

June 28, 2026

“Guiding Principles for Decision-making”

Philippians 4:4-9

Intro:

This morning we come to the end of our sermon series that has taken us through some of the baptism course curriculum here at Argyle Road. I hope that through this series you have not only been reminded of your own journey to baptism, but also been encouraged and equipped in your ongoing journey as a Christian.

Today we are looking at part two of the final lesson, which focuses on how we are to live as Christians. Last week, in part one, we looked at guiding principles for Christian living, and today we look at guiding principles for Christian decision making.

So, how do we make decisions?

There are a number of processes we use to make decisions. Some of you might note down all the pros and cons of the outcome and based on that analysis, make your decision. Sometimes we work on whim, such as the eeny-meeny-miney-mo approach. With some decisions we have lots of time to weigh alternatives, while other decisions require immediate action. However we go about doing it, decision-making is a regular part of our lives. So how should a Christian go about making good decisions?

All parents want to see their children make good decisions. When we are young, our parents have more influence in the process – or at the very least, veto power on the decisions we have made. How many children have been on the receiving end of a phrase similar to, “If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you do that too?”. Usually this is in response to a decision they made that did not meet their parents’ approval. As we get older, we are more independent and our parents have less direct say, and so we hear them whispering quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) “Make good decisions” as we leave the house.

One could argue that good decisions are just the result of employing common sense. But we all know that there is nothing common about common sense. So, good decisions could be defined as the ones that turned out alright in the end. However, a positive outcome does not mean it was a good decision.

When I was in grade twelve, I went on the senior class ski trip over the Christmas break. I had never been downhill skiing in the mountains and so I was looking forward to the adventure. Ski lessons were provided, but for reasons I can no longer recall, my friend Mike and I missed the lessons. Since this was the first day, we didn't want to waste any of it just because we missed the lessons. So we decided that we could probably manage just fine by figuring it out as we went. We spent the trip going down green runs, blue runs, black runs, and at one point decided that skiing down a sheer cliff was a much quicker way of getting to where we wanted to go. Luckily, neither of us got hurt, but that positive outcome did not mean that we had made good choices, just that we were able to coast on the dumb luck of youth.

In last week's sermon, I said that as Christians we belong to God, and that adds a new layer to our decision-making process because we can no longer think just for and about ourselves. This morning we are going to look at Godly decision making from two perspectives: How the decision will affect us, and how that decision will affect others.

How it affects us:

As I said, there are lots of ways that people make decisions. Most of those have to do with what effect that decision will have on ourselves. Will it make us happier, richer, life easier, bring instant gratification, and so on. For Christians, how that decision will affect our relationship with Jesus needs to play a significant role in our process.

There are two questions of personal impact that we need to consider when faced with a decision:

The first is “Is this beneficial?” When we ask this question, we aren’t asking if we will profit in some way from this. This isn’t about gaining power, influence, or a “step up in life”. This is in the context of our walk with Jesus. Will the thing you are about to decide on, or the direction that decision is going to take, be beneficial in your growth as a Christian? In many places, the Apostle Paul reminds Christians that because of Jesus, they are free from the religious constraints of don’t eat this or touch that. But, in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, he qualifies that statement with “just because something is allowable, it does not mean that it is beneficial.” A frequent example of this in the church is the drinking of alcohol. Now, the only stipulation on drinking alcohol in the Bible is that one should not become drunk. It then follows that as long as you don’t get drunk, it is fine. However, drinking – even without getting drunk – might not be beneficial to you or your walk with Jesus. Perhaps you have an addictive personality and the regular imbibing of beer will cause you become an alcoholic. Or, perhaps you only have one or two beers after work, but if you do this every day, it will have a negative impact on your health, finances, and likely any relationships you have, such as with your spouse. In all those cases, your relationship with God will be impacted because your desire will be for the alcohol over Him.

The second question builds on the first one and asks “Will this master me?” One of the great risks of having freedom is that it is not easy to notice when something has taken over our lives. Again, the alcohol example is an easy one to use here. We have determined that drinking is not wrong, just getting drunk, and so you open up a pattern or habit of having a drink or two after work on the weekends or whatever. If you have an addictive personality, as I mentioned earlier, then those occasional drinks that become regular will quickly lead to an addiction and become your master. Instead of a nice casual enjoyment, your body craves and needs the alcohol and you will find yourself doing everything you can to satisfy that need. This is just an example. Any number of things, once opened up, can exert a mastery over your life that will get in the way of your relationship with God. So, when faced with a decision, begin by asking how choosing one way or the other will affect you personally.

How it Affects Others:

The second area to think about is how that decision will affect those around you.

It would be nice if everything we did happened in isolation. We don't bother anyone and no one bothers us. The reality is that our decisions and actions often have an impact on other people, and we need to take that into account. For the Apostle Paul, there are two areas to consider on this point.

The first is, "Will whatever I am about to do cause someone else (meaning another Christian) to stumble in their walk with Jesus?" This question often goes hand in hand with the earlier one of "Will this master me?" Let's return to the alcohol example. Yes, we are free to have a beer or glass of wine or what have you – that is a decision you can make. But, if you happen to be in the presence of a fellow believer who has very strong opinions on not drinking, or reasons to not drink, then ordering that beer in front of them could be harmful to their faith journey. It costs you nothing to refrain from having the beer, but may make all the difference in the world to that other person's growing relationship with Jesus, or his personal or mental health. If your desire to have that drink is greater than your consideration of someone else, that is a good indicator that you have allowed that thing to have mastery over you, instead of letting Jesus be your Lord.

The final question deals with the kingdom impact. Mainly, will this decision lead to God being glorified, or will it lead to Him being mocked and ignored?

Remember that as a Christian, you represent Jesus on earth. Because you have the Holy Spirit in you, you reflect God to those around you. Often people who are not yet believers have a pre-conceived idea of who God is. Our actions will either dismantle that notion – and possibly lead to someone becoming open to the love of God, or they will reinforce the bias that they have against God. One of the biggest hinderances people have to becoming a Christian is that they think Christians are hypocrites. That, combined with incorrect assumptions, makes people look at our actions and conclude that God can't be real.

So again, yes, we are free to do what we want, but we are not free to do things that will turn people away from God.

Conclusion:

In all of this, keep in mind that God wants us to make good decisions and live a vibrant and growing Christian life. He will guide us and show what is good, if we are open to His leading. That is the promise from Psalm 32 that we read earlier in the service. It is also the encouragement that Paul gives in Philippians 4 that we read earlier:

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

Keep your thoughts and sight on Jesus. Allow what you know of how He lived his life on Earth to inform how you live your life as His follower. Not every situation you encounter will have been written about in the Bible, but the character of Jesus is consistently written about. His words and actions can and will provide a foundation for determining how you should act and what decisions you should make in any given situation. Remember the words from Philippians 4:8:

“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”

Let’s pray.