

Faith That Works Msg 2
 Making Wise Decisions
 Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
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Good morning and welcome as we're continuing our message series through the book of James Faith That Works – is the name of our series, and this week we're talking about . . .

Making Wise Decisions

Let me ask you for a show of hands. . .

How many of you have ever seen the movie, "Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade"??

It's the third movie in the Indiana Jones series.

If you've seen the movie, then you know that there's a scene that comes at the end of the movie, in which the three travelers enter a cavern

And there they see that this cavern is filled with many cups

And one of those cups - - - but only one is the HOLY GRAIL

And based on the plot of this movie, this cup will give the one who drinks from it "LONG AND HEALTHY" life.

But all of the other cups - - - bring instant death.

So they walk into the cavern, and one traveler, the evil one. . .

Asks the ancient guardian of the cups, "Well, which one is the right one?"

Watch . . .

Indiana Jones 3 Holy Grail Scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0TallRtZ24>

So the evil traveler, carefully . . . very carefully chooses one cup . . and he picks it up and he drinks. . .

And immediately. . .

His skin melts away

He becomes a living skeleton

His head explodes and he crumbles into dry dust on the cavern floor and screams echo in the chamber and dust blows from his skull to which the guardian of the cave says . . .

"He Chose Poorly"

If you're someone who has a hard time making decisions in life, then it's likely that scenes like that haunt you.

Because that's the way that you see life

Every time you're faced with a choice, I mean any choice

You think that there's only one right decision you can make, only one Holy Grail among my many choices

There's only one right house to live in

Better choose wisely

Only one right college to attend

Only one right person to marry

Only one right car to purchase

And you're terrified that after you make your decision. . .

God will look at you and shake his head and say . . .

"He chose poorly"

Today we're looking at "**How to choose wisely**"

Specifically . . .

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE DECISIONS

The book of James has a lot to say about making wise decisions.

Here in James chapter 1, he describes an indecisive man, a double-minded man as someone who is . . .

"Unstable in all his ways."

This is the problem we're talking about this morning.

Never before has the world we live in offered us so many options, so many varieties of things from which to choose.

And we have freedom to choose
 But that FREEDOM TO CHOOSE is both A BLESSING and A BURDEN.
 It's a BLESSING because WE HAVE THE FREEDOM, it's a BURDEN because WE HAVE SO MANY CHOICES.

I love the story of...
 Of the man who immigrated to America many years ago, and he COULDN'T SPEAK ANY ENGLISH at all when he arrived.
 So he CALLED A FRIEND who had immigrated a couple of years before him and SPOKE ENGLISH fairly well and said
"Until I get settled here I've got to eat all of my meals in restaurants. So you have to teach me how to order so I don't starve."
 His friend said *"NO PROBLEM, all you have to say is THREE WORDS"*
"HAMBURGER, FRIES, COKE..."
 That's it -- Hamburger, Fries, Coke...
 So he went into a restaurant the waitress said *"What would you like to order?"*
 He knew three English words so he said, *"HAMBURGER, FRIES, COKE..."*
 She brought it to him.
 And this worked pretty well for about two weeks.
 But after about two weeks he was tired of having *"Hamburger, Fries, Coke"* for three meals a day.
 So he called his buddy and said *"I need another menu, I need to expand my options"*
 His friend said *"No problem, just tell them "EGGS, TOAST, JUICE..."*
Eggs, toast, juice.
 He said great.
 He goes into a restaurant and the waitress said *"What would you like?"*
 He said *"Eggs, toast, juice."*
 She said, *"Will that be SCRAMBLED eggs, or FRIED eggs, POACHED eggs, or BOILED?"*
 Would you like *"WHITE, WHEAT, RYE, SOUR DOUGH, RAISIN toast or bran muffin?"*
 Would you like *"ORANGE juice, GRAPEFRUIT juice, TOMATO juice, PRUNE juice, or CRANBERRY juice?"*

He said *"HAMBURGER, FRIES, COKE?"*
 Have you ever felt that way?
 Confused by too many choices.
 Show of hands. . .
 How many of you would describe yourself as someone who tends to be indecisive?
 You have a hard time making decisions?
 Many hands going up.
 In fact the really indecisive people, didn't raise their hands. . .
 They're like. . .
"I'm not sure, am I indecisive or not, I can't decide."
 Some people are tortured by this . . .

HOW CAN I MAKE WISE DECISIONS
 Number one . . .
 Ask God For Wisdom
 It's interesting, and I don't think it's just coincidental that James includes this section about asking God for wisdom, immediately following a section that he's written about the problems -- the trials -- the tests -- that will come into our lives.

Because that's one of the situations in which we often need wisdom.
 James says . . .

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God. . ." James 1:5a

Ask - - - just ask God.

That's important because too often God, is the last one we turn to for guidance.

But then second you have to

Believe God Will Guide

James says . . .

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." James 1:5

You might want to circle those words. . .

“our generous God”

I wonder, Is that the way you see God?

As a God who is good?

As a God who gives generously?

You need to, because the very next verse says . . .

James says . . .

“When you ask God, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.”
James 1:6

And then he follows that by saying . . .

“Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.” James 1:7

Many Christians have all kinds of ideas when it comes to discerning God's Will - - or figuring out what God wants them to do in a particular situation.

Let me share with you

Two different view that Christians often have when it comes to God's Will.

One of these views I would characterize as WISE

The other I would characterize as less than wise.

First the “LESS THAN WISE” view. . .

You might even call it. . .

DUMB THING

The dumb thing is (and any Christians believe this)

That when it comes to God's will . . .

God Has a detailed Blueprint for my life

But this blueprint is . . .

Hidden and Mysterious

And my job is to somehow . . .

Discover this blueprint in order to know God's will for my life.

A lot of us, if not all of us, want to know God's Will for our lives. .

That may be what brought you to church today . . . you want to know God's Will for your life and you want to do it.

But many of us think that God's will is unknowable

We think God's will is HIDDEN and MYSTERIOUS and you can never be sure of it.

This leads people to start to do some dumb things to try and discover it.

Some people look to the stars

They people look at HOROSCOPES

And they try to get direction from God through a horoscope.

Let me give you a passage of scripture

Write this down, especially if that's you or you know somebody like that. . .

Deuteronomy 18 verses 10 to 13

Deuteronomy 18 verses 10 to 13

Let me paraphrase for you what those few verses say

They say *“Don't look at Horoscopes.”*

Here's why

Because **THAT'S SINFUL**

It's bad

Psychics - - - people who do TAROT CARDS

Here's what those few verses say

THEY PLAY FOR THE WRONG TEAM

There are two kinds of spiritual forces at work in the world

One is HOLY AND RIGHT AND GOOD and the OTHER ONE IS EVIL

The Bible says STAY AWAY FROM HOROSCOPES

STAY AWAY FROM PALM READERS

Stay away from all that stuff.

What's the

SMART THING

When it comes to God's Will?

God has a designed a **Game Plan** for my life that is set forth in **General** guidelines and principles and includes lots of **Freedom** and **Flexibility**.

What's The Difference?

What's the difference between a blueprint and a game plan?

A Blueprint: Spells everything out in great detail

A **BLUEPRINT** is what you use when you're going to build a building

And a blueprint and **has to be exactly right** or it messes up everything else

The corner of the room has to be measured exactly - - - and if it's not it messes up the whole building

A blueprint doesn't say, **"Well within an inch or two"**

And it doesn't say **give-or -take 3 feet**

It spells out exactly where things go

And when people think of God's Will for their life as a BLUEPRINT it can really distort their thinking.

"Oh, here's my problem I made this mistake back when I was 18 years old and it just messed up my entire life - - -

"No wonder I'm not experiencing God's will today because I made that decision 20 years ago and that's all there is to it and it just had a Domino effect and that's why I'm in the situation I am today"

That kind of thinking is not Biblical.

The good news is **even if you're missing out on God's will**, you can get back in on it today

Even though you step out of God's Will you can get back on track

Because God's Will it's **NOT AN INCH-BY-INCH BLUEPRINT**

We have this erroneous idea "I made this one wrong decision and it's messed up everything"

That's not what the Bible teaches. . .

The Bible is filled with stories of people who made really, really stupid decisions and then they decided to repent and go back to God and God used their life in mighty, mighty ways

Abraham, who the Bible calls the father of our faith, **lied about his relationship with Sarah**, not once but twice, saying she was his sister instead of his wife in order to save his life.

David committed **adultery** and **murder** and the Bible calls him a **"man after God's own heart."**

Peter denied even knowing Jesus.

According to the Bible, the **difference** between the righteous and the wicked is **not that they don't stumble**, but it's a difference in what they do when they fall.

Proverbs 24:16 says. . .

Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.

Do you think of God's Will as being a Blueprint?

A lot of you would say **"no."**

But a lot of you, when it comes to **THE MAJOR DECISIONS** in you life, I'll bet you do.

When you're trying to decide **which college to attend, which career to pursue, which person to marry, or who to date** you may approach those things **as if** God's has a very, very detailed plan in mind for you.

That's how you look at God's Will - like a BLUEPRINT

There's another approach - It's what you might call **THE GAME PLAN APPROACH**

A Game plan is very different than a blueprint

Whereas the blueprint approach sees God as having this detailed plan for my life, and even for today, it's my job to find it and figure it out

A Game Plan: Sets general guidelines with an occasional specific play

That's how a game plan works

Let's just use **FOOTBALL** as an example because **football is a sport that always has a Game Plan**

A coach's game plan, unlike the detailed blueprints for building, **doesn't spell out every play** that the team is going to run.

The coach **might have the first 10 - 15 plays scripted** but after that it's a general direction

And there are **some occasional very strong specifics** that will be done

A coach generally builds his game plan based on the **STRENGTHS OF HIS TEAM**, and the **WEAKNESSES OF THE OPPONENT**, and maybe some of the unique variables of **that particular game**.

Like whether it's being played in the rain, or in snow or things like that.

For example, the coach might look at things and realize that the **other team's run defense isn't very good**, so he makes the decision to **do a lot of running**, and **less passing**.

And so, the team **works all week on running plays**, because they figure that's their best bet when it comes to advancing the ball.

Now, **if the coach's team falls behind 21-0** he will probably alter the game plan.

Why?

Because **he has to play catch-up**

And **when you run the ball, you burn a lot of time off the clock**, because when a person is tackled the clock keeps running.

Whereas **an incomplete pass** or an **out of bounds play stops the clock**.

And so **even though the original game plan** called for running the ball, **changes in the situation dictate a change in the game plan**

When you see God's will as a game plan, you understand that **there's a general direction, but it has lots of flexibility** with the **ability to make mid-course corrections** should they become necessary.

I believe that God's Will is much **more like a Game Plan** than a blueprint.

Those of us that go through life and look at our major decisions as if there's only one way to go on almost every decision, we can find ourselves **very frustrated with God**, and we can find ourselves making some very poor decisions because **God hasn't promised a blueprint for your life**

He has promised a plan

He has promised direction

He **hasn't promised to tell you whether to buy the green car or the blue one**, or necessarily even whether to buy any car at all.

He **hasn't promised to tell you whether to live in this house or that one**.

Let me ask you to think about something.

Have you ever stopped to think that **God might be less concerned with which house you live in, than he is with HOW you live in that house?**

Before we look at how to follow God's Game Plan

Let me ask you to go back and circle one word in that definition of game plan that I gave you.

And that word is . . .

"Occasional"

A Game Plan sets general guidelines with **an occasional specific play**

Read through the Bible and you'll see that although God lays out a **GAME PLAN** for his people to follow, there are **occasional times when he calls a specific play**, and that's why it's wise to touch base with God on every decision, because you never know whether he might want to call a specific play.

But understand, those times where he calls a specific play are **the exception rather than the rule**.

Let me give you an example of **an occasional specific play**.

There's a guy in the Bible named **Moses**

He's out in the wilderness where he's been for 40 years, when God decides to call a specific play - he calls an audible.

He speaks to Moses through . . .

A **BURNING BUSH** and he tells him exactly what he wants him to do.

Have any of you heard about this story?

Very specific play that God called for Moses.

He said . . .

I want you to go to Pharaoh, I want you to say **"Let my people go."**

Let me ask you something. . . .

For those of you who know your Bibles, **How many examples can you find in the Bible of people that God spoke to through a burning bush?**

Answer - ONE

And yet **based on this example**, we seek God and we look for Him to speak to us through a burning bush.

The problem is we take the things in the Bible that are **DESCRIPTIVE** and we try and make them **PRESCRIPTIVE**.

Some things in your Bible are **PRESCRIPTIVE**

Some things in your Bible are **DESCRIPTIVE**

And **it helps to know the difference**

PRESCRIPTIVE means it applicable for everybody for all time

PRESCRIPTIVE are ALL GOD'S COMMANDS AND PRECEPTS

An example of some PRESCRIPTIVE instructions in your Bible THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

When God says Don't Lie - that's for everybody

When God says Don't Murder - - that's for all of us

Don't covet

Don't commit adultery

Those kinds of things are PRESCRIPTIVE

They are APPLICABLE FOR EVERYBODY FOR ALL TIME

But, and don't miss this . . .

SOME THINGS IN YOUR BIBLE ARE DESCRIPTIVE

In other words when you're reading, what you're reading is just describing what God did with an individual or with a group of people at a specific time

It doesn't mean He's always going to do it that way

And what happens is, you and I take the DESCRIPTIVE things and sometimes we make them PRESCRIPTIVE

God has NEVER SPOKEN TO ME THROUGH A BURNING BUSH.

He's NEVER ASKED ME TO BUILD AN ARK.

He's NEVER ASKED ME TO TAKE A SLINGSHOT AND A ROCK and kill a giant.

If I want to make a wise decision . . .

I Ask God For Wisdom

I Believe That God Will Guide

And then third. . .

Commit To Doing What God Says

"Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." James 1:22

Let me encourage you to underline those words . . .

You must do what it says.

This is HOW you . . .

Follow God's Game Plan For My Life

On the back of your notes, three points. . .

Number one . . .

1. Stop waiting for a VISION and start looking for a VERSE

Stop waiting for a vision start looking for a verse

There are people who live their lives, looking for signs . . .

Like the guy who was on the way to work one morning.

And he started having a craving for a donut.

And he knew there was a donut shop right on his way to work.

He wouldn't have to alter his route.

He knew he was going to pass right by it

But he was also a guy who was trying to watch his weight, so he decided to pray.

He said, ***"God, if it's your will for me to have a donut, this morning, I'm asking you . . . let there be a parking space right out front of that donut shop."***

And you know what?

There was a parking space - - - right out front - - and he found, the fourth time around the block.

Stop waiting for a vision, start looking for a verse.

If you and I want to know what God's will is for our life

Do you know where it starts?

It starts in his Word

BTW - - you won't find a verse that tells you whether or not to have that donut.

Do you want to know what God's Will is for you?

Let me put a couple of verses up on the screen that tells you.

Romans 12:1-2 says . . .

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

Don't miss those five words

THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE

Do you know what that's telling me?

It's telling me that - God's will is knowable

If you do the things it says to do in verse 1-2 . . .

What things?

“offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God”

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is

His good pleasing and perfect will

So God's will is not elusive

It's not mysterious

It's not hidden

You and I can know it

If you want to know God's will then

Stop waiting for a VISION and start looking for a VERSE

Most of what we need to know from God is written right here in black and white.

And what we do is WE IGNORE WHAT GOD HAS SAID IN BLACK AND WHITE, until we're facing a BIG DECISION and then we come to Him and say "God I need a sign - - I need direction"

And we try to involve God at that point.

One example I like to go back to again and again, because it's such a good one, is the example of BAPTISM.

What the Bible teaches about this is, if you are someone who has placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, then the thing you ought to do ASAP is make that decision public by taking the step of BELIEVER'S BAPTISM.

The Bible says this clearly in Black and White.

And yet too often, many believer ignore what it says in black and white.

They ignore God's revealed will.

And they go to God with questions about other things.

“God I really need your guidance in this situation. . .

“I really need to know whether I should take this job or that one”

“Show me your will”

And I feel like God is saying to them, *“Why are you asking me to show you my will in an area where I haven't spoken, when you're ignoring my will in an area where I have?”*

“My will is for you to follow my Word.”

Which brings us to a second principle. . .

Do you want to follow God's GAME PLAN for your life. . .

2. To discern the way, trust and obey

DAILY OBEDIENCE is way more important than TRYING TO DISCOVER A PREDETERMINED PLAN.

To follow God's game plan for your life you have got to play by the rules

You've got to play the game by the rules

Every coach who draws up a game plan, ASSUMES that the players know the basic rules

And that's critical because if you don't play by the rules you cannot succeed in the game plan

Let me give you an EXAMPLE FROM FOOTBALL.

The coach's game plan calls for the quarterback to pass.

He's got a good arm

The SECONDARY the other team is not all that good

So the basic game plan is PASSING.

The QB takes the snap, he looks for a receiver, no one is open.

And the quarterback knows that if he does nothing he's gonna get sacked.

So the QB tucks the ball under his arm and he begins to run

And he crosses this line called the line of SCRIMMAGE, which is the place from which the ball was hiked, and the QB cuts left and then right, and he's able to advance the ball about 5 yards, and then suddenly he sees one of his receivers WIDE OPEN and so he takes the ball and he passes it to him

What's going to happen?

He's going to see a PENALTY FLAG

Why?

Because even though the game plan called for the QB to pass, the QB has to execute the game plan within the confines of the rules.

And the rules say you can't pass the ball after you run beyond the line of scrimmage.

Let's imagine you're trying to figure out what God wants you to do in a situation

For instance you're going to buy a car or a house.

It's something that is going to require you to take out a loan

So you're asking "God, *what's the game plan in this situation?*"

Should I buy this car, or this house?

Lord am I stretching too far?

Is this wise or unwise?"

You're SEEKING THE LORD'S GUIDANCE

Please don't miss this!!!

But along the way as you're seeking God's guidance you discover that you can't qualify for the loan unless you cheat and lie on the loan docs

People do this all the time

It's just like they're running past the line of SCRIMMAGE and seeing somebody open and passing

They think they're being really good because they're seeking the Lord's guidance

And they're praying "Lord help me I just want to know, *am I stretching too far on this*"

And God says "*I'm not gonna give you any guidance on this because one of the rules of the game is you always tell the truth*"

"So if you have to lie, then it's not a matter of whether you should or whether you shouldn't.

I've already told you that.

Just play by the rules."

The GAME PLAN part of it is so simple, compared to the stresses of the blueprint, where you have to worry about every detail and the possibility of messing up.

But within the flexibility and freedom of the game plan is the requirement that you play by the rules.

You want to DISCERN the WAY, TRUST and OBEY

3. To be informed I must commit myself to the process of being transformed

What do I mean by that?

What I mean is . . .

The starting place for finding God's will is to obey the commands and instructions I already know

The starting place for finding God's will is to obey the commands and instructions I already know

Two things when it comes to God's Game Plan & Transformation

1. It's really hard to know the game plan IF YOU MISS ALL THE TEAM MEETINGS

Does this make sense?

Hard to know the game plan if you miss all the team meetings.

2. Hard to know the game plan IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE PLAYBOOK

It's real hard to know the game plan if you don't know the playbook

If you want to know what God has to say about something, the Bible is the first place to go.

It's the foundation for it all.

Again, that's why we hammer so hard on NEXT STEPS here.

If you're not in a SMALL GROUP, join a LIFE GROUP, where you'll study God's Word with others.

If you're not reading God's Word, pick up a reading plan.

It's real hard to know the GAME PLAN if you don't make team meetings,

It's impossible to know the game plan if you don't know the playbook

Bottom Line - if you're doing the things we've been talking about. . .

If you're not waiting for a VISION, but you look for a VERSE

If you understand that the best way to DISCERN the WAY is to TRUST and OBEY

If you know that to be INFORMED then you need to commit yourself to the process of being TRANSFORMED

Then the Bottom Line for you when it comes to God's Will is what it says in our . . .

Memory Verse

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” Proverbs 3:5-6

What that verse and so many others will tell you is that God doesn't just want to give you ADVICE

He wants to be your GUIDE in a very personal way.

The key word there is TRUST

You will face a lot of decisions in life.

The most important decision you can make is to

Trust In God

God's will is primarily a RELATIONSHIP

Where you put your hand in his and you say “You just lead me on”

The smartest decision you can ever make is to make Jesus Christ #1 right now, and I want to give you a chance to do that.

Would you bow with me in prayer?