

# 12 Steps to Making Better Decisions

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You recently began a new year and a new decade, which means you've likely made a new set of resolutions. What makes resolutions so compelling is that they provide us with a fresh start, a chance to recommit to taking actions that will improve our lives. Yet such resolutions are just a tiny fraction of the decisions we make that affect our happiness.

Research has shown that the average adult makes 70 conscious decisions every day. That means we make a decision, on average, four times every waking hour, or about once every 15 minutes. Over the course of the 2010s you would have made 3,652 decisions (including the decision to read this article).

Most of the decisions we make, of course, are trivial—what clothes we will wear, what we will eat for breakfast, and so on. But we frequently need to make decisions that are substantive, and that may have a profound effect on our lives or the lives of others. Because of the significance of decision-making, we need to develop the habit of doing it well.

The decision-making process is circular: the decisions we make are not only determined by our worldview, but they also help to shape our worldview. Our day-to-day decisions to hear God's Word and to obey his commands leads us to become wise, and thus able to make better decisions. As we enter a new decade, here's a 12-step mode that can help you make godly decisions throughout the 2020s:

## 1. Commit to seeking God's will —

Commit to seeking God's will by praying he will guide you through each step of the decision-making process, search the Bible for relevant commands and principles, and obey all he asks you to do.

## 2. Classify the question —

The second step is to classify the type of question or problem you're trying to decide. Is this a generic type of problem or something unique? While many of the decisions we need to make will be on questions unique to us, the problem itself is probably generic. That means someone else you know has probably had to make a similar decision and may be able to provide prudent advice or guidance.

## 3. Define the problem —

Once we determine whether the problem is unique or generic, we then need to drill down and define it clearly. For example, you might initially think the decision you are making is to take a new job, when the real problem you are grappling with is whether a change that would advance your career is worth leaving your family, friends, and local church to move to a new city.

#### **4. Understand the specifications for the decision —**

You need to be clear with yourself what specifications need to be met for the decision to be clearly and wisely decided. While this may appear to be obvious, we may think we've decided an issue when the outcome actually does not meet our long-term specifications or goals. For instance, our long-term goal may be to marry a spouse who loves and honors God, yet we may decide to accept a marriage proposal from an unbeliever, thinking we can "convert" them during the engagement period. In such a case we would not only fail to meet the specification for a decision, but we would also be making the decision about marriage more difficult in the future.

#### **5. Determine whether the decision is covered by a command —**

The next step is to determine if God has provided a clear course of action based on Scripture. Is there a clear command about what should be done? In the case of marrying a non-Christian, the Bible is clear we should not be "unequally yoked" to an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14). If the command is clear our decision is also clear: we must obey God.

If the decision is not clearly covered by a command, we can consider whether we can determine a principle based on analogy or indirect extension of a related principle. Sometimes, though, the decision—such as whether we should take a new job—is not going to be revealed simply through reading the Bible. In such cases we must move to the next step.

#### **6. Gather relevant information —**

What additional information do you need to make the decision? Are there specific obligations, such as to your spouse or children, that would affect the decision? Is there specific data, such as the pros and cons, you need to consider? What are your personal desires? Are you excited about a particular outcome or nervous about what would happen if you chose a particular path? Collect as much information as you think is necessary to make a timely decision.

#### **7. Seek wise counsel —**

As Proverbs states, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prov. 11:14). Get input on the decision from mature and wise advisers.

#### **8. Process the information through your values and worldview —**

Our ability to consistently make wise and godly decisions will be predicated on our becoming a wise and godly person. If you are striving to obey God, trusting in him, and seeking his will, then you'll be developing the values and worldview that will help your long-term decision-making be rooted in wisdom and courage.

## **9. Identify your choices —**

After you've gathered and processed the relevant information, you may find you have a broader range of choices than you might have originally considered. Don't let this paralyze the process. Pray for guidance and then narrow down your options to the ones you find most appealing, or that will best solve the problem.

## **10. Make a decision (or not) —**

Every prior step to this point is intended to give you clarity about your choice. But ultimately, you have to make a decision—even if the decision is not to decide just yet. Recognize that at a certain point the choice not to decide is itself a decision about how to address the question or problem. Be bold and trust the instincts you've honed through wisdom and obedience.

## **11. Convert the decision into action —**

Now that you've made your decision, what actions will you need to take? You won't always have a clear path or know where the decision will lead. But you can make the decision actionable by outlining the next step or steps you need to take.

## **12. Make additions and adjustments as they come —**

Taking decisive action often leads to a cascade of more decisions you'll need to make. For example, if you decide to take the new job you'll have to decide where to live, decide where to go to church, decide how you will maintain the relationships with old friends, and so on. If you try to make all the decisions at once you may become overwhelmed. Instead, trust God will help you make the necessary additions and adjustments as they come.

## **Addendum:**

With practice, the 12-step model outlined above can become an intuitive process for making significant decisions. Still, it's helpful to have a stripped-down version we can teach your children. Here is the "Five-What" model of decision-making:

- What does God say?
- What do Godly Councilors think?
- What do I need to know to decide?
- What's my decision?
- What do I do next?