

# Proverbs 16

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of the pictures that is often used in Proverbs, and that I don't think I've brought! out is that life is a bit like a path. Life is a path. The picture of a path is actually! a really helpful one in Proverbs. Because how do you walk a path? You walk a path, don't you, by a series of repeated, boring steps. Lots of them, don't you?

Repeated, boring little steps. But as you walk a path, that makes a difference, doesn't it, in the long term? Walking like that, boring, repeated little steps, gets you from A to B.

And life is like walking a path. Life is full of a series of repeated, small, day-by-day decisions. Little steps. Decisions of life. Day-by-day. And what kind of decisions that we make day-by-day and step-by-step will have a great effect in the long term, won't they?

And the kind of person that we turn out to be. Now tonight I want to focus on those decisions. We're going through Proverbs and we're looking at different topics now. We kind of went through it passage-by-passage. But for the last number of weeks we've been looking at different chapters. So I think we've probably got two more. I've got one on character and one on marriage. Next week Dick Lucas is coming to preach. Which will be a joy. He says it's the last time. He's 88, 89 September. Who knows? But he'll come and preach. So we've got probably two more in the book of Proverbs. But we're going to look at decisions tonight. And life is full of decisions, isn't it? Who should I marry? And what job should I take? Where should I live? What should I do today? Should I stop off for that kebab on the way home? Big things like that. Now the first thing that I want to talk about tonight, and my first point is this. Whose decisions matter?

[ 2 : 08 ] Whose decisions matter? And look at chapter 16 and verse 1. The plans of the heart belong to man. But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. There is man and there is God. Whose decisions matter? Whose decisions matter? Well to man belong the plans of the heart. In other words we think things through. We make our decisions. But do you notice it's from the Lord that comes the reply. The answer of the tongue, the reply is from the Lord. We make our plans and our decisions but it is ultimately God who overrules and decides and replies. Paul, yes or no. Or wait, whatever his plan may be. Whatever his answer is. We make our plans and our decisions but ultimately God replies and God overrules with his plans and decisions. Man proposes, God disposes. So whose decisions matter? Well it looks like in verse 1 it says it is saying that basically God's decisions matter. Yes we make decisions.

The plans of the heart belong to man. The plans of the heart belong to man but ultimately it is God who decides. But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. It is God's decisions that matter. And the rest of the book of Proverbs seems to bear that out. The picture of God in the book of Proverbs is a picture of a God who is completely in control. So look at chapter 16 and verse 33. The lot is cast into the lap that is every decision is from the Lord. What we call chance, the Bible calls God's decision. So you go home, you roll a dice. What number comes that? Well is it total luck? No it's not. Every time. Every time is God's decision. Do you see what that means? It means that this week's lottery numbers will be decided by what? By Chancellor? No this week's lottery numbers will actually be decided by God. A God who is completely in control. And it is an incredible view of God. A God who is so utterly powerful that he is in control of everything. Even the roll of the dice. Even the numbers on the lottery. Amazing. But so what? What does it matter if God decides the roll of the dice?

Because at the end of the day if God is in control even the tiniest little details of my life and we can be absolutely sure he is in control of something as significant as you and me. Look at verse 9. The heart of man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps.

Whose decisions matter? God's decisions matter. Verse 9. He is so in control that he even determines your steps. How things are going to work out for you. Or chapter 19 and verse 21. Many

are the plans in the mind of a man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. Whose decisions matter? God's decisions matter. Now we see this time and again in the Bible don't we? The picture of God is one that he is completely in control. Even of people and even of their decisions. So for example let's go for two illustrations. Let's go for the story of Joseph. Joseph's father made some very bad decisions. In the way that he managed his family. Joseph. I don't buy into this that there is no account that Joseph is in. Joseph made some bad decisions in the way that he relates to his brothers and his father. Joseph's brothers make some very bad decisions by deciding to sell Joseph into slavery. And one thing leads to another and Joseph ends up in Pharaoh's prison. Poor Joseph. Poor Joseph. What's he going to do?

Well eventually he is appointed isn't he? To Pharaoh's right hand. He becomes Pharaoh's right hand man and he saves the nation from famine. And his brothers are found out. And at the end of it all what does Joseph say to them? Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20. As for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good. To bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today. In other words, although Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, that was evil. They were only doing what God had decided. That God was sending Joseph to Egypt. Through their actions and decisions, he is completely in control over people and their decisions. One more example. You see exactly the same thing happened at the cross. The death of the Lord Jesus at the cross. Why did Jesus die on the cross? Because Jewish leaders made a very bad decision, didn't they, to get rid of him. And because the crowd made a bad decision, they preferred to release Barabbas the terrorist instead of innocent

[ 7 : 17 ] Jesus. And he was killed because Pilate made a very bad decision. To be a people pleaser. Rather than just a ruler. Jesus died because lots of bad and evil decisions, didn't he? Now listen to what Peter said on the day of Pentecost 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. Now do you see that? Look at that verse on your sheet. Wicked and lawless men. You crucified him. You killed him. You made that bad decision. But actually, at the start of the verse, they were only doing God's set purpose. Because God is completely in control. And their decisions ended out carrying out God's plan. Okay, you may be thinking, this is weird. This is terrible.

This is awful. How come God's decisions are the one that matter? What about our decisions? Doesn't anything that we do make a difference? It sounds weird to you. If it sounds weird to you, it sounds even weirder in the context of the book of Proverbs. Because think about the book of Proverbs. What is the book of Proverbs? It is all about a book, the book of Proverbs. It's about making choices and making decisions. So in fact, the whole assumption of the book of Proverbs is that your decisions matter. Proverbs is a book on how to make wise decisions and good choices. Proverbs screams that your decisions matter. So let me give you one example. Proverbs chapter 21 and verse 5. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance. But everyone who is hasty only comes to poverty. In other words, if we make diligent plans, if we carefully think through our decisions, then they are more likely to work out than if we just rush into things. And the assumption is, your decisions and your plans matter.

Otherwise, if they don't, why bother making careful diligent plans at all? Why bother doing what Proverbs tells you to do? Now just an example. These two themes, that God's decisions matter, and our decisions matter, actually come up lots in the world. And they come up lots in the literature of the world. So I was reading a few things this week in preparation for this.

[ 9 : 58 ] And they use these themes, that our decisions matter, and God's decisions matter. That comes up lots in literature. So the thing I was reading this week used examples from the classics, the Greek classic, Edupus, and Macbeth. But I've never read both of those, so I didn't really know what they were going on about, alright? So I've got two other examples from great pieces of literature. The first example is from Star Wars. There's a line by Obi-Wan Kenobi in Return of the Jedi. This makes me sound like such a geek. I don't even know Star Wars at all. But I looked it up on the internet, I didn't know it off the top of my head. There's a line in The Return of the Jedi, where Obi-Wan Kenobi says, you cannot escape your destiny. Profound, isn't it? That's the tragedy, the tragedy of Darth Vader. Anakin was always destined to be the man in the black mask, heavy breathing. It was basically out of his control. His decisions didn't matter. You cannot escape your destiny. Something else was ultimately controlling his life. You cannot escape your destiny. On the other extreme, from another great work of literature in the 1980s, the film

Back to the Future. Do you remember the mad prof, Doc Brown? And there's a moment where he says to Martin McFly, your future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one. Your future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one. In other words, you are in control, your decisions matter. The thing is, if you go for one or the other exclusively, it causes huge problems. If only God's decisions matter, then maybe you'll give up making responsible decisions. You'll never think carefully. It is Star Wars stuff. You cannot escape your destiny. So you become cynical and maybe defeat it. Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be. Fate is going to happen whatever I do. Or if only your decisions matter, then your whole future depends completely on you. Your future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one. And that is so stressful, isn't it? Everything hinges on making the right decision. And yet that is what a lot of people in our society believe. A lot of our friends and neighbours believe. It is completely up to me. You get what you deserve. So who is it? Whose decisions matter? Is it God? Is it a faith kind of thing? Or is it our decision? Is it completely up to us? And the answer is both. Both matter. God is utterly, ultimately in control. He is in control of the roll of the dice. He is in control of Joseph's life. He was in control of Jesus' death. And everything always turns out exactly how he plans and exactly how he decides. To man belongs the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. And yet the Bible insists that the plans of your hearts do matter. What Joseph's brothers did was evil. And even though God had decided things would turn out that way, they were guilty. Their decisions matter. What the Jews and the Romans and Pilate did to Jesus was evil. And even though God had sat and determined that that was going to happen, they were guilty. We are not robots. God is in control. And yet our decisions matter at the same time. It is not that God decides some things. And then he leaves other things for us to decide. Both things are true at the same time. God is in control massively. And we make choices that matter. He is sovereign. And yet we are responsible. He is the ruler. But it doesn't make us robots. He is supremely in control. And yet we do make choices, significant choices. God's decisions matter. Our decisions matter. Now how? Do those two fit together? How can both of those things be true? Philosophers have given it a name. They call it compatibilism. And that doesn't make it any easier for anyone to understand at all.

[14:29] And usually people go from one option to the other. But the Bible insists tonight that both of those things are true. And for you and I to live wise Christian lives, we've got to hold both those truths firmly. And we must work out how the Bible applies both of those truths. And I hope that's what we're going to try and see tonight. God's decisions matter. And my decisions matter.

And how they are actually used in the book of Proverbs. So I'll do a second one. How to make wise decisions in the light of those two things. So you've got a job and decision to make. You've got a decision to make. What from college should I go to? What job should I go for? Who should I marry? Who should I live with? Should we move? What schools should we send the kids to? Should we get a loft extension?

Where can we go on holiday? They're upteen decisions, aren't they? And you can add to your own to the list. How do you go about making a wise decision? And chapter 16 of Proverbs, I think, gives us four principles for making a wise decision. The first principle is this. Don't trust your heart. Don't trust your heart. So look at Hebrews 2. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. But the Lord waits for it. In other words, when we make decisions, all sorts of motives come into play. And from our own perspective, can't it seem that we're making a good decision for good reasons with good motives? And yet God knows our heart. God knows us better than we know ourselves wonderfully. And often we think we're making a good decision. It seems so innocent to me, but my motives are all wrong. I want to marry that girl. I want to go out with that girl. But the truth is, her looks and her money have so blinded me to the fact that she is ungodly. And God sees what I'm doing. But I don't see it myself. I want to go for that job. But the truth is, although I'm well trained for it, it pays very well.

And I find it really fulfilling. It means I will never have any time for my family. And it means I will never have time for service. God sees what I'm doing, but I can't see it myself. In other words, when you're making a decision, don't trust your heart.

We convince ourselves we're doing the right thing when we're actually doing the wrong thing sometimes. Your feelings are no barometer. So what does Proverbs suggest that you do?

[17:19] First of all, take advice. Chapter 19 and verse 20, listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom in the future. In other words, other people may well be able to see what

you can't see in yourself. Seek advice. And in fact, the Proverbs says more than that.

It says, don't just take advice. Take lots of advice. So chapter 15 and verse 22, without counsel, plans fail. But with many advisors, they succeed. Why lots of advisors?

Because if I'm just going to pick one person, I might well pick the person who tells me what I want to hear. So I know I've got minister friends that if I ring them and I say, well, this is what I'm going to do. They'll say, oh, that's great. Just because they want me to hear. They'll tell me because of what I want to hear. Whereas if I ask for lots of advice, I at least, I understand a chance, don't I, of them telling me, or at least someone telling me what I need to hear. Which means, doesn't it, where possible, take your time. So chapter 19 and verse 2, which I've not put on the sheet of the sheet of the sheet of the chapter 19 and verse 2. Desire without knowledge is not good. And whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way. So it takes time to ask a friend his advice. Yet if I don't, I might well miss the best way. And I might rush into something without knowing things that I ought to know. And yet the reason we so often rush into things is because we're so sure we're right, aren't we? So marriage is the classic example of this. How could love ever possibly be wrong? How can what I feel for this person not be right? I feel in love. And yet chapter 16 and verse 2 is the great corrective to that, isn't it? All the ways of man appear in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. So don't trust your heart. The second principle is this, do the right thing. Do the right thing. So chapter 16 and verse 3 is very helpful. Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established. Now when I first read this and how I thought about it until this week, I thought I was saying, commit your plans to the Lord, your plans about the future, plans you know that you've got a decision to make, maybe it's a big one, commit that to the Lord, pray about it, leave it with him, and your plans will be established. Now that is no doubt true to a certain degree, but I don't think it's what this verse is saying. So notice with me, just if you'll look at the verse again, the two parts of the verse, the contrast. It says there, commit your work to the Lord. It does not say commit your plans to the Lord. It says there, commit your work to the Lord, and then your plans will be established. In other words, it's saying to you and I, it's challenging us to be the kind of people who always do the righteous thing, righteous deeds and work. That is what it means to commit to the Lord everything you do. It is to say, everything I do, Lord, I want to be pleasing to you.

[ 20 : 58 ] I refuse to go with anything sinful, or to do a sinful thing. And the promise is, as I become that kind of person, always making the godly thing the thing that I do, then my plans will tend to succeed, or be established, at least from God's point of view. More about that in a minute. Now this helps us, doesn't it, when we're tempted to take sinful shortcuts. So my car insurance will be up, I think, in a couple of months.

And you ring the insurance people. And they say to you, have you any points on your license? Or they say to you, have you had an accident in the last five years?

Now, we know, don't we? If we say, I haven't got any points on my license, very unlikely they'll check out. If we say, we haven't had an accident in the past five years, that little accident, it wasn't really an accident.

I haven't had that. We know that the amount we pay will be less. And that kind of sinful shortcut, we're not laughing at it now, but actually in the heat of the moment, it's very, very tempting, isn't it? I want the plans to work out, to make the best decision. I want the cheapest car insurance. And it seems that at that point, the best decision involves just telling just a little lie.

[ 22 : 26 ] Or certainly not telling the whole truth. And this proverb, when we're faced with that temptation, where it seems that the best decision involves just telling a little lie, this proverb is saying that it's not the best decision.

Commit to the Lord whatever you do. Always do the right thing. Always do the godly thing. And if you do that, at times, certain options will be ruled out.

Sometimes that will mean doing a costly thing, won't it? Like losing a job. Or more likely, losing a friendship in some way. Because I refuse to do the ungodly thing.

What is Proverbs saying? It is saying, determine to do the right and the godly thing. And leave the success or otherwise of your plans to the Lord. Do what's right.

So there are two principles. Let's say you do those two things. You don't trust your heart. So you take your time. And you ask advice.

[ 23 : 30 ] And you ask lots of advice. And you determine to do the right thing. You commit your way to the Lord. And you determine not to be ungodly.

You do those two things. But what if that still leaves you with a choice to make? With two options. And yes. They both seem sensible to pretty much everyone you talk to. And they say that they're sensible. And neither involves doing anything wrong. How do you choose? How do you decide? Is it a feeling of peace? Just want to feel it? Well maybe. I'm sure God does sometimes give us a settled conviction about something. But again we've got to be very careful about that. Because the Bible tells us very clearly. We've already seen that sometimes we think we're right when we're wrong. So sometimes we might feel mistakenly peaceful. And other times we might have to make a decision and we don't feel any peace at all. [ 24 : 32 ] Or sure about the decision we've made. I think it's fair to say. When I came to this church. It seemed right. It seemed right. It seemed sensible. It made sense to me. It made sense to others too. And yet I wasn't dead sure. But that's okay isn't it? Isn't that really okay? But you don't have to be dead sure. When I make mistakes and decisions. You don't have to be sure. Why is that okay? Because the third principle of Proverbs is this. It reminds us that God is ultimately in control. Look at chapter 16 and verse 4. The Lord has made everything for its purpose. Even the wicked in the day of trouble. In other words. First thought is wonderfully assuring you. That you cannot escape God's purposes. [ 25 : 29 ] God works out everything. Everything for its own end. He is ultimately in control. Chapter 21 and verse 30. No wisdom. No understanding. No counsel. Can avail. Can stand against the Lord. No wisdom. No insight. No plan. Can succeed against the Lord. And do you see that? That cuts both ways. So it may be that somebody makes a deliberately wicked decision. They make a decision to go against God's will. What is Proverbs saying? Proverbs is saying you won't escape God. God knows. And you cannot outwit him. And it won't work out better. If I go my own way rather than his. Chapter 16 and verse 4. The Lord has made everything for its purpose. Even the wicked for the day of trouble. He is in control. Which is why we so desperately need the forgiveness of God. [ 26 : 25 ] Isn't it? And you need to be forgiven. And I do. So that we might be spared that final day of judgment. When Christ comes. That day of disaster. Wicked decisions cannot outwit God. But what about other decisions? Where I've got a choice. And I've asked advice. Either way it seems I'm being godly. I just don't know which way to jump. How do I know that I've made the right decision? I've asked. How do I know I've made the right decision? I might not. I don't know. I don't know what decision to make. But God does. I know this. God is ultimately in control. And this is wonderful. He is so in control. That not even my decisions can get me off track. From his plan. There is no wisdom. There is no insight. There is no plan that can succeed against the Lord. [ 27 : 25 ] Even my best intentions. Even if I take a decision. And it turns out badly for me. Turns out badly for me. From my perspective. So I choose a university or college. And it's a horrible time. I get married. And the marriage is very very difficult. I take a job. And it's a disaster. I'm made redundant within six months. Do any of those things mean that I've lost my way in God's plan? In my life? No. Because he is in control. He is in complete control. It was his plan all along. And as I look back. I look back. At those difficult. Difficult times. And I see that he worked it out. Through those difficulties. And I may never know why. But I know this. That the Lord works everything out for his own ends. Because his decisions matter. And my decisions matter. There's a way of summing all this up. And it goes like this. It's not so much that the Lord gives guidance. [ 28 : 26 ] It's more that the Lord does guidance. I think that's very very helpful. It's not so much that the Lord gives guidance. It's more that the Lord does guidance. In other words. The Bible does not lead us to expect. The kind of detailed road map. Of the future. Of which choices to make. In our lives. Telling us what to do on each decision. God doesn't really operate guidance like that. It's more that God. It's more that God does guidance. That as we think. And plan. And take advice. And avoid evil. God is overriding.

And God is overruling. Even through our decisions. God's hand is upon us. Guiding us. Not telling us what to do. But guiding us.

As we make our decisions. They are our decisions. They are real decisions. And yet. As we look back. We can thank God. Can't we? That he has been guiding me. Directing my way.

[ 29 : 23 ] All the time. Which leads me to my last point. And the last principle is this. Adopt a humble attitude. Adopt a humble attitude. Look at chapter 16.

In verse 5. Everyone who is arrogant in heart. Is an abomination to the Lord. Be assured. You will not go unpunished. The Lord detests. The proud person.

The person who makes his or her plans. Without God. Chapter 27. Verse 1. Which again. I have not written on the sheet. Is a wonderful verse.

Do not boast about tomorrow. For you do not know. What a day may bring. It is a verse that is picked up. In James 5. In other words. I make the best decisions.

Or plans I can. But I am not sure. How they are going to turn out. And in fact. To claim to be sure.

[ 30 : 21 ] That this decision. Is going to absolutely. Make things turn out. The way I want them to do. Is to boast. It is to be proud. And it is to be arrogant.

So. Leave it with God. There's our four points. And do you see. How they take into account.

Where we started with. Our decisions do matter. And that's why. We don't trust our hearts. That's why. We want to avoid. Making silly mistakes. So we take our time.

And we take advice. Because our decisions matter. And that is why. We always. Aim to do what is right. And what is good. To never. Take a decision. Which involves sinning.

Because our decisions. Do matter. But on the other hand. It is true as well. God's decisions. Also matter. Which is why. We remember. He is ultimately.

[ 31 : 15 ] In control. And so. I don't expect. A blueprint. Of decisions to make. But I am. Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Sure. That as I live my life. He is. Utterly.

In control of me. Not so much. As giving guidance. But doing guidance. Through my decisions. And God's decisions matter.

And that is why. I need to humble. Myself. Because we don't know. What he has decided. For us tomorrow. Do we? And all our plans.

Are provisional. Let's pray. Let's pray.