

# BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND MAKING DECISIONS

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Three birds are sitting on a limb. Two birds decide to fly off the limb. How many birds are left on the limb? One! No: all three are still on the limb. A decision without action is no more than a wish or exercise in rhetoric. A 12-year-old is walking back and forth in front of the candy counter. In a voice of frustration, he says, “All of these choices with only a quarter”.

Decisions! Have you taken time recently to notice how many decisions you make every day? Some of these decisions are made automatically. Some are major and some are minor. We make decisions under pressure; we try to avoid making some decisions; and we wish we hadn't made certain decisions. Life revolves around the decisions we make or don't make. A decision not to make a decision, is a decision to do nothing.

From the first couple in the Garden of Eden—Adam and Eve—every person has been given the freedom to make decisions. Decisions determine our destiny in time and in eternity. Biblical counseling, in order for it to be effective, requires making and activating decisions. Once the presenting issue or problems is identified; the Bible answer or solution is documented, and a belief it will work; that is not the end. Activating (doing) the decision through an action plan, is the only way biblical counseling achieves long range results. A decision without putting it into practice is nothing but a bird on a limb thinking about flying.

## WHAT IS A DECISION?

While I'm sure the answer to this question doesn't require the knowledge skills of a rocket scientist; it does, however, need to be noted. *Decision making involves our thinking skills as we make a choice between several alternatives that are possible. The goal of the decision-making process is to produce the final choice that may or may not, at the time, be activated. At first it may be spoken or written as a resolve. A personal choice produced by the decision process is usually one based on the decision maker's core values, beliefs, and emotions. Also, “What's best for everyone?” may be part of the decision making process.*

Decision making usually involves:

1. An analysis of a need, problem, desire, solution, etc. in a person's life. The analysis has a psychological element relative to one's felt or perceived needs.

2. During the evaluation phase of making the decision what the decision maker feels, knows, and is prejudiced toward, will enter into the process. Thus, the challenge to “remain natural and open minded.”
3. A popular method of reaching a choice in the decision process is the **pros and cons** process made popular by Plato and Benjamin Franklin. A line is drawn down the middle of a sheet of paper and the pros and cons are listed.
4. Sometimes the “What if” game is played in trying to project the results of a possible decision and choice.
5. Sometimes the decision maker will invite another person or persons to join him/her in the decision making process. The chosen person may be an authority or considered an expert.
6. Another practice in decision making is prioritizing the possible choices and alternative. Trying to see what they look like and possible results.
7. Biblical counseling advocates praying about the choices related to a decision that needs to be made. It also advocates asking, “What choice has God already made for me?”

### **PROCRASTINATION AND DECISION MAKING**

When it comes to making decisions, it is difficult for some people to make them. The decision doesn't have to be deciding to take a trip to the moon; it may be something as simple as making a choice in a restaurant. Here are a few reasons I have noted relative to why some people don't like to make decisions and activate them:

1. The activated decision would demand making a change; and they don't like change.
2. They like to present status quo. No need to rock the boat.
3. Pride and ego will not permit them to say they need to change.
4. There are those who don't know how to go about making the right decision.
5. Laziness is another reason don't eagerly engage in making decisions.
6. Have drawn a line in the sand and will not cross it: “Take me like I am or leave me.”
7. Fear holds some back from making a decision: “What if I fail?”
8. Sadly, some are enjoying the fruit of their sin or behavior.
9. Some have good intentions and will “decide tomorrow” but tomorrow never comes.

10. Some have taken a dogmatic stance and must save face: They're never wrong.

### THE BIBLE AND CHANGE

It is clear in the Bible counseling manual, given by God, that man is endowed with the ability to make decisions based on his free will. This is documented from Genesis to Revelation. Joshua gives us a summary in these words: *Choose you this day whom you will serve, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15)*. This principle is the cornerstone of all biblical counseling. It's the top and bottom line. We must choose to serve God that is if we hope to resolve all our issues.

As the biblical counselor and the counselee share God's solution to the problem or issue, sooner or later it will be time for the counselee to make a decision. The choice is one of accepting and applying God's solution or ignoring it. To be only *a hearer of the word and not a doer (James 1:22-26)*. Talk but no walk.

Reluctance to make a decision relative to applying God's word is not of recent origin. Here's an account from ancient history of God's people:

1. **I Kings 18:21:** *And Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter (linger) between two opinions (choices)? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.'* But the people answered him not a word. What a sad but a graphic picture of how people try to avoid making decisions. A decision not to make a decision is a decision; a fact that most people ignore. Indecision is an enemy of the soul as well as one's mental health. In a biblical counseling session, help and healing begins when a decision is made and acted upon.
2. **Joel 3:14:** *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decisions! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.* A principle from this verse is that indecision is not the exclusive territory of one or two persons; it is the place of the masses. Indecision is a frequent practice by those who seek biblical counseling.
3. **Proverbs 3:31, 32:** *Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord, but His secret counsel is with the upright.* It is clear that a person may make the wrong decision, and as a result suffer the consequences. In biblical, we seek to know and obey God's counsel. This is why we must de-

cide to do the good and refuse the evil (cf. Isaiah 7:15). In biblical counseling a decision is made to practice the good (Psalm 119:30, 31).

In biblical counseling once the problem is identified and acknowledged, the solution from God's word is shared. It becomes a choice that the counselee must make. It is a decision to follow God or not to follow Him. The pros and cons of the decision are discussed; this will help the counselee make the right decision. The person may need some time to ingest and digest the choice. A future session will give him an opportunity to do so.

#### **SOME FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN MAKING A DECISION**

In order for the person being counseled to feel secure about his or her decision, sharing some of the following observations will be helpful:

1. If I make this decision will it glorify God (Ephesians 3:21)?
2. If I make this decision will it be approved by God?
3. Is this decision based on a clear teaching in the Bible?
4. By making this decision will I have done my part to solve the problem?
5. If I don't make this decision will I have peace of mind, joy, and happiness?
6. Do I understand that biblical counseling is powerless without activating decisions?
7. Do I fully understand the possible consequences of not making a decision?

These seven questions will help the counselee evaluate the importance of making a decision based on the choices available.

#### **APPLICATION EXERCISE**

1. Write an essay on why some persons seek biblical counseling, but don't want to make and activate a decision.
2. How would you use decision making as a tool in biblical counseling?
3. How does decision making relate to "being a doer of the word"?
4. What additional observations do you have?
5. How will you intentionally use this lesson in your personal decision making?

