Series: Foolproof
Title: #9 Wisdom & Decision-Making

Date: November 8, 2026
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SELECTED PROVERBS

[SCRIPTURE READING]

9:10: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*
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.*
4:18: *The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*
4:23: *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*
14:12: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*
14:15: *The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.*
15:22: *Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.*
16:33: *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
19:21: *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*
21:1: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*
24:16: *The righteous falls seven times and rises again.*

[INTRODUCTION]

#10

- This is the final week of our series *Foolproof: God's Wisdom for Your Life.*
  - We began with the foundation of the whole book: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom **(9:10)**.
    - Proverbs isn't a list of tips, tricks, or lifehacks.
    - Instead, it all begins with God—with reverence and awe for who he is and what he's done for us in the gospel.
      - Our greatest need is to be saved by his grace.
      - Only then can we live new lives.
  - Through that gospel lens, Proverbs has given us wisdom on a number of topics: our words, friends, rest, money, marriage, sex, and parenting.
  - And today, we finish with a question that pulls it all together: What about the topics or situations we haven't covered—where the right answer isn't clear?

#11

- Or put it this way: **What do we do when we don't know what to do?**
  - My guess is that almost everyone here is facing something like this.
    - Where should I go to college? Should I take that job?
    - Should I marry this person? Should we have kids?
    - How much freedom should we give our teenager?
    - Should I confront my friend—or let it go?
    - How should I handle this diagnosis? Is it time to retire?
  - Sometimes these decisions are small—sometimes they shape our lives.

- What about you?
    - Are you facing something right now where you don't know what to do?
    - And how are you approaching it?

What do you do when you don't know what to do?

- The world says, follow your dreams, go with your gut, be true to yourself.
- But Proverbs says something better.
    - It doesn't tell us to look for a sign or hand us a map of God's secret plan.
    - Instead, it makes us the kind of people who can walk wisely without one.

[Transition]: So let's get our arms around Proverbs' teaching using the same headings we've used in this series—starting with:

#12

THE POWER OF DECISIONS

- In one sense, Proverbs is a whole book about decisions.
    - In chapters 1–9 a father pleads with his son to choose the right path.
    - And then we get a picture: Two women calling out to him.
        - One is Lady Wisdom. The other is the Woman Folly.
        - And they say exactly the same words: **9:4, 16:** Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!
- Every decision we make is an answer to one of those two voices.
    - And our lives end up being the accumulation of our choices.
    - Which means:

#13

1. On one hand, our decisions have power for HARM.

- **14:12:** There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
    - We can make decisions that have disastrous consequences.
    - Spiritually, morally, relationally, financially, eternally.
- And unnervingly, at the time these decisions seem right—it's humbling to accept the limits of our best thoughts.
    - I think of the time I thought I could fix our shower and ended up needing to call an emergency plumber.
    - But sometimes the end is worse than water and some extra dollars—sometimes bad decisions are the way to death.
        - We prioritize work at the cost of relationships.
        - We allow sports to distance our kids from Christian community.
        - We get sucked into scrolling and distance ourselves from God.
    - Slowly but surely, decisions that seemed reasonable turn out to be foolish.

Our decisions have power for HARM.

2. **On the other hand, our decisions also have power for GOOD.**
   - **4:26:** Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.
   - Wisdom is a path.
     - It's not usually one dramatic moment.
     - It's the steady accumulation of wise choices: We open our Bibles, we have that conversation, we say no, or we say yes.
   - We can make decisions that bring health and life—to us, our families, our community, our church.
   - Like dawn, it's hard to see the change minute by minute—but look back, and the whole sky is bright.

Our decisions have power for GOOD.

[Transition]
- If decisions have that much power, how do we make good ones—especially when we don't know what to do?
- 1) The **Power** of Decisions; and now…

#14

THE BEST DECISIONS

- Proverbs doesn't give us a formula. It gives us a way of walking.
- Let me give you five marks—each with a short phrase to help us remember.

#15

1. **First, when you don't know what to do—Check Your Heart.**

#16

- **4:23:** Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
- In the Bible, the heart isn't just your feelings.
- It's the control center of your life: What you think, desire, and choose.

[Illustrate]
- In decision-making, we often let our hearts decide and then find reasons to justify it.
- You've already fallen in love with the truck—the "research" is just paperwork.
- You've already decided you're right—so you're not listening, you're just doubling down in an argument.

[Apply]
- So before we make a big decision, we ask: What's going on in my heart?
  - What's driving me in this decision—about love, work, health, kids, or whatever?
  - Fear? Pride? Comfort? The approval of others?
- I might not like the answer—but I need to know it.

Check Your Heart.

#17

2. Second, when you don't know what to do—Use Your Head.

#18

- Faith doesn't mean switching off your brain.
- **14:15:** The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.
  - Gather the facts: **18:13:** If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.
  - Think about where things lead: **22:3:** The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.
  - Take your time: **19:2:** Whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.

[Illustrate]

- When **Charles Darwin** was deciding whether to get married—he made a list.
  - **Under *Not Marry*:** Freedom to go where he liked, and the conversation of clever men at clubs.
  - ***Under Marry:*** Children, and a constant companion in old age.
  - His conclusion: "Marry—Marry—Marry."[1]
- He was trying something Proverbs commends: Thinking it through.

[Apply]

- When we don't know what to do, we don't jump or react.
  - We gather the facts—and write them down.
  - We consider where each path will take us in five years.
  - And we take our time—and we sleep on it.
- In other words:

Use Your Head.

[Transition]: But then Proverbs adds a caution, which takes us to the third thing.

#19

3. When you don't know what to do—Seek God's Face.

#20

- **3:5:** Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
  - Use your head, but don't lean on it.
  - Rest your weight on God.
- How do we do that? Proverbs gives us two things:
  - **First, his Word: 6:23:** The commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light.
    - Many decisions are answered by the Bible before we start.
      - Some options are ruled out by Scripture: Should I hold a grudge, gossip, or let this flirtation go further? NO!
      - Other choices are actively commanded: Should I come clean, stand up for what's right, or be generous to the poor? YES!
    - Sometimes we make life more complicated than it needs to be—there's beautiful freedom in obedience.
  - **And alongside his Word, prayer: 16:3:** Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

[Illustrate]

- Here's the promise that comes with trust: **3:6:** He will make straight your paths.
  - It doesn't say he'll show you the destination—how things will all work out.
  - Instead, he promises to keep you on the path—one step at a time.

#21

- The novelist **E. L. Doctorow** once said writing is like driving a car at night: *"You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way."*[2]
- That's what God does: He gives us enough light for the next step—and step by step, he takes us where we need to go.

[Apply]: Before you make a big decision:

- Open your Bible before you open the spreadsheet.
- And pray: Lord, here's my heart. Here's what I'm thinking. Lead me.

Seek God's Face.

[Transition]: And if you're still not sure, or if it's a big decision, there's a fourth thing…

#22

4. When you don't know what to do—Ask for Help.

- Proverbs assumes wisdom is learned in community.

#23

- **15:22:** Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

[Illustrate]

- Every car has blind spots—and so do we.
  - That can be unnerving to think about.
  - I don't always see things as they really are.
- So God gives us other people as our mirrors.
  - They see what we can't—including what's in our hearts.
  - **20:5:** The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

[Apply]

- Choose carefully: **13:20:** Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.
  - Talk to people who know you, know God, and will tell you the truth.
  - Not just people who'll agree with you.
- And be willing to hear hard truth: **27:6:** Faithful are the wounds of a friend.
  - I remember one friend calling me out about my marriage.
  - He was asking questions, I was being evasive, and he said: *"James, don't hide."*
  - He stopped me in my tracks—and brought me back to the path of life.
- Do you have someone in your life like that?
  - If not, that's one of the reasons God gives us the church.
  - Talk to one of our seniors who's already walked the road, be vulnerable in your community group, or reach out to one of our pastors.

Ask for Help.

[Transition]: And when you've done these things—checked your heart, used your head, sought God's face, and asked for help—finally:

#24

5. When you don't know what to do—Step Out.

- At some point, you must decide.
- Take the job. Make the move. Have the conversation.
- Remembering that the key word is "trust": **3:5:** Trust in the LORD with all your heart.

[Illustrate]

- I feel like wisdom can take you 90% of the way, and then, having trusted God in the process, you trust him with the remaining 10% too.
- And as you step out, three things:

[Apply]

- Don't wait for absolute certainty.
  - That will only leave you mired in indecision—and living out of fear.
  - Christians have a special version of this where we act like God is keeping his will hidden and is waiting to smack us if we choose the wrong thing.
  - That's not how God works: Move forward on the path—trusting that he'll let you know if you need to adjust.
- Don't second-guess because it's hard.
  - The right decision isn't always the easy one.
  - In fact, sometimes you do the right thing—and it gets harder!
    - Joseph refused Potiphar's wife—and ended up in prison (Gen 39).
    - But God was in it—and though it took years, that prison became the path to the palace.
  - Difficulty isn't proof you got it wrong—it might just be one of the steps the journey requires.
- Don't be afraid of getting it wrong—or, better, make peace with the fact that sometimes you will.

#25

  - Even then, don't fear: **24:16:** The righteous falls seven times and rises again.
  - Whatever's in front of you:

Step Out.

#26

[Transition]: Check your heart. Use your head. Seek God's face. Ask for help. Step out.

- And do it all remembering—God is worthy of our trust.
- 1) The **Power** of Decisions; 2) The **Best** Decisions; and finally…

#27

THE GREATEST DECISION

#28

- Behind all our decisions: **God rules** and overrules everything.
  - He rules over **epic** things: **21:1:** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
  - He rules over **small** things: **16:33:** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.
  - And he rules over **everything in between**: **19:21:** Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.

- And this all-powerful **God loves** us—as a father the son in whom he delights **(3:12)**.
- This **combination**—his power and his love—makes all the difference.
    - If he's powerful but not loving—that's terrifying.
    - If he's loving but not powerful—that doesn't do us much good.
    - But the God of the Bible is both.

[Illustrate]

#29

- We see this most clearly at the cross.
    - **He overruled: Acts 2:23:** This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
    - **And he loved: Rom 5:8:** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- God took the worst decision in all of human history—to kill the Son of God—and used it to work salvation for us.
    - And we can trust a God like that.
    - **1 Pet 5:6–7** brings these ideas together: Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God… casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

[Apply]

- Maybe you're carrying **regret**—a decision you wish you could undo.
    - Your story isn't done yet.
    - God still rules and overrules—and he still loves you.
- Maybe you're carrying **pain**—from decisions others made that hurt you.
    - What was meant for harm doesn't get the final word.
    - He sees, he cares, he heals—and he's for you.
- Or maybe you're facing something right now where you **don't know what to do**.
    - Approach it with the wisdom Proverbs describes—if you do all five things you're going to get close!
    - And whatever happens, your Father will be with you.
- The greatest decision isn't one we'll ever make.
    - The greatest decision is God's decision to set his love on us.
    - And that decision frees us to go and live.
        - If you put your faith in Jesus, your sin is forgiven, and you are in the hands of a God who is all power and all love.
        - You can trust him with your next step.

[CONCLUSION]

#30

When we don't know what to do…

We can make wise decisions because God holds us—and our future too.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*.
- Tim Keller, *Proverbs: True Wisdom for Living*.
- Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*.
- Logos Bible Software.

Endnotes

[1] Charles Darwin's handwritten note, "This is the Question," dates from 1838. It is available through the Darwin Correspondence Project at the University of Cambridge, accessed here 11/5/26.
[2] E. L. Doctorow, "The Art of Fiction No. 94," interview in *The Paris Review*, Winter 1986, accessed here 11/5/26.