe what the Bible tells us about God's providence.***

It also means...

Seemingly small things are integrated into His plan.

Proverbs 16:33. The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Seemingly large things are integrated into His plan.

Proverbs 21:1. The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

Victories are integrated into His plan.

Proverbs 21:31. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

Failures are integrated into His plan.

Proverbs 21:30. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD.

The Purposes of the Lord are not obvious in our circumstances.

Proverbs 20:24. A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?

Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

We really do not always know or understand how God's purposes and our situation intersect. So it is helpful that Proverbs gives us wisdom for some of the more challenging circumstances where we may need to *Trust the Lord*.

So what do we do?

We entrust our integrity to the Lord. In our world it seems a person of integrity will not make it. You have to fudge a little, push for an advantage even if you have to be a little dishonest. That is all about controlling our futures with our decisions rather than trusting our futures to God while we walk in the integrity he has commanded us.

Proverbs 2:6-8. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *he is a shield to those who walk in integrity*, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.

We entrust our hunger for revenge to the Lord. There are decisions about individual justice that you simply cannot be trusted to make. When we have been wronged our first desire is to make sure that the score is settled and we get even. When we settle the score of our own accord by working out our own individual revenge, we display that we do not trust God. CONSIDER JOSEPH. "Am I in the place of God?"

Proverbs 20:22. Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

We entrust our fear of destruction to the Lord. We are often so afraid that if we do not take matters into our own hands and toss aside making decisions with integrity and waiting on the Lord then we will be destroyed. But the message of Proverbs is that we can Trust God's ultimate purposes.

Proverbs 3:25-26. Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Some of you are thinking, "Well...I did that." Now I am angry with God because He didn't come through in the way that I asked. Here is the good news, as Tim Keller has pointed out, a God big enough for you to blame when bad things happen, is also a God big enough to have better purposes in the end than you could be able to see right now. The story isn't over.

Therefore, ultimately, We entrust our actions to the Lord.

Proverbs 16:3. Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

Now here is one of the best insights from Proverbs about planning the future. Start by committing to only do those things that are obedient to God. We are untrained in the ways and purposes of God. We think things look good and they are often not. We live in a world where things that are righteous get labeled evil. But if we are going to develop wisdom it begins by doing what God says before we understand what God understands. If you do that faithfully you will develop the sort wisdom that we cause you to be able to think in terms of good plans for the

future.

"Providence is wonderfully intricate. Ah! You want always to see through Providence, do you not? You never will, I assure you. You have not eyes good enough. You want to see what good that affliction was to you; you must believe it. You want to see how it can bring good to the soul; you may be enabled in a little time; but you cannot see it now; you must believe it. Honor God by trusting Him." - Charles Spurgeon

Look to Christ - We find real hope in the gospel.

If you want to appreciate the beauty of God's Providence in your own situations and decisions you will first need to see the beauty of it in the gospel. The actions of wicked and evil men nailed the sinless Son of God to a cross with no regard for justice. It was the great purpose of them to destroy Him and put an end to His teaching and to His movement of disciples.

And in the same moment that they nailed Him to the cross with vile disdain in their hearts, by God's intention and the willingness of Jesus to be our substitute they were nailing the debt of our sins with all it's demands as well in an Eternity altering act of mercy. That is God's glorious providence.

And because Jesus endured the dark night of the yet unseen purposes of God in that evil act we can know the secure certainty of the promised resurrection whereby God's purposes and plan for us has been revealed.

He has good purposes for our future, not evil ones. He who began a good work in us, may be working it out through the trials of the moment but it is clear He will be faithful. He will be faithful to complete His purposes for us in Christ Jesus at the day of Redemption when all things included in His purposes will be finally known and seen.

All these things – things great and small – the victories and failures – the Trials and celebrations, God is working together for the good of those who love Him and have been called to Faith in Christ by His Spirit according to His good purposes. If you have entered into this relationship with God by faith you can rest assured in this and rejoice in what is promised to us through Christ's victory. The Apostle Paul captures it well:

Romans 8:31-32. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:37-39. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So in the words of St. Augustine, "Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's providence." Grow in wisdom as you face your decisions, but never forget the providence of God has secured your hope for the future.