Biblical Decision-Making in Business

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” - James 1:5

God has given us tools in His Word to help us make key decisions, both in business and in life.

As Christian business leaders, our decision-making is, at its core, the same as any other Christian: to seek God’s will and follow it. God is sovereign and He reveals His moral will to us in His Word. Our job is to follow Him and the path He has outlined in faithfulness and humility. Therefore, the only question we need to ask when making a decision is, “What is God’s will?”

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” - Romans 12:2

While it sounds simple, there are at least three complications we can run into when trying to discern the will of God:
Our ears are weak.

Our decision-making is often based on our own selfish desires and wishes, shaped by years of personal experience, secular management training, and exposure to the world and corporate culture. Because we assume that we are godly people doing God’s will, we don’t critically analyze the process by which we make decisions. This misstep can culminate in decision-making that is largely independent of God’s moral will, the standard of right and wrong as revealed in His Word. This haphazard approach to relying on our instincts leads to overconfidence, which in turn, leads to oversight.

Our hearts are hard.

Sometimes we know what the right thing to do is, and don’t do it. This can be caused by fear of man, or a desire to do things our way instead of God’s way. The problem is not a lack of knowledge, but a lack of desire to follow God.

If this is the case, we need to repent of this sin and turn our hearts back to Him.

Our knowledge is limited.

God’s sovereign will, the way He works in our lives on a daily basis, is impossible to fully know in advance. He is all-knowing, taking everything into account at all times and He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). We are not God, and both our knowledge and perspective are limited. Our job is not to try to figure out what God is planning, but to be faithful with what He has given us and trust Him with where He is leading us.

This curriculum is not intended to be the conclusion to this conversation, but it seeks to provide a solid foundation that can be used in making key decisions.

Although God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), it is sometimes difficult to find Bible verses that offer direct input into a specific issue or decision. Often the best we can find are general, over-arching principles in Scripture. We can trust in the fact that God’s Word always provides us with absolute truth and guiding principles, not necessarily specific answers to every question or issue that arises.
It’s also important to recognize the other tools God has given us in addition to His Word:

1. Prayer  
2. Godly counsel  
3. Personal experience

Whenever possible, we should first seek to hear from God through His Word. God's Word is the only unchanging tool in our toolbox; it is absolute reality, the touchstone we can depend on when all else seems changing and uncertain.

“The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.” - Psalm 119:160

If we don’t go to God's Word first, we risk relying on our own experience and biased perspective, approaching the situation with our own preference for how we would like to see it turn out. Even our prayers can be influenced by our desires, hopes, and opinions.

It is wise to pray to the Lord, asking Him to specifically direct you to the Scriptures He would have you read and apply in your situation. As you read His Word, pray it back to Him. Read verses aloud as a prayer and rest in His promises.

Additionally, we should seek the wise and godly counsel of others who can give us insight into Biblical decision-making. They may know of verses that we haven’t thought of and point us to truth in God’s Word.

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” - Proverbs 11:14
Servanthood & Stewardship

According to the world, the primary purpose of business is to make money. Our business schools do not understand the biblical mandates of honoring others over ourselves or considering the needs of others before our own.

As christian business leaders, we seek to apply these Scriptures in our businesses because we are commanded to by God. Paradoxically, when we apply these biblical principles, they generate happy and satisfied customers, which is good for business. But the benefits that come from following Scripture should never be our primary motivation for obedience.

There are 3 questions to consider with every business decision: ¹

1. Is this option legal?
   It seems elementary to start here, but we would never want to entertain a decision that is either illegal or borders on being illegal. If the answer to this question is no, we need to find a new option.

2. Is it consistent with the character of Christ?
   As christian business leaders, this means acting as a servant to others, making decisions that consider the wants and needs of others higher than our own.

   Jesus taught and personified this servanthood principle when He washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:5-17) and in the ultimate act of service, His death on the cross. In Matthew 20, Jesus is clear:

   “…Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” - Matthew 20:24-28
The question you should ask yourself is, “If people are affected, can you envision Jesus treating them this way?”

As imitators of Christ, we are not to take any action that He would not. Options that do not pass this litmus test should send us back to look for better options that are consistent with the character and service of Christ.

3. Will the choice I make maximize organizational performance?

God is the creator and owner all things (Psalm 24:1, 50:12), and He has given us everything we have to steward in His interest. Christian leaders are to act as stewards, not owners, of the organizations and resources at their disposal. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25, Luke 19) demonstrates the priority God puts on maximizing the gifts He has given us.

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.” - Luke 12:48

That’s why one important step in biblical decision-making is asking the question, “Is this the best way to steward the resources God has given me?”
Tension between servanthood and stewardship:

While these questions seem straightforward, there are times when we see apparent contradiction or tension between them. Something that would be good for business might conflict with what is good for individuals; for instance, having to let go of an under-performer. If we make every decision based solely on the good of others, we may go out of business, which would be poor stewardship. On the other hand, if we only approach business from a stewardship perspective, doing what’s best for the company, we may end up hurting people along the way. The objective is to pursue both of these principles, to arrive at a balanced position of conducting business that maximizes stewardship of resources and service to others.

In situations where there is tension between stewardship and service, it becomes even more important to utilize all the tools God has given us for biblical decision-making: His Word, prayer, godly counsel, and our own experience. We need to slow down, reflect deeply, gather more advice, and reject any misinterpretations of Scripture we may have embraced. Then we need to humbly trust God to lead us in the direction that would best glorify Him.

Ultimately, there is no perfect formula for every situation. To be consistent with a Christian worldview, every decision-making model ultimately relies on God for answers. That means marinating every step of our decision-making process in prayer and true discernment.

A biblical approach to decision-making is not quick, easy, or hasty. We are not guaranteed that we will always make the right or best choice in God’s eyes, but having a careful process in place helps guard us against the common mistakes of overconfidence and self-reliance. This ensures, in the very least, that we will be doing our best to seek His will, and not our own, when making decisions.
Scriptural Application

As has been said, there are many principles in the Bible that can lead us to make wise, godly decisions. Below is an example of how to take one verse and create from it a list of questions from which decisions can be made.

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. - Philippians 4:8

When faced with a key decision, ask yourself the following:

1. Am I telling the truth in my comments as it relates to this decision? Do I really know what the truth is in this situation?

2. Am I applying nobility in this situation? Am I putting my own preferences and well-being after those of others? Am I acting with the utmost character and integrity in this situation?

3. Is this decision going to be the one that is right for all parties involved? Can I clearly discern between what is best for an individual vs. what is best for the larger group of people this decision will effect? Which decision would have the most positive impact on the most people?

4. Am I acting in love in this situation? Can others around me see that I am handling this issue with the love of Christ?

5. Am I addressing this in a way that others can respect and admire in spite of the difficulty involved?

6. Am I honoring God and bringing glory and praise to Him in the midst of this decision?
Finally, the question which should ultimately govern all our decisions is, “What option allows me the greatest chance to bring glory to God?

In spite of the obstacles to overcome, it is possible for us to develop a specific process for making biblically based decisions. Developing a series of questions from Scripture can add clarity to a situation.

This is particularly true when we have studied opposing viewpoints, received varied godly input, and even when our prayer life has not led us in a specific direction. God has not left us to figure it all out on our own. He has given us tools in His Word, His Spirit, and wise counselors that can lead us to follow Him and His will.

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**ASSIGNMENT**

1. Prepare your own series of questions in the space below to help you when making difficult decisions. This list can be taken from a specific Bible verse like the example above from Philippians 4:8, or from biblical principles like servanthood and stewardship.

2. Make 12 copies to bring with you and share at your next round table meeting.

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1 Taken from Michael Zigarelli’s book, “Management by Proverbs”

All Scripture taken from the New American Standard Version.