

Joke: A newly engaged young man goes to his father for advice he says, Dad, you and Mom have been happily married for 28 years now. How do you do it? What's your secret?

"That's easy son, when your Mom and I first got married, we made a deal. She would make all the little decisions, and I would make all the big decisions."

That sounds like a good arrangement. But how do you decide what's a big decision, and what's a little decision?

"Oh, there hasn't been any big decisions yet."

We have been in a series called worry. . .who me. And you could replace the word worry with anxious and in this series we have been looking at the book of Philippians chapter 4. Today we're wrapping up the series and I pray it's been a blessing to you.

One last time let me give you the context of Philippians.

The apostle Paul, more than anything else, believed that if he could get to Rome to preach the gospel it would be the most strategic move to reach people around the world.

And he made it to Rome, but not as a preacher. Instead he was there as a prisoner. Locked up, 24 hours a day under house arrest.

And it was in that season that he penned a letter to the believers in Philippi, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the letter we know as the book of Philippians.

And if there was anybody who could've been anxious it was the apostle Paul. He's a prisoner, awaiting trial, not knowing what would happen to him. Not knowing if he would live or die.

And this is what he said to his friends in Philippi, he said:

Philippians 4:4–7 (NIV): Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And the peace of God will guard your minds.

I mentioned earlier in this series that so often the battles that we're fighting are battles in our own minds. That's one reason we need to take captive every thought and bring it into obedience of Christ. Because our thoughts often have a way of getting to us.

And the truth is, we may, on the outside look confident all the while on the inside, we're secretly insecure or struggling. And no one else may even be aware of it.

And some of you right now may be having to make a decision. And the weight of the decision is weighing on you, and can honestly say, I don't have a peace of mind. Because your mind is racing, you feel overwhelmed, feel a heaviness, a pressure, frankly, you feel afraid.

In fact one of the biggest forms of anxiety is called decidophobia it's better known as decision paralysis.

And it can stem from several different things. It can come because of the fear of making the wrong choice, overthinking consequences, lack of confidence, or fear of repeating past mistakes, numerous other things as well I'm sure.

So, if I were to give a title to today's message it would be this, "Torn between options." I'm talking about when your struggling to decide.

Let's pray a moment. . .

Papa, today I pray for those who have decisions to make. Your Word tells us that if anyone lacks wisdom we should ask of God. So, today as we present our request to you, and ask that you open up heaven and give us a peace passes all understanding. Direct our steps in all that we do. We pray this in the name of the one who gave it all for us, our Lord, and our Savior, Jesus, and everybody said? Amen

Those of you who have decisions to make, I wonder how often you're like me, because if I'm being honest there are times I feel a bit of anxiety about some of the decisions I need to make.

And decision making can at times feel quite complicated. We question how, what if, or we let our but's get in the way. . .can anybody else relate to that or is it just me?

Should I stay in this job, or should I take another job? Should I live in this city, or move to a different city? Should I stay in this house that I'm renting, or should I try to buy a house? Should I keep this car that I've been driving and hope it makes it through till taxes come in, or should I invest in a better car? I just don't know what to do.

And it often feels so complicated.

Today I want to try and answer the question, why are we so anxious so often around our decision making?

Let me give you two reasons, there are tons more, but I'm only going to deal with two.

Number one is, we have too many choices. They call it the paradox of choices.

Many of us tend to think if we have more options, it's going to be easier, but that's simply not true.

It's a little bit like if you are scrolling on Netflix, or across your cable television package where there's an unlimited number of choices of shows to watch, it's hard to make a decision. Ever notice that? I mean growing up we had like 4 or 5 choices of what to watch, that's it. I could come home from school and choice between Gillian's Island or Batman. Now you have 4 or 5 hundred.

But if you look at your local movie theater where they may only have 5 or 6 choices it's a bit easier to decide A. is it even worth going to see any of them or B. which one would I like to go to usually there might be one or two that your even interested in.

I've seen people struggle in line at McDonald's. That menu hasn't changed much since it started in San Bernardino, CA in 1940. **(talk about staring at the menu)**

It's a paradox of choices, and we live in an age of unlimited opportunities, we can go anywhere, do anything, but with that it can give us a sense of anxiety.

Depending on the study you read, and say depending on the study, because not everyone agrees, which once again makes us have to decide which one is more accurate.

But anyway there is article after article talking about the paradox of choices and many say children make about 5,000 decisions a day. . .5,000. Adults however, make about 35,000 decisions a day. No wonder we're exhausted.

We're making so many choices, and the paradox of choices can create anxiety.

Why do we feel so anxious? One reason is because there's so many choices, the second reason is that we're afraid of making a costly mistake.

We're afraid of missing out. It's the FOMO problem. That fear of missing out.

To put it in spiritual terms, we don't want miss God's will.

And because we don't want miss God's will, so many of us have the idea that, and the pressure to, get it just right.

And so we often fear, We think, I don't want to let somebody down, I don't want to make the wrong choice, I don't want to let God down, I don't want make an irreversibly bad decision, so we hesitate, we stall, we procrastinate. We become indecisive.

And just to throw this in mix for you, indecision is a decision, and it's one that so many people are making today.

What I would like do today is I want to try to un-complicate it.

And if you were hoping for some tools to help you on your decision making, sorry, I won't be doing a 3 step program today.

What I'm going to do today is look at one spiritual principle, and in doing so I'm going to hopefully show you that you can un-complicate it.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to lead up to this principle, build a foundation if you will from a powerful story.

We're going to look at a story in Acts chapter 15, and in Acts 15 it's very interesting, some of the leaders of the church were dealing with some complicated issues.

There was Paul, and Barnabas, James was there as well, and they met up in Jerusalem to deal with some of the controversies.

And some of the controversy's that they had to deal with was if you're a Christian, could you eat certain types of meat, because there were some traditions that forbade you from eating certain things.

Then the really complicated question was, if you were a Gentile, would you have to be circumcised like the Jewish brothers, would you have to be circumcised in order to be a follower of Jesus?

Which, let's face it if this were a membership requirement today. . .I mean could you imagine me standing before all you guys and say, "Hey, you wanna join the church, and be a follower of Jesus, well you got to be circumcised. come on down your the next. . ."

Let's be honest it's difficult enough to get you to be baptized let alone. . .

But these were some of the decisions these men had to address.

So here they were, trying to make these weighty theological decisions. Doctrinal decisions that determine someone's eternal destiny, these are the early church leaders making these incredibly weighty decisions.

And I want you to watch as we read their conclusions, and every time you see the words seemed good, I want you to say them out loud. Alright?

Acts 15:22 (ESV): Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

Then it what. . .seemed good

Jumping to verse 24 and reading through verse 29. . .

Acts 15:24–29 (ESV): Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

It seemed good to us having become of one mind, to select men to send with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than the essentials.

In other words, it seemed right to simplify things, and not to raise the barrier to invite people to follow Christ, it seemed good.

It seemed good to not shackle you down with the 613 laws the religious people made up. It seemed right just to simplify things.

It seemed right to just tell you who you are in Christ and then trust God that He will direct your steps as you walk in that new identity.

It seemed right not to make the Gospel so hard to decipher. It seem right to tell you it's not about religion it's about relationship.

So, what do you do if you don't know what to do? What do you do if scripture doesn't speak directly to the decision that you're trying to make?

I could preach a message saying just do what seems good. . .but there's a couple problems with a message like that, first off in the Old Testament, there's this verse. . .

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

It seems right, but it leads to a very bad spot. So probably not a real good sermon. Just do what seems good

Then there's the Apostle Paul in the New Testament that tells us. . .

1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV): 12 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

And let me pause a moment to explain what Paul was encouraging believers to do here in 1 Corinthians 6.

Paul was indeed saying that as believers we freedom because we are no longer bound by the law but are under grace.

However, he also highlights the importance of using that freedom wisely. That’s way in Romans 6 he asks should we sin that grace may abound. By the way in case your uncertain he adds. God forbid.

And here in Corinthians he adds, I will not be mastered by anything. He’s telling them don’t let allow yourself to be controlled or dominated by any behavior that detracts from your relationship with Christ, but rather live in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to make choices that reflect our new life in Christ.

Listen church God has forgiven us, but there are still consequences for the bad choices we make.

If you run off to the casino and rack up a big loss, it means you may have to figure something else out for food that week. Or go without. There still is the principle of sowing and reaping.

That choice would not be beneficial.

So, how could what we read in Acts 15 and that verse in Proverbs both be true?

It seemed right so we decided it was good and then there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

They seem to contradict each other. . . ,

Well, let's start with the Old Testament verse in Proverbs.

There's a way that seems right to a man, but at the end, it leads to death.

If you're taking notes, this is the reason why. If you're around the wrong people, listening to the wrong voices, and living for the wrong values, what seems right will often be wrong.

Let me say it this way. . . ,if you're in the wrong crowd, if you're listening to people whose opinions are different from that of God's truth, if you're consistently following worldly values instead of spiritual values, and you're surrounded with people that are not close to God, and don't give Godly advice then oftentimes what seems right will actually lead to something that is incredibly wrong.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV): Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Think about this, Jesus healed a man because of his friends faith. Who you hang around with matters.

I wonder how many of you have ever found yourself in the wrong crowd, around the wrong influences, listening to the wrong voices, and you did something that seemed right, and later on you said that was the wrong thing.

There's a way that seems right to a man, but at the end, it leads to the way of death.

I was talking with a co-worker this week and he shared a story about when he was younger some friends came over (**share story about car dealership and keys**)

How many know he made a good decision walking away.

But in Acts 15, we have some of the spiritual leaders saying it seemed right, and so we built the foundation of the church on something that just seemed right.

How could Paul, and James, and Barnabas make such weighty decisions on something that just seemed right?

And before I get into that I'm going to give you a hint. . .

Proverbs 11:14 (TPT): People lose their way without wise leadership, but a nation succeeds and stands in victory when it has many good counselors to guide it.

And earlier we read three different keys but honestly, we just read right on by them.

In fact, the most important portions of scripture in this story, we just passed on by, intentionally. . .yes, and most likely without most of you even noticing.

So, I want to look again at the very same verses, and this time I'm going to focus on something different than it just seemed good.

How could they do what seems good, this is how.

Acts 15:22 (ESV): Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent

Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

Then it seemed good to the apostles, and the elders, and here's the part you need to get, with the whole church to choose some men.

In other words, this wasn't something that seemed right to one person, to just the pastor, this seemed right to the whole family of God, that was gathering together.

Read on verse 25. . .

Acts 15:25 (ESV) - it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

In other words, the whole church agreed, we were unified.

Acts 15:28 (ESV): For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, not just me, but to all of us partnering with the Holy Spirit. We went to God and agreed together.

Hear this church and this is important, there is a big difference between something that seems right to a man, or to a woman, that in the ends leads to death and something that seems right to a community of faith filled, mountain moving, devil kicking, spirit filled, followers of Jesus, who have been seeking God's word, and following the voice of his Spirit.

Don't miss this, they were able to act on what seems good, because the whole church agreed. Because they were of one

accord. Because it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, and this is why what I'm about to tell you may be one of the most important things you will hear me say this year.

You do not go to church. The church is not a building. It's never been a building, it's not a destination. The church has always been, and will always be a people.

It's not a building to which you go, it's an identity of which you embrace.

Let me say that again. . .

It's not a building to which you go, it's an identity of which you embrace.

We as followers of Jesus have been made new. You have been given a new identity, with a new purpose, and a new heart.

We don't go to church. . .we are the church.

And the church is more than a one hour meeting on the weekend, when you don't have anything else going on.

What do you wanna do this weekend? Well, the weather's not nice enough to do anything, we can't go to the lake, so we might as well go to church. . . No, no, no, and no.

It's not a place we go. It is who we are.

Why is it that so often we feel anxiety? It's because we're trying to follow Christ, and trying to please God outside of the context of the institution that he created to serve as his body, the body of Christ, it's a family, and we are incomplete without the other portions of the body.

Whenever we hurt, what do we do? Someone else prays for us. Whenever someone else hurts, we pray for them. We are a family.

It seemed good to us, and our whole family.

This wasn't a decision made in isolation, based on feelings, or intuition.

This is the family of God, gathering together and recognizing we believe this is God's direction. That's the difference, if it seems right to a person, it can lead to death. But when it seems right to a community, we can trust God on a whole different level.

Don't complicate it.

In fact, let me take you back through the previous weeks, and just kind of review where we've been. If you've been here with us all four weeks, you may recognize some of this.

Week one, if it is big enough to worry about, it is big enough to pray about.

And I need you to understand that God cares about what's on your heart.

We asked what is anxiety? And it's a signal alerting us it's time to pray. In the church, we recognize, we don't always have the power to control, but we always have the power to surrender.

You can't always change the circumstances but you can always surrender them to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV): Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Notice what this verse doesn't say. . .it doesn't say give thanks for all circumstances it says give thanks in all circumstances and there is a big difference between those two.

Last week, because of who God is, we praise him. Not just for what he does, but because of who he is, and that perspective of praise changes everything.

It may not take the anxiety away, but it does change your perspective.

So, how do we make the decision?

It feels so weighty. I don't want to do the wrong thing. I'm scared to death to miss it. What if I make a decision, and I can never get it back?

Church what if this is the one place where we, with a posture of prayer, and a perspective of praise, seek God and do what seems right?

With a posture of prayer, this isn't me deciding, this is us, seeking God. With a perspective of praise, this is us coming together and recognizing God is always good, and he's always with us. This isn't me seeking God, this is us. His body, we will seek God, then we will just do what seems right.

And let me say this, the idea of missing God's will can often lead to anxiety, but here's the good news.

And if your curious to what God's will is for your life.

God's will revealed in the New Covenant is this, for all people to believe in Jesus and experience salvation. And then as we do that and become believers, God's will involves living in a way that reflects our new identity in Christ.

So, rather than focusing on specific decisions or circumstances, God's will is about our relationship with Him and allowing Christ to live through us. He is inviting us to live out our faith, trusting His guidance and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us in expressing His love and grace in our daily lives.

Does that mean I won't mess up? No but I won't miss God's will either.

It's a little bit like whenever you're driving, and your GPS is telling you take the next right.

But when it tells you, "Take the next right." Sometimes there's like a next right that's like right there, and then there's a next right that's just beyond that.

And you like which one! Which one is the next one!

But what happens if I take the wrong one? Does it start to speak up and say hey stupid the other right? No.

Usually without even saying a word It just goes, rerouting. . .

And Paul could've said I didn't take the right one. I wanted to be in Rome as a preacher. But I'm here as a prisoner. Did I miss it?

But if you remember last week, he said, "Hey, I want you to know that what has happened to me, this thing I'm going through right now, what felt like a wrong turn, what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

Oh maybe I got off where I didn't want to get off, but my God did something that I couldn't do on my own.

And that's why Paul the same Paul that we have been talking about said in Romans 8:28. . .

Romans 8:28 (NIV): And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

In other words, one wrong turn isn't going to keep you off God's path.

You may just hear that voice say, "Rerouting, rerouting." Why? It's taking you on another path.

Some of you, you may have made a wrong turn, and you're going on another path. Some of you have had more scenic routes than you care to admit.

But the voice of the Spirit is rerouting. He's still taking you there, and the good news is that our God has a way of bringing good things even out of wrong turns. That's way a test can become a testimony. That's way a mistake can become a mission.

That's how good he is. I should of never dated him. Maybe not.

But now, you understand what a godly man should look like, and when God brings you one, who cherishes you, and honors you, you'll recognize it, and you'll be grateful.

I should of never trusted that person, I got burned so bad. And yes that hurt, but now you're learning to forgive. You're becoming more like Jesus.

I should of never done that, it's such a big mistake, it cost me so much. But now you understand God's grace like you never have before. Now you understand that indeed His grace is sufficient.

He's good enough to work through our wrong turns.

My life story, my right destination was based on a bunch wrong turns. I had some wrong friends, I was often times in the wrong environment, with wrong entertainment, doing the wrong things, and ended up in the wrong places.

But those wrong turns led me to seek the right person, whose name was Jesus, who forgave my sins, who made me new, who transformed my heart, who changed the direction of my life, and I'll be the first to admit that I traveled a lot of scenic detours, but it didn't stop me from getting to the destination. God used those things to draw me closer to him.

And hear this church, he will never stop pursuing you. Heaven sent its best to pay the price for our sins so that we can be free from the law of sin and death and become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

And so here I am with all those detours that I experienced standing before you telling you God's not forgotten you.

There are two words in the New Testament that deals with the will of God, one means that which is absolutely fixed meaning it's certain it will happen and you don't get a vote.

It's like Jesus is coming back, you believe that, great. But if you don't believe it, it doesn't matter your opinion doesn't change that fact.

There's another will of God that actually describes His desire, He actually longs for certain things to take place but there has to be a partnership or it won't happen.

So, when you hear people say whatever happens was meant to happen that's just not right. That's actually really bad theology.

There have been leaders that were given a gift to lead but they distorted it. There have been musicians that have been given a gift but distorted it.

See here's the thing Scripture tells us. . .

Romans 11:29 (TPT): And when God chooses someone and graciously imparts gifts to him, they are never rescinded.

What does that verse mean? Talk about it.

And listen church God will fulfill all His promises but He is not obligated to fulfill our potential. There are some things that God wants us to partner with Him to see then come to pass.

Does that mean your not making heaven, or He will be upset if you don't heed the call. No. It just means God desires it for your life because He knows what's best for you.

And listen, If there's anyone who's ever messed up or partied too hard, I want you to know it wasn't a waste, it was a wrong turn sure but now God can use it in His ways for His glory. He's that good.

Don't complicate it, it's a posture of prayer. And perspective of praise, surrounded by God's people. Together we can do this.