

Proverbs: Skillful Living - Decisions

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[0 : 0 0] Well good morning and if you are a guest with us today we are in the middle of a series in the book of Proverbs and Proverbs is a book full of wisdom and so we are seeking to plunge the book of Proverbs to see how does God's word what is God's words how does it speak to different areas of our life what virtues can we find and we often would take a book of the Bible and go verse by verse but in the book of the Proverbs case because the way the construction of the the the letter has been put together we're taking topics and virtues and today we find the topic of decision-making as what we will look at how does the book of Proverbs speak with regard to making wise choices and decisions and so we will be looking here shortly at the book of Proverbs but we often would say something like this since God has such a wonderful plan for my life why won't he just tell me what it is and therein lies the questions of decision-making of how am I to make wise choices and what the life that God has given me and and what does that look like and in some ways decision-making begins with an understanding of what how do we understand God's will because if we think well what is God's will for my life then I would gladly do it and so decision-making and God's will are I would say decision-making comes follows after an understanding of God's will so today instead of plunging directly into the book of Proverbs we're gonna talk firstly about God's will very briefly because there have been many and much ink that has been spilled over millennia talking about God's will and I will just tacitly do it in like a minute and a half and so I will not treat it to the degree that perhaps it ought to be treated with but for the sake of this message I'm gonna treat it as such first of all we we come to what some theologians call the the God's will of decree and that is that part of God's will that cannot be thwarted he is sovereign over all things over nature and nations angels and animals spirits and

Satan wonderful people and wicked people even disease and death what God decree God is sovereign over all of these things in other words you could say it this way what God wills will occur and what has occurred is according to God's will and this is what it is meant when we say God's will of decree if you look with me in Ephesians here on the screen we see in him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will he works all things according to counsel of will there is no exception we look at Matthew are not two sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the father your father but even the hairs of your head are all numbered so this seemingly abundant bird because it's only worth one penny this seemingly abundant bird does not fall to the ground in death apart from the will of the father even the grayest of your hairs God knows he is numbered and for those of you are bald perhaps God got tired of counting I don't I don't know anyway amen so lastly your eyes saw my unformed substance the Psalmist records in your book were written every one of them the days that were formed for me when yet or when as yet there were none of them our salvation Ephesians the sparrows our hair our birthday the day of our death are meticulously decreed by

God in order for me to make sense or any sense of this this kind of providence that God has this kind of meticulous care for his creation I go to Isaiah 46 I don't have this one on the screen but Isaiah 46 verses 9 through a 10 read this I am God and there is no other I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient things not yet done saying my counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purposes God's sovereignty super intends all things all his purposes and the things that we do not yet understand they are not without purpose he is God and there is none like him second way of understanding God's will is there's a will of decree there's also a will of God's will of desire this is the other side of the coin from God's will of decree this will of desire refers to what God has commanded it is what he desires in his creation this this if you understand the will of decree is how things are the will of desire then is how things ought to be

and he holds humanity accountable to this will of desire I know that we are treading on a topic this sovereignty of God and this human responsibility aspect and again much ink over millennia has been spilled on this subject so by treating it briefly it doesn't do its justice but let me just share a few verses the will of God's desire we'll let me let me first before we read this give you some examples God sent Babylon to punish Judah but then in Jeremiah 25 we read that God held Babylon responsible for the their wickedness that they treated to

Judah we also read in the book of Acts chapter 2 that that God had planned his the death of his son to provide sacrifice for sin for all of humanity for those who believe in him and yet in Acts chapter 2 we read of those people who put Jesus to death he refers to those as wicked people so God holds people responsible for the things that he decreed so there is responsibility on behalf of humanity as well so we read in 1st John this do not love the world this these are things that God has commanded us the will of his desire do not love the world or the things of this world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him for all that is in the world the desires of the flesh the desires of the eyes the pride of possessions this is not from the father but is from the world and the world is passing away and along with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever this will of God is this will of the desire that God has commanded his people and he will hold us responsible to the things that he has commanded us so this will of God here in this passage in 1st John is not referring to the way God ordains things but the way that God has commanded us to live and we will be held accountable this is the will of God's desire God's desire for us he's given us commands and once again we will be held accountable to how he has commanded us and our obedience to it so the last one and again theologians debate on this we could understand God's will as a will of direction is the last one this is these are things these are the then this is where the questions begin if we understand God's will of desire is given us these commands so all of this over here is disobedience God has said don't do this he's given us commands say do this but in within this there's all kinds of questions how much of my household budget should I spend on food what should I take this job over that job who should be my cell phone carrier whatever and on and on we make tens of thousands of decisions a day but there are some questions that give us pause and so God has given us this book of proverbs to help us understand how with regard to those decisions do we make wise choices yes to avoid sin and to honor him with our life what is what does wisdom look like so then we turn to the book of proverbs and we understand more what wisdom may look like and before we before we turn there though I want to talk about firstly the purpose of decision-making I would argue that the purpose of decision-making is to develop intimacy and a dependency upon God what's interesting is jahoshaphat served as the king of Judah and it was in a time in

Judah's life where there was great strife both from within between Judah and Israel the the two factions of the nation of Israel the ten tribes to the north and two tribes to the south there's internal strife but there's also external strife there's warring armies at the front door of Judah and in one instance God had arranged neighboring nations to go against and battle against God's people and jahoshaphat received this frantic report with a great multitude that was coming against him you imagine jahoshaphat there in Jerusalem in the southern tribe of Judah and all people are coming against and the leader found himself in a very vulnerable spot and the king felt the weight of his significant decisions he is about to be besieged and so what is jahoshaphat do what is his response jahoshaphat says I was afraid and I and jahoshaphat set his face to seek the Lord and he proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah jahoshaphat upon hearing the news knowing he had to make a decision he admits his fear he was afraid and so what did he do he set his face to seek the Lord and he proclaimed a fast throughout all of Israel he developed intimacy and intimacy and and he developed this dependence upon God in the decision-making so I would submit to you that the purpose of decision-making is just that it's to develop intimacy and dependence upon God later we read in that same account this is what jahoshaphat further after calling the fast he gathered the people and he led them in the following prayer so this is jahoshaphat's prayer that the people of Israel joined oh Lord our God of our fathers are you not God in heaven you rule over all the kingdoms of the nations and in your hand our power and might so that none is able to withstand you we do not know what to do but our eyes are on you I love the honesty of that prayer Lord here's a decision all the eyes of people are on me to make this decision as king I don't know what to do but I know in your hand our power and might our eyes are on you that's my decision this decision-making process drives jahoshaphat to say I depend upon you and intimacy with you is more important than the decision itself often all too often our gaze is on the decision and our glance is on God and

jahoshaphat reverses that he says no no no no my gaze upon the God and my glance is the decision where is your gaze and where is your glance later in the [13:55] New Testament we're coming upon the Christmas season and the Advent season and and Gabriel comes to Mary and says you're gonna bear a son and and not just a son but he's gonna be the son of the most high Mary and Gabriel communicates this angel communicates this to Mary that she's gonna bear the Messiah Jesus will be his name but can you imagine what that must news must feel like to Mary I'm going to bear a child that is not even my betrothed I don't know how I'm gonna explain that I'm a virgin I don't know how I'm gonna explain that and I'm I'm going to bear a child that is the very son of God what should I do and Mary's responses behold I'm a servant of the Lord let it be done to me according to your word the news and the the gaze her gaze was upon the Lord to say Lord these decisions I'm about to make this this this life these decisions they're gonna drive me to intimacy and drive me dependence upon God so I don't know what decision you are making in your life but may it drive you to have intimacy with the Lord and drive you to express dependence upon you and may our gaze be upon God and our glance be upon the decision second now we will turn to the book of Proverbs and see what matters in decision-making what matters the book of Proverbs would say the development of a godly character will shape your decision-making ability so what matters is your character look how

Proverbs says it above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life your heart the whole totality of your inner being your heart your mind your wills emotions your your motives that what you allow in through your eye gate and that's what you allow in through your ear gate influences the heart and he says that heart is so important you must guard it it's so important you've got to guard it why because out of it flows a wellspring of life but if that heart is tainted or soiled it will also influence your decisions so guard it it's so important so we have to be careful what informs our heart does the world or God's word and form how you think you how you feel how you consider we must guard it we must keep it this is why knowing God's word reading God's word listening to God's word is so crucial God's word is the final authority for life and godliness it is the living word and it discerns the thoughts and the intensive our hearts it is forms our heart of that which is true good and beautiful and it provides this wellspring from our heart from which we make wise choices similarly the the warning in Proverbs chapter 2 we read this all man's ways seem right to him but the Lord weighs the heart all man's ways seem right to him but the Lord weighs his heart most of us feel like our actions and patterns in life are perfectly acceptable to God but God however looks at the heart and he judges our thoughts and our motives God unmasks our thoughts he unmasks our motives and the bottom line integrity is crucial as a basis of good and wise decision-making what is in your heart and we must guard it so please be careful that which we allow in our minds and into our motives what we see what we set our gaze upon what we listen to do we spend more time listening reading watching that which is lovely true and pure it's affecting your heart and you are to guard it or is it that which the Lord may find detestable false and wrong good decisions are vital dependency upon God is vital in the development of good character to help in making decisions what's hard about that is that means there's a lot of pre-work to be done before the decision arrives and so wherever you are at I implore us let us be a people of God's word let us guard this heart so that we may have this wellspring of life that helps us make good decisions secondly we read that wisdom in decision-making would say it's the practice of routine obedience how does the book of Proverbs share this to us it says commit to the Lord whatever you do whatever your and your plans will succeed commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed the focus here is on the practice of godliness in our daily choices in life with the recognition that life is one or lost in small decisions I let's assume

for a moment that I receive two dinner invitations one dinner invitation and the first one comes along and I say yes I would love to join you and your family my wife and I we would love to join you and your family and share a meal together we would love to do that to this family and then let's assume another family comes and says Scott I would love to have you and your wife over on the same date and time for you to come and join our family and so I'm left with this decision and and because I've already given my word to this family over here I'm going to keep my word and enjoy a meal with this family and hope to reschedule with this family why do I say that prior commitments help us in making decisions prior commitments help us in making decisions and you say how does that apply to this verse it says commit to the Lord commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed your prior commitment is to the

Lord and it's no matter no matter what I do I'm gonna have this commitment to the Lord and it's gonna determine all the other options and all the other decisions that may come Satan may tempt me the world may tempt me my flesh may tempt me and say Scott it's okay to be selfish it's okay to be lazy it's okay it's your time it's me time you're worth it Scott just be selfish my flesh may say but if I've made a prior commitment to the Lord when that temptation arises I say no I've committed myself to the Lord and whatever I do and I desire for my plans to succeed life is one or loss and daily small decisions does your daily decisions reflect your prior commitment to the Lord are you loving in your speech or are you all too often chippy with your words unloving in your speech especially when someone is chippy with you does your desire long for the others best is your desire to be self-protective or self-centered is your motive to rejoice with others or is your motive self-focused and so become jealous and envious of another do you tell the truth even when it hurts your own reputation or makes you look bad husbands do you love your wives as Christ loves the church wives do you respect your husbands children do you obey your your parents no matter what your age do we honor our parents do we do we speak well of others and bless others with our words and refrain from gossip and slander including the snide comments we mutter under our breath do we give life with our words do we yearn for God's glory do we look for opportunities to share the gospel to be uncomfortable and risk friendships and family for the sake of the gospel is it our habit to be hospitable yes with our homes but also with our very lives are we hospitable with our time are we hospitable with our our person kind in conversations looking to host others in conversations do we invite others to sit with you or do you say I'm sorry you can't sit here and yes I'm meddling at this moment do we keep our word even to the to our own harm or to our own desire are you lazy or industrious with your time are you generous with your finances to the Lord and to others are you do you readily submit to authorities over you at work and home and church do you work hard to honor your employer and do you bless others at work see these are just daily choices where in some ways you should have a prior commitment to the Lord we should have a prior commitment to the Lord so all of these decisions are easier to make because I have a prior commitment to the Lord so wisdom would say practice routine obedience to that what you already know to be true right and good and it because I have this prior commitment to the Lord all of these decisions are far more easy thirdly wisdom would inform us through proverbs to seek godly counsel there are many verses in the book of Proverbs that speak to having many counselors this is just one of them without counsel plans fail but with many advisors they succeed now I know I live in the inland northwest along with you so I have this rugged individualistic self-made mentality that I share and wrestle with that is not biblical or honoring to the Lord but we have this in our culture in the inland northwest the so it's hard for us to admit that we may need somebody else to help us make a decision I mean come on I can do this we can do this we're northwesterners whatever that is and yet the book of Proverbs says the wisdom would say you know it's okay to have a wide range of advisors so you don't have to rely on your own knowledge your own intuition and consider other points of view and drawing on others experiences to speak into your decision-making process that that may actually be good for you it is good for you so without counsel plans fail but with many advisors they succeed so once we have received the counsel of advice from others what is also the book of Proverbs though say it says we ought to obey it where there is no guidance a people falls but in an abundance of counselors there is safety meaning this person took the advice and they had obeyed it and so not only is there advice seeking but there's also a leaning in a propensity to say I will I will do what they ask or what they what I'll consider them strongly and my heart-leaning posture is to say I should probably maybe lean toward obeying that so the implication is that you obeyed it the to heed the counselors that heaven and the counsel that others have provided Proverbs is replete with though one caution Proverbs is replete with many examples of this working well and this not working well and scripture is full of examples of people who sought counsel and obeyed counsel and the counsel was wrong so there is a warning here for us not to just blindly take someone else's counsel so I want to those to try to help who what I consider who does God's word consider to be a wise counselor who is it that you ought to seek so that you may not fail so that plans may not fail so that you have sound guidance I have three things that I want to share with you who are these wise counselors number one they they possess a fear of the Lord if you remember how we began the sermon series we read in Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of of wisdom fools despise wisdom and instruction but the someone who fears the Lord and we talked about this reverential awe that someone has for the Lord that they they readily kneel and bow to God's word they to the Lord

himself they have this awe of who God is and it emanates from someone who fears the Lord so someone who possesses the fear of Lord second someone who's where God's word is on their lips God's word is on their lips I can think of them in this way that they are stained by scripture if I had some white wool here and I were to submerge it in a vat of

[29 : 25] dye and I take that white wool or cotton out and now every fiber is stained through and through with whatever the color is that it has been just dipped into like that like that is the wise counselor is the one whom you're seeking advice and counsel from stained with scripture that they have immersed themselves that on their lips they can't help but cite scriptural principles when they speak counsel and scripture has a way that has infused in them that determines their own actions their attitudes their desires it's obvious this person has been stained by scripture thirdly a wise counselor so first someone has a fear of the Lord they have been stained by scripture and then third I call them trusted trespassers we all have built elaborate defenses and to protect ourselves from being harmed we put up no trespassing signs in our life we put up walls of self-protection we put up walls of self-preservation we put those those walls may look like walls of isolation we are adept wall builders and proficient defense fabricators these walls may look like a brash or big personality so soon as someone doesn't get too close and they don't probe too much and you can talk them down whenever they get too close they may be have someone who's proficient at the silent treatment or lead themselves into isolation avoidance of any meaningful conversation and on and on and on a week ago but you get the idea no trespassing so someone who is a wise counselor is a trusted trespasser these are select few people who love you enough to ignore your no trespassing signs and they are trusted friends to ask you hard questions they may be redemptively curious questions thoughtful questions to draw you out and to draw out what has been your heart they offer the truth that may sometimes be hard to hear as opposed to just telling us what we want to hear God's word calls those people friends here's what God's word says in the book of Proverbs faithful are the wounds of a friend so what I call trusted trespassers the Bible just refers to them as friends so who are your wise counselors who are they who fear the Lord who are stained by scripture and who are those trusted trespassers I remember one afternoon meeting with my college pastor at the time when I was a young man and he said Scott it just appears to me that you just think too highly of yourself right now and you're kind of too big for your britches thank you hard to hear but I appreciate him being a good counselor in that season when I was making the decision next we're gonna just talk about a wise decision is often not impulsive wisdom with and and proverb speaks to this saying the one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him it's the it's a courtroom setting in this verse and the defendant seems right until the the prosecuting a

Kearney if you will cross examines him and then adds more color to the story and now it begins to question whether what he first said is actually true and the proverb is speaking to the need to weigh all the evidence rather than reacting too quickly this lack of impulse pill impulsiveness though that the wise possess doesn't mean if certain a few things it doesn't mean that a person is excessively that it's good to be excessively timid for the wise are not excessively timid it also does not mean that a person is it is good to be irresolute no you can be a person who is resolute however the wise one is not to overestimate his own capacities of understanding and wants to weigh all factors to make a wise decision I would also say to those who tend to be cautious I am perhaps one of those some would say oh Scott he's not very impulsive but what one may not recognize is that sometimes I am operating by fear rather than faith and my delay is not necessarily a lack of impulsiveness a desire to not be too impulsive it may actually be fearful and so I want us to be careful not to say not to justify ourselves yeah those people who rush into things poo on them it's more of and I'm not that way when I may be not just ration impulsive but I may be actually sinning as well but it's called fear and so let's be careful you can fall off on the wagon on both sides of that issue last I perhaps want to just share this that wisdom would say is someone who has been trained by consequences decision sometimes paralyzes because we don't know the outcome if we knew the outcome it'd be far easier to make the decision but but sometimes one of the things that has shaped us and and is good for us is to be trained by consequences Galatians said this this way do not be deceived God is not mocked and whatever a man sows that will he also reap and the one who sows to the flesh will from the flesh reap corruption but the one who sows to the spirit will reap eternal life consequences are not meant to terrorize us they are meant to train us all educators probably would would affirm that that helicopter parents hinder their child's education how is that a parent steps in to relieve a

child from the natural feeling the natural consequences of being unprepared for a test and so they may step in and do some things to help this child not feel the weight of consequences for their own decisions or beginning a project the night before it is due the next day and the project will take 14 hours but they're going to give themselves two hours before they fall asleep and so a parent will step in and help them with this project to make it what it could be and unwittingly parents in their desire to help in the present cripple them in the future how the child does not feel a consequence of their own decision so God allows natural consequences and actions to shape us and to change us for his glory there are universal laws that are at play both in the natural world but also in the spiritual world in the natural world despite how much I despise gravity despite how much I don't like it I may not even believe in it every morning I step on the scale in the morning I am I'm confronted with the reality that gravity is still at work and it and it firmly holds me on the soapbox from which I will declare it doesn't exist that's a physical law well the spiritual law is just the same Paul is reminding here in Galatians the Jewish believers that the spiritual choices have consequences if you sow to the flesh don't be deceived you sin against God and others and you will have consequences to that I remember being a young man and a boy actually and I have an older brother and I lied to my brother my brother then repeated that lie and it got him in trouble well my parents traced down where the source of that information my brother got and received in it and it sourced from me and there was a great consequence that I had that my parents applied to me thankfully to help me learn a valuable lesson and that's just my parents allowed a natural consequence for me to be feel for my sin sometimes I'm thankful that one came at the hands of my parents who are an instrument of God in that case but sometimes I also have lost relationships for my own choices that I've made that too is a natural consequence I'm a big fan of natural consequences but consider

Israel for a moment as we close the service today God had proven them to be a trustworthy and he had proven to them to demonstrate his power on their behalf all the time and Israel was in his place when they had not yet occupied the land that God had promised Abraham and and they were found themselves to be in Egypt and while they were in Egypt God showed himself to be faithful to them God encouraged Pharaoh to let him go he denied that on one plague he says okay there's gonna be a death angel it's gonna go through the whole land and any firstborn son of any man or beast will be killed but Israel to avoid that consequence here's what you can do put blood on the doorpost put blood on the lintel of the doorpost and when the angel passes over they will go through Egypt it will pass over that home and that and the consequence of not doing that won't be upon you and Israel was spared God delivered Israel out of Egypt God it was faithful and demonstrating himself to be strong and trustworthy into the wilderness they go through the Sinai on their way to Israel and at that point they send 12 spies into the land to check out the land that God had promised them while they sent the 12 spies in 10 came back with the report all 12 came back 10 of them reported my there were great walled cities my there were giants in the land oh and yes look at the fruit of the vine which is huge and look that indeed this is a land flowing of milk and honey Caleb and Joshua also two of the 12 spies returned with this report and they come back and they report indeed this is what they said if the Lord has delighted in us he will bring us into this land and give it to us the land that flows of milk and honey however what the 10 spies report did is it disheartened the people and they began to be fearful and they began to act on fear rather than faith that this Caleb and Joshua said indeed this is the land that God has given us the 10 said I'm gonna respond in fear despite God being a trustworthy person despite him demonstrating himself to be powerful and strong on our behalf we're still gonna act in fear and as a result there are several consequences that the nation of Israel felt firstly all 10 of those spies would be dead anyone 20 years or older who was gonna die over the next 40 years that they were going to wander that was another consequence 40 years of wandering the death of anyone 20 or older and so if you will you can think of the 40 years in the wilderness as a long death march ah Betsy is no longer with us she must have been 20 years or older and and on and on with

[42 : 42] John he's no long wow John today was John's day and and people just start dying off 20 years or older and it was a reminder to the children of Israel your choices have consequences your choices have consequences you sow to the flesh you'll reap corruption and it's a bitter bitter taste but here's what I want us to see also accompanying that bitter taste of wandering for 40 years God demonstrates his mercy and God demonstrates his kindness how every morning they woke up his mercies were new in the form of manna and they had something to eat they also in those time that period of time they built the tabernacle so that God could dwell with his people and so even among

this disobedient people God said I want I still I'm gonna demonstrate my mercy to you I'm gonna demonstrate my my grace to you I want to dwell with you so yes there's a consequence but it's not the removal of his presence and it's not the removal of his provision for them in manna applying that so all that to say even in our own life many of us have tated stood the bitter pill of sowing to the flesh and we have the consequence of that whatever that may look like in your life and you feel I'm in the wilderness that doesn't mean God is still not present in your life and God is still not providing for you and to be grateful even with the weight of the consequences being very palpable in your life and all of us can rejoice in the book of Ephesians we read this and you are dead in your trespasses and sins all of us were dead in sin and verse 4 it's read this but God being rich in mercy because of his great love for us and which for which he loved us sent his son and I'm so grateful that Jesus Christ despite my sin and the consequence of my sin and the reality of what that means being separated from him for eternity that reality God took the consequence for me on my behalf and on your behalf to all those who believe and he I was dead in sin and now I'm alive to God because of my faith in Christ and his sinless life and his death for sin and his resurrection overcoming sin and death on my behalf there is consequence to sin so wisdom would instruct us allow natural consequences to train you to train me to be better decision-makers and that's the heart of Proverbs father we thank you for this day we thank you for your kindness and goodness to us or I am grateful that you have given us wise counselors you've given us your word you've given us your Holy Spirit you've given us prayer as tools and instruments to know what is wise you've also shepherded us with natural consequences and I pray Lord they that we would be the wisest of people that we would offer life with our words we would offer life through your gospel to others we love you we thank you for it may we be wise amen