

# Decision Making and the Will of God

## Session 3

Opening prayer. (wisdom emphasis)

### I. Review

A. Conventional view in a nutshell:

1. **God has an individual will or blueprint for our lives that we are to be about figuring out.**
2. **We use a variety of methods to figure out what that will is.** Some of the methods:
  - a. looking for private messages in the Bible
  - b. trying to “tune in” to the leading of the Holy Spirit through our thoughts and feelings—two-way prayer techniques, etc.
  - c. depending on our feeling of “having a peace about it”
  - d. looking for and depending upon “opened and closed doors”
  - e. putting out unbiblical fleeces
  - f. looking for “confirmations” in various forms

B. We briefly went through these popular techniques and demonstrated how none of them were given to us as models for our decision making, how the proof texts offered for the texts do not support them, and some of the dangers of the methods.

C. Last week we wrapped up the critique of trying to “hear the voice of God,” discussed whether we are attempting to limit God by refusing to pursue unbiblical means to divine God’s will (and refusing to believe that God could be “trying” to communicate with us but failing).

D. We defined God’s will in two categories: His sovereign will, that which God will bring about and *cannot* be missed, and His moral will (commands, moral standards). I also found that the “individual will of God for me in every decision *that I’m supposed to figure out*” does not exist. We can now set aside all superstitious methodologies and press on to see how God intended for us to make decisions.

### II. God’s Individual Will for Your Life – *It’s not lost so quit looking for it!*

These are the standing, explicit marching orders we currently have. To ignore these while looking for something more specific and personal would be foolish/unwise. When you think back to the lesson of the bugle last week, these are the clear messages from God. This is not an exhaustive list!

A. It is God’s will that you **be saved**.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 17:30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **he commands all people everywhere to repent,**<sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in

righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

First things first—In a church culture that has been committed to a man-centered evangelistic method for many decades, it is important to start at the beginning.

If you have a copy of these notes, please don't jump to the right answer right away! Allowing the group to struggle with the wrong answers is part of the learning experience.

- Are you saved? –no, let's back it up one more step
- What is it you need to be saved from? (Play devil's advocate)
  - Sin? No, sin is fun... next?
  - Consequences of Sin? ... if I steal, I get stuff; if I fornicate, I have fun... are you advocating "safe sex" to keep from STDs?
  - Myself? No, I'm as narcissistic as the next guy... anyone else?
  - God... are you saying *saved from God*? ...Exactly!

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 12:5** But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 5:9** ... be saved ... from the wrath of God. (*ellipses filled in later!*)

- How is a person saved?
  - Repeat *the prayer*?
    - Was Paul teaching us a magical incantation in Romans 10:9?
    - If I can teach a parrot to say this, will it be saved too?
  - <sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 10:9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
  - Accept Jesus into my heart? --What does that mean?
    - Rev 3:20 has nothing to do with individual salvation, it is addressed to the churches of Asia that have just been exhorted and rebuked.
    - <sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 3:20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
      - Is Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who told the raging sea to "shut up," helplessly standing at the door of my heart knocking and hoping I will do him a favor and let him in? --*If this is your perception of Jesus, lose it. I assure you, Jesus is not someone you could beat up.*
  - Who can be saved? Is it hard to be saved?
    - <sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 19:23** And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "**With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**"
  - "What must I do to be saved?"

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 16:30** Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> And they said, "**Believe** in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 2:37** Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "**Repent** and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 26:19** "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should **repent** and **turn to God**, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 1:14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent** and **believe** in the gospel."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 17:30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to **repent**, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

➤ How do (can) you know?

➤ *We stand upon a promise of God.*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 10:13** For "everyone who **calls on the name of the Lord** will be saved."

➤ *Our salvation is a work of God, perfectly accomplished in Christ!*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 19:26** "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 5:8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 8:33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

➤ *If you are trusting in anything other than justification by grace (alone) through faith (alone), in Christ (alone) as revealed in Scripture (alone) to God's glory (alone), your hope and confidence are misplaced.*

➤ Has Tim forgotten this is a decision-making class?

I camped out here because all other "decisions" pale in comparison to this. If you have questions or concerns about your own salvation, repent and trust in the finished work of Christ. If you wonder what repentance looks like, check out Psalm 51.

Write your own "Psalm 51" before God, then place your trust where it belongs, in Christ and his faithfulness.

B. It is God's will that you be ***filled with His Spirit***.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 5:17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

➤ ***Power to be witnesses & resist sin***

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 5:16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 8:13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

C. It is God's will that you be sanctified (holy/set apart).

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 4:3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

D. It is God's will that you be **submissive**.

1. To God—obedient to the Great Commission and Great Commandment

<sup>ESV</sup> **James 4:7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

2. To Our Elders

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

3. To One Another

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 5:21** submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

4. To Worldly Government/Authority

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 2:13** Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

E. It is God's will that you **suffer**.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Philippians 1:29** For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 4:19** Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

F. It is God's will that you be **thankful**.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:16** Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

G. It is God's will that you be wise.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 5:15** Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

### 1. Wisdom—*Our Neglected and Despised Guide*

*Wisdom personified in Proverbs describes herself as a counselor and guide:*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 1:20** Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; <sup>21</sup> at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; ... <sup>24</sup> Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, <sup>25</sup> **because you have ignored all my counsel** and would have none of my reproof,

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 8:14** I have counsel and sound wisdom; I have insight; I have strength. <sup>15</sup> **By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just, <sup>16</sup> by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.** <sup>17</sup> I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

### 2. Insight from Pastor Ron (Proverbs 4:7) –A PhD in Hebrew

In Hebrew class this week he was discussing ways the Hebrew language emphasizes an important point. He showed us two possible translations of Proverbs 4:7 (both of which strongly support the importance of wisdom). Has to do with grammatical means of showing emphasis:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 4:7** The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

<sup>NAS</sup> **Proverbs 4:7** "The beginning of wisdom *is*: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Proverbs 4:7** Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

At the end of the discussion he gave us a copy of Eugene Peterson's translation of Proverbs 4:5-8. From *The Message*<sup>1</sup>:

"Take this to heart. Do what I tell you—live!  
Sell everything and buy Wisdom! Forage for Understanding!  
Don't forget one word! Don't deviate an inch!  
Never walk away from Wisdom—she guards your life;  
love her—she keeps her eye on you.  
Above all and before all, do this: Get Wisdom!  
Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!  
Throw your arms around her—believe me, you won't regret it;  
never let her go—she'll make your life glorious.

### 3. J.I. Packer connects wisdom and guidance this way:

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message*, NavPress, 1993.

Wisdom in Scripture always means knowledge of the course of action that will please God and secure life, so that the promise of James 1:5—“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him” (RSV)—**is in effect a promise of guidance.** “Let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed,” counsels Paul. “Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect” (Rom 12:2 NEB).<sup>2</sup>

H. Dr. Walke’s closes our discussion of God’s will

[God] never calls us in the New Testament to “seek His will,” but rather to seek His kingdom and do His will. *We ought to stamp out of our vocabulary the nonbiblical and misleading expression “finding God’s will.”*<sup>3</sup> [emphasis in the original]

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<sup>2</sup> Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1993 ed. p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> Walke, Bruce K., *Finding the Will of God a pagan notion?* Eerdmans, 1995, p. 15.

## **The Wisdom Model** *simple but not easy*

I've seen several presentations of the wisdom model, but none seemed to present it in its basic form:

**Do the wisest thing.   ← your new model!**

Even Koukl's "In absence of clear, supernatural, divine intervention from God ..." unnecessary, since the wisest thing to do when you receive this kind of divine guidance is obey it!

I'll describe the three main points using three words beginning with "F"

### **I. Faith**

This is where an understanding of the sovereignty of God and of the true definition of faith come in.

- A. Faith is "believing trust." It is not what it is commonly portrayed to be, a mindless, blind leap into the dark. (examples: chair, airplane ... you exercised believing trust in something that has proven reliable/trustworthy)
- B. When we understand and believe that God is in control and will guide our steps, we simply need to ask ourselves, "is God trustworthy/faithful?" If He is, we then proceed with confidence, making or decisions by applying wisdom, and know that God will keep His promises.

<sup>NAS</sup> **Proverbs 16:9** The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 16:9** The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

<03820> לֵב (leb) (524b)

**Meaning:** *inner man, mind, will, heart*

- C. Rather than guiding our decisions, this affects our attitudes about decision-making. (more on this in the last "F").
- D. Walking by Faith—a True Mark of maturity

If you recall from week 1, I mentioned there is a perceived maturity that goes along with learning the various methods of divining God's will and speaking the lingo.

The reliance on special signs from God is the mark of an immature person—someone who cannot simply believe the truth as presented, but must have a special, miraculous sign as the symbol of authority from God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walke, p. 12.

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:7** ~~for we walk by faith, not by sight.~~

1. Again we come to a verse that people might use to repudiate the wisdom model. Which do you think it is teaching:
  - a. “don’t walk by wisdom, but by blind presumption in unclear guidance”
  - b. “walk [not sit and wait] as God told you to [by wisdom], taking more than just your immediate visible circumstances into consideration”
2. When you think about it, which method constantly seeks for a sign in order to walk by sight?

## II. Factors (or “Formula”)

There are many factors that play into the wisdom model. Some are weightier, more authoritative than others.

- A. Has God commanded this? –Wise!!! (God’s revealed Word—would include special divine intervention if God chooses to do this)
- B. Has God forbidden this?—Unwise!!! (exceptions? I believe so, but rare, never confuse deceiving Nazis at the door with self-justification of sin, .. e.g. Rahab in Joshua 2)
- C. Calling—so misunderstood. This is not a warm fuzzy feeling or unexplainable urge. This is the convergence of two important things:
  - A transformed heart (with healthy self-examined motives)
  - A gifting from God

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 12:7** To each *is given* the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*.<sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.<sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually *as he wills*.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 12:6** Having *gifts* that differ according to the grace given to us, *let us use them...* prophecy... service... teaching...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ephesians 4:11** And *he gave* the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> *to equip the saints for the work of ministry*, for building up the body of Christ,

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 4:10** As each has received a *gift, use it to serve one another*, as good stewards of God's varied grace

*Principle: receive it; use it to serve; be a good steward; give God the glory*

Dr. Waltke has this to say about seminary students:

In my view, ministry is a calling, and God not only puts a burning desire in the heart of the learner, but also places people around the student who encourage them to use their gifts in the church. When I see a student without the gifts necessary to pastor, and without the affirmation

of the body of Christ, I believe I am looking at a young person who has made some irresponsible choices.<sup>5</sup>

***Are you gifted?*** Do others, e.g. leaders, peers, acknowledge your gift and encourage you in it? (Our pride can mislead us into believing we have a gift that we don't--Ever watch the opening rounds of "American Idol?")

There are many sad stories of "felt called" preachers who had no gift. If you have the heart but not the gift, there is likely an important support role for you.

- D. Circumstances/Limitations/Abilities (but DON'T underestimate the power of God)
- God can and often does prick the conscience beyond perceived circumstances. For example: lack of funding or a record of others failing when trying the same thing...

- E. Council!
- Seek out the wisdom of multiple mature believers. *Put their advice to the test.* (Are they advocating superstitious methods?...)

- F. Personal desires—(yes! They matter—God is not a cosmic kill-joy)

***Are you being transformed or not?*** Your conscience (*con* –with; *science* –knowledge) and your desires are getting more inline with God's as you are sanctified. You begin to love what He loves and hate what He hates. Where do you think a "heart for the lost" and "a desire for holiness" comes from?

Dr. Waltke says it this way.

If you are struggling with a specific question, rather than trying to magically divine God's answer, spend time drawing close to Him. Then your character, and perhaps your perspective, will change. Then God will shape your desires. Then you will have the mind of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 10:10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

- G. Simple but not Easy
- The wisdom model is simple: pick the wisest course.
  - No one ever promised that it would be easy to determine the wisest course.

- H. Rationalism?/Worldly?
- If it is Biblical, it can hardly be considered worldly or rationalistic
  - Rational (and no, that's not a bad thing!)
  - Make certain the wisdom used is that "wisdom from above" rather than worldly.

### III. FREEDOM!

There is a tremendous amount of freedom (and responsibility) in the biblical model.

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<sup>5</sup> Walke, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Walke, Bruce K., *Finding the Will of God--a pagan notion?* Eerdmans, 1995, p. 170.

After explaining God’s will for our lives (saved, Spirit filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering), MacArthur drops this bomb:

OK, let me give you this final principle, but hold onto your seat! You may want to jump up and shout! If you are doing all five of the basic things, do you know what the next principle of God’s will is? Do what ever you want! If those five elements of God’s will are operating in your life, who is running your wants? God is!<sup>7</sup>

Augustine is famous for saying:

Love God, then do what you will<sup>8</sup>

Again, are you being transformed or not?

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 37:4** Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

- A. You are free from all the pressure to try to figure out how to hear God. God is not silent. (Ref. Piper’s article from week 1). *It is no small thing to be freed from chasing after the wind.*
- B. You are free to use the gifts, talents, and *God-given transformed desires* to pursue whatever you want!
- C. You are free to get off your duff and go for it. (also “free” from excuses)

Discern the wisest course → make a decision → go for it



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<sup>7</sup> Found, MacArthur, p. 54-55. Though MacArthur mentions five here, my list is longer because I found a few more.

<sup>8</sup> Often accredited to Augustine of Hippo, but I couldn’t find the original source. Imagine that.

IV. Role Models (Scriptural Examples)<sup>9</sup>

- A. Paul planning his mission to Rome (Romans 1:9-15)
- B. Legal disputes (1 Corinthians 6:3-6)
- C. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29)
- D. Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 15:36)
- E. The care and feeding of Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1-6)
- F. Choosing leadership in the church (Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9)

V. Application(s)

A. Marriage

1. To marry or not, the Bible has a lot to say, especially in 1 Corinthians 7:
  - a. singles can serve the Lord more freely than married (v. 32, 35)
  - b. singles are more prone to sexual frustration (“better to marry than to burn” v. 9) than married
  - c. married are not free to divorce or leave their partner’s needs unmet ...
2. What kind of husband/wife you are (the Bible speaks clearly)
  - a. Husbands are to love sacrificially  
ESV **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,  
ESV **Colossians 3:19** Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.
  - b. Wives are to submit graciously  
ESV **Colossians 3:18** Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
3. Whom to marry. (The Bible gives requirements, guidelines, and **FREEDOM**)
  - a. Is it a lawful (God’s Law) arrangement
    - opposite sex
    - a believer
    - free to marry (single, widowed, or otherwise biblically eligible)
  - b. Are you in agreement about children?
  - c. Is he lazy, abusive, or a selfish pig?
  - d. Is she a nag or financially irresponsible?
  - e. Koukl’s specifics for a wife<sup>10</sup>

No. You <i>won't</i> change him/her after you get married.
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<sup>9</sup> Koukl, Greg, “ABC-Decision Making and the Will of God” outline pp. 25-28. Here I will give students a choice of which ones to investigate. Koukl has detailed notes on each of the above applications of the wisdom model.

- 1) Someone you can endeavor to love as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25)?
- 2) Already beginning to show respect for you as the head of your relationship (Ephesians 5:33)?
- 3) Showing a willingness to be subject to your leadership (Ephesians 5:24)?
- 4) Someone you as a husband can be subject to in the fear of the Lord (there is a
- 5) type of submission that works both ways: Ephesians 5:21)?
- 6) Someone you can joyfully fulfill your sexual responsibilities to (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Proverbs 5:15-20)?
- 7) Someone you can live in peace with (1 Corinthians 7:15)?
- 8) Someone you can provide for adequately (1 Timothy 5:8)?
- 9) Someone who allows you to exercise your spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10)?
- 10) Prudent (Proverbs 19:14)?
- 11) Not contentious or vexing (Proverbs 21:9, 25:24, 27:15, 21:19)?
- 12) Someone who will be an industrious, contributing member of the household, fulfilling domestic duties, hospitable and kind, with a positive outlook on life, and possesses strength and dignity (Proverbs 31:13-27)?
- 13) Someone who fears the Lord (Proverbs 31:30)?
- 14) Chaste and respectful (1 Peter 3:2)?
- 15) Kindhearted, not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead (1 Peter 3:8-9)?
- 16) Someone you are happy to be with (1 Corinthians 7:40)?
- 17) Committed to the priority of fulfilling her God-given role and responsibilities as a wife?
- 18) An excellent woman (Proverbs 30:10)?

***NOT!***

Trying to tap into God's mind (*divination!*)

- f. ... waiting for a "peace about it"      – are you serious?
- g. ... waiting for a "sign"
- h. ... waiting for a "confirmation"

4. Choose ***wisely***—God won't be surprised.

## VI. Wrap Up & Feedback

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<sup>10</sup> Koukl, appendix p. 13. Ladies, many of these principles (or similar ones) apply to the potential men in your life.