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**Decisions!
Decisions!
Decisions!**

(Part 1)

907-A

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!

Have you ever stopped to consider how many decisions you will make before this one day is over? How many decisions you will make before this next week becomes history? How many before another month passes?

Little decisions!

Big decisions!

Minor decisions!

Major decisions!

Matter of fact decisions!

Matter of life and death decisions!

So many are seemingly insignificant decisions. Do we go out to lunch after church, or don't we? It is hardly a matter of international importance, but even how you make THAT decision may reveal a pattern.

How much do I eat, a salad or a feast? What do I do this afternoon, watch basketball, sleep, or study? Do I come back to church tonight? Do I discipline Johnny for talking back? Do I make that phone call I have postponed for days? What about that hospital visit? Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!

Not all of our decisions are minor ones, though. Some of the decisions we will make today or this week or this year will change the course of our lives:

- Should I take that job?
- Should we move to another city?
- Should I accept the responsibility of that ministry?
- Should we buy that house?
- Should we borrow that money?
- Should I go to the mission field?
- Decisions about marriage and divorce
- Decisions about medical treatment
- Should I go into this business venture?
- Should I end that friendship?
- Should I get counsel about my spiritual or emotional turmoil?

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Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! The simple truth of the matter is that all of your life, all of my life, is simply the result of a series of decisions. And, while a sovereign God will make all things work together for our good, His perfect will is that we will learn to make godly decisions in the first place.

This chapter's living lesson from Proverbs will follow this pattern:

- I- Self-Control: Mirage or Miracle?
 - A- The basics (back to last lesson's outline)
 - B- The breakdown (Ahead: a list of the enemies of the Spirit-controlled life and how we will study them.)
- II- Decisions, decisions, decisions!
 - A- God's great problem with man (he makes wrong decisions.)
 - B- Satan's great deception: An impulsive spirit (that causes the wrong decisions to be made).
 - 1. Impulse and the appetites
 - 2. Impulse and the emotions
 - C- God's great goal for His children: Learning to make godly decisions)
 - 1- Principles from Proverbs (preview next chapter)
 - 2- Practical procedures
 - a- The tools
 - b- The tests

You may remember from our last chapter that the issue at stake is the issue of "self-control", the second of the Four Faces of Wisdom. Wisdom, you may remember, is the mind of Christ in control of the Christian; and that the first face of wisdom, the first step to attaining wisdom, was humility. We defined humility as learning that self is dead, that Christ is alive, and that the battle is not ours, but God's!

Then we tasted of two reflections of humility. The first was a teachable spirit, one's openness to instruction and hunger for the Word. Secondly came a correctable spirit, one's openness to rebuke. In the last chapter, we turned to this second face (or this second phase, if you will) of letting the mind of Christ control us. We asked ourselves: "Is it a mirage or is it a miracle?" The conclusion we came to was that self-control, where the will

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controls the appetites and emotions, is a farce unless the Spirit of God is in control of the life. It is like an engine with no fuel, or a TV set with no electricity. The idea is good, but you are powerless to perform.

Oh, but when Christ is in control of the life, when Wisdom is in control of the life, WE make simple choices, and HE performs in response to those choices. Then suddenly, our lives are under control! WE are no longer driven by our appetites, no longer yanked to and fro by our emotions. We make deliberate choices in harmony with the Word under the control of the Spirit, and GOD CONTROLS OUR LIVES. That is living—a life free under God’s control.

Satan, however, has other ideas. He wants us to waver in our confidence that God can handle our lives. He wants to play tug-of-war with our emotions. He wants to whet our appetites for this world’s likes, this world’s lies, and this world’s logic until our ability to make clear choices dissolves in a sea of emotional confusion.

James describes this “wavering” kind of confidence in James 1:7,8 (TLB): “If you waver, every decision you make will be uncertain, as you turn first this way, and then that.” (We ought to memorize that!) His startling conclusion for that kind of Christian is twofold. First, he will not receive anything he asks for. (His prayer life will be a joke.) Secondly, he will be unstable in all his ways; the primary characteristic of his life will be instability, along with confusion, inconsistency, frustration. Satan, by robbing him of a decisive spirit, has robbed him of a productive life.

Ah, but God! God moves with certainty, with consistency, with continuity. All of His decisions are in harmony with the perfect purposes of His will. He never changes His mind. In a frenzy of indecision, He never decides, “No sun today!” or “I’m too tired; I can’t decide.” He never forgets His objectives. He is never moved by appetite or emotions. He weighs the facts, measures them by His Word (which never, never changes), and makes a deliberate choice. That choice is based on what will best honor His Word, bless His children, and glorify His Name. He has never made a wrong decision, and God never will.

Moreover, He has given to each of us His personal Decision-Maker, the perfect interpreter of His will, the Holy Spirit. So, freed from bondage to appetites and emotions, we are at liberty always

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to choose to do His will, which sets Him in us free to accomplish it. We choose (He demands that of us), but He does (only He can do the Father's will). That is the controlled Christian life.

Satan hates that, so he has developed a barrage of cleverly designed enemies of self-control. Four categories of them clamor for our attention from the book of Proverbs. First there are the enemies of controlled responses:

- a. Responses to external tests retaliation:
 - impulsiveness
 - anger
 - retaliation
- b. Jealousy responses to internal tests:
 - fear
 - jealousy
 - stubbornness
- c. Then there are his enemies of controlled desires:
 - lust
 - greed
 - ambition
 - an ungodly thought life
 - a besetting response to temptation

There are also the enemies of controlled behavior:

 - drunkenness
 - gluttony
 - immorality
- d. Lastly, there are the enemies of controlled conversation:
 - boasting
 - bad report
 - blasphemy
 - flattery
 - gossip
 - a judgmental tongue
 - meddling
 - nagging
 - immoral speech
 - sarcasm

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These are Satan's carefully planted weeds in God's garden of self-control. They vie for control of our wills by preying on our emotions and our appetites until we make WRONG choices, thus losing control of our lives by taking the control away from the God of purpose and giving it to the god of emotions and appetites (who is in fact the god of this world.)

Satan's story to Eve in Genesis 3 and to Jesus in Matthew 4 was that you can live independently of God, that you can be your own god, set your own standards, let circumstances dictate your decisions. IT IS A LIE. Either God controls your life by your choosing to let Him, or Satan controls your life by your choosing (either by design or default) to let him. You and I were designed by God to be ruled by a spirit. Our choice is not whether or not to be ruled, but rather, by which spirit we will be ruled!

So, what the Christian's life boils down to is decisions, decisions, decisions. It is the process of making deliberate right choices without being swayed by Satan's input into our appetites or emotions. Therefore, God's great problem with man is that man relinquishes control of his will to his feelings or desires, and thus wrestles control of his life away from God. His life goes out of control.

So now we begin our look at the enemies of the controlled Christian life by looking first at the enemies of God-controlled responses. We will begin by focusing our attention on the central enemy: Satan's attack on our response to making the decisions themselves.

First, we will look at the sin of an impulsive spirit. Impulsiveness is the process of making decisions based on the appetites or the emotions rather than deliberately choosing based on the principles of Scripture. It is Satan's great deception, the base from which the other enemies, secure in their harbor of confusion, attack the believer and wrestle away control of his life.

Impulsiveness is when we buy that car because we were overcome with the desire to have it (a desire of lust, envy, or pride), not because we reasoned it out, applied the principles of the Word and determined it to be the will of God. If so, that was an impulsive decision. It means we watched that questionable movie because we were overcome with lust and curiosity, even though we knew it would not please God. It means a decision to

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marry based on physical attraction, or a decision to drink based on a desire to drown your sorrows by counterfeiting the Spirit. It is a decision to buy dessert in the cafeteria because your mouth watered. It is a decision to quit your job because your feelings were hurt or you were angry at the boss. It is a decision to cheat on a deal because you were overcome with greed.

It is any decision you make, any decision I make, under the influence of desire or feelings rather than the clear direction of the Word and ways of God.

There are obviously two kinds of impulsiveness: impulse of the appetites, and impulse of the emotions. The first is impulsiveness that depends on feeding the physical appetites and thus results in wrong choices. David made a wrong choice based on the appetite of lust. It was just a look, but the look led to a decision—a decision which David knew contradicted the plan of God. It was a decision David knew would have devastating consequences. David did not stop and reason based on God's Word. He made a decision based on appetite; and the result was adultery, the deliberate violation of the image of God, and then murder, the deliberate destruction of life. A final result was shame, the embarrassment that accompanies wrong choices.

David suffered, his family suffered, the nation suffered, and God's reputation suffered...all because David made a decision moved by the impulse of the appetite. Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! Do you see how important they are?

Lot made a decision based on the impulse of appetites, too. Given a choice, he took the "best". Filled with greed, he grabbed for it all. Given a choice, he pitched his tent towards Sodom...a seemingly insignificant choice, but it was based on the impulse of lust for more of the world. Just a little decision? Perhaps, but it cost him his testimony, his spiritual growth, his legacy of godliness, his children, and finally, his wife.

It was not the last choice that got Lot. The last choice was the result of a natural progression of choices. The first decision got Lot. It was a decision based on impulse to pitch his tent towards Sodom. Decisions based on appetites will destroy you! There are obviously also wrong decisions not necessarily based on the desire to fulfill appetites, but rather on the surge of control one's emotions gain when they are allowed to enter into the decision-making process.

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Jonah made a wrong choice—a whale of a wrong choice, if you please! Based on the impulse of his emotions, it got him in deep trouble, to say the least. He knew the will of God, but moved by the emotions of stubbornness and fear, he did not logically think it through, analyze it in the light of Scripture, and decide, “Hey, there is only one reasonable choice...go to Nineveh!” Instead, panic took over, and Jonah made an emotional choice. It took him on a choppy voyage which ended up with a fishy episode in which an unsuspecting king-sized finned friend could not believe he ate the w-h-o-l-e thing. Jonah got to swim unexpectedly in a huge indoor pool. He became the first man to make a fish sick and ended up deciding that maybe he ought to take a mission trip to Nineveh after all. (Which was the choice he should have made in the first place.)

Impulse! DECISION BASED ON EMOTIONS!

Joseph’s brothers made a wrong decision based on the emotion of jealousy. For Joseph it meant a dip in the well, a ride on the camel, a season in the palace, a tour of the dungeon, and ultimately the right to rule. For his brothers it meant lives of guilt and fear. Until years later, at the death of their father, they were still in agony over the possible consequences of their choice. “You meant evil, but God meant it for good,” Joe answered. He was okay; he was the victim who became the victor. His brothers never found the life of joy because they chose to destroy their brother on an impulse of jealousy, and bartered away their walk with God.

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Moses made a wrong choice based on anger. He struck the rock on impulse! He knew better, but because of one act of impulsiveness, he never entered the land.

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Abraham made a wrong choice based on jealousy and fear, and passed his wife off as his sister. Cain made a wrong choice based on jealousy and anger, so Abel was never able to finish the course. The children of Israel made a wrong choice based on the impulse of fear, and a whole generation missed the land of milk and honey. They had to settle for a life of wandering in the wilderness instead.

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God's great enemy, impulsiveness, still is at work, eating away at the very fiber of the lives of God's potential spiritual giants. It leaves in its wake lives crippled by wrong choices. Husbands leave their wives, wives leave their husbands in direct conflict with the Word of God. Anger, jealousy, fear, stubbornness, or lust overpower their ability to think logically through the mind of Christ. They lose it all over one wrong choice.

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Men enter into unequally-yoked partnerships because it "seemed like a good deal." Men and women quit their jobs because they "felt" like it. People leave their churches in anger, or make foolish business decisions based on emotions rather than the clear principles of the Word. Then they cry out to God, "Why did you do this to me?" God did not do it; it was the result of impulsiveness: wrong decisions based on appetites or emotions, not on the mind under control of the Word.

Before we go on, we need to look at the decisions of life that may wreck our lives and how to make right decisions in their places. Our first assignment is to look at the process of making the decisions themselves, and find out just how we know to choose the will of God. So our textbook is the book of Proverbs, and our subject is decision-making. Our question is, what are God's principles from Proverbs on making wise decisions?

What a clear picture Proverbs paints on decision-making! Basically, it says this: You never make decisions based on impulse. Instead, you follow the Scriptural checklist if you have a decision to make. Here are a few of God's principles on decision-making.

PRINCIPLE #1: Be sure you have all the facts.

What a shame—yes, how stupid!—to decide before knowing the facts! (Proverbs 18:13 TLB)

It is dangerous and sinful to rush into the unknown. (Proverbs 19:2 TLB)

Get the facts at any price, and hold on tightly to all the good sense you can get. (Proverbs 23:23 TLB)

Somehow, so-called "spiritual" Christians in our day and age sometimes act as though they need only follow "open doors" or look for "signs" in order to make a wise decision about a job, or a house, or a relationship, or a move. Like leaves, they blow

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with the wind waiting to light somewhere, acting as though only God could open doors or give emotional peace. My friend, Satan is a master at opening doors. He is a master at creating artificial tranquility, which may be only the result of the absence of adequate information, but which may be wrongly interpreted as the peace of God. HOW MANY DECISIONS ARE ALREADY MADE FOR US IF WE SIMPLY GET ALL THE FACTS AND WEIGH THEM ON THE SCALES OF SCRIPTURE. So, before you make a decision, get all the facts you can. Do not play hide-and-seek with God.

The problem is that so often we do not want to know any more than we know, for fear it would contradict our predetermined choices. So we do not investigate, we hibernate, and call it “spirituality.” Remember, get all the facts.

PRINCIPLE #2: With facts in hand, honestly consider the consequences (not with your head in the sand, but with your eyes on the Word).

It is pleasant to see plans develop. That is why fools refuse to give them up even when they are wrong.

(Proverbs 13:19 TLB)

Only a simpleton believes everything he is told! A prudent man checks to see where he is going.

(Proverbs 14:15 TLB)

In other words, be realistic about what lies ahead if you make that choice.

The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won't face the facts.

(Proverbs 14:8 TLB)

Can you relate to that? You want something so badly that you look at the facts through rose-colored glasses, and only see what you want to see. Then when it all backfires, who gets the blame?

A man may ruin his chances by his own foolishness and then blame it on the Lord!

(Proverbs 19:3 TLB)

A prudent man foresees the difficulties ahead and prepares for them; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.

(Proverbs 22:3 TLB)

In other words, “Ostrich Christianity” is not Scriptural.

A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks, and suffers the consequences.

(Proverbs 27:12 TLB)

So count the cost honestly and realistically BEFORE you

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make a decision. Jesus said it clearly in Luke as he urged His disciples to count the cost of discipleship.

But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if he has enough money to pay the bills?

Otherwise he might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh!

"See that fellow there?" they would mock. "He started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!"

(Luke 14:28-30)

To count the cost is not the absence of faith; it is the presence of wisdom. To ignore the cost is not faith; it is presumption, and often, as Jesus reminds us, the eventual result is shame.

PRINCIPLE #3: Wise planning is an exercise of faith, not an absence of it.

A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't, and even brags about it! (Proverbs 13:16 TLB)

The wise man saves for the future, but the foolish man spends whatever he gets. (Proverbs 21:20 TLB)

Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts. (Proverbs 24:3,4 TLB)

We should make plans—counting on God to direct us. (Proverbs 16:9 TLB)

It is not sin to plan. It is foolish not to. We are not to trust our plans, but we are to plan our trust.

PRINCIPLE #4: When in doubt, seek counsel. (We have just studied this.)

Plans go wrong with too few counselors; many counselors bring success. (Proverbs 15:22 TLB)

Or, in the King James version:

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

(Proverbs 15:22)

For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. (Proverbs 24:6)

First, get your counsel from the Word. Secondly, pray and ask God for confirmation. Thirdly, having prayed, seek counsel to confirm your findings from the Word. If counsel does not confirm, wait! Compare counsel with counsel until the smoke of confusion clears. God may have allowed the confusion to slow

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you down.

PRINCIPLE #5: Stay away from easy answers to complex questions. Christians are gluttons for get-rich-quick schemes or super-simple solutions in the name of faith.

Steady plodding brings prosperity; hasty speculation brings poverty.

Dishonest gain will never last, so why take the risk?

(Proverbs 21:5,6 TLB)

Remember, God normally does supernatural things naturally, and He often answers pleas for pat, quick answers with a long, steady process. God is a Gardener; He grows trees. He does not sell canned fruit. What God produces takes time, and He is glorified by the process, often more than by the product. It is the process that produces faith. The product, hastily received, often produces only presumption.

PRINCIPLE #6: Once you have reached what you feel is God's decision, relax! Don't look over your shoulder. Your planning was only to prepare you for His sovereignty.

We can make our plans, but the final outcome is in God's hands.

(Proverbs 16:1 TLB)

We toss the coin, but it is the Lord who controls its decision.

(Proverbs 16:33 TLB)

Man proposes, but God disposes.

(Proverbs 19:21 TLB)

Go ahead and prepare for the conflict, but victory comes from God.

(Proverbs 21:31 TLB)

As you go along, don't panic if the road signs indicate that God is traveling a different path than you thought you would have.

Since the Lord is directing our steps, why try to understand everything that happens along the way? (Proverbs 20:24 TLB)

What a load that ought to take off our minds! So our job is to:

- 1- get the facts,
- 2- consider the consequences,
- 3- plan wisely, and
- 4- confirm by counsel
- 5- shun easy answers and quick solutions.

God's job is to:

take our decision and use it His way, in His time, for His glory.

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So, if you follow God's plan and never knowingly run cross-current with His principles, YOU CAN RELAX! The results are not your problem. Furthermore, you do not always know what it is that God is planning to do. His job is to work it together for your good. Your job is to make wise decisions.

In the next chapter, we will look at the process and apply the principles to some of the practical everyday decisions of life. As a preview, we will look at this simple formula to apply to making wise decisions. We will see how to take the Word of God and let it become God's decision-maker.

Lord willing, we will also look at how the enemy of impulsiveness can be conquered on a day-to-day basis, and how to use the Word of God as your decision-maker. In the meantime, as you are faced on a day-to-day basis with the trauma of decisions, big ones and small ones, simple ones and complex ones, try to remember that all our decisions, from what to wear to who to marry, can best be made by choosing to apply the principles of Scripture, rather than moving to the impulse of appetites and emotions. Some of your decisions (such as what to wear) may not seem to be of great significance. Others, such as who to marry, obviously are. All of our decisions reveal patterns, set precedents, and reveal principles. If you and I are to be men and women of wisdom, we must become men and women of self-control. We must begin by learning to make decisions God's way, not based on what we want, not based on how we feel, but based on a deliberate choice to honor the Word.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! Make them carefully, for they are the threads from which a sovereign God weaves together the tapestry of our lives.

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DECISIONS! DECISIONS! DECISIONS!

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!
The crux of life they are.
What we decide and how becomes
God's greatest tool, by far.

The tool with which He molds us
And fashions out a plan,
Determining along the way if
We're to be God's man.

So learn how to make decisions,
Not by feelings or by fears,
Not by fleshly appetites,
Nor moved by anger or tears.

But learn to make decisions
According to God's clear Word
That every choice in life you make
Might honor accrue to the Lord.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!
Each one's but a tiny part,
But all those decisions, end to end,
Eventually fashion your heart.

Oh, carefully make your decisions!
Every Scriptural principle see;
For the kind of decisions you learn to make
Is the kind of a man you will be!

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND APPLICATION

- 1- Read Chapter Two (part one of Decisions! Decisions!)
- 2- Look for one or more passages of Scripture that explain how God makes decisions.
- 3- Look for one or more passages of Scripture that confirm how Jesus made decisions.
- 4- Read Genesis Chapter three and Matthew chapter four and do a study on the similarities of Satan's approach to Eve and to Jesus. What appetites and emotions did he use to appeal to them to make wrong choices? What did Jesus use a basis for His decisions? What did Eve use?

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5- Take one or more of the following Bible characters and study the progression of their choices; determining what Satan used to appeal to them that caused them to make wrong choices. Try to find one verse in Scripture they could have claimed that would have given them a basis for a right decision.

| <u>Bible Character</u> | <u>Passage</u> | <u>Choice</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| David | II Samuel 11 | |
| Lot | Genesis 13,19 | |
| Jonah | Jonah 1 | |
| Joseph's brothers | Genesis 37 | |
| Moses | Numbers 20:8-12 | |
| Abraham | Genesis 20 | |

6- Take one major decision you have made in the last year, and filter it through the six principles listed in your notes, and try to determine the degree to which that decision was made in harmony with the Word or in response to emotions or appetites or circumstances.

7- Keep a list for one week of the small decisions you make where the appetites and emotions were competing for control of your will. Find a passage of Scripture for each decision that clearly tells you which choice you should have made.

8- Pray for the other members of the Study Group for the next two weeks specifically that God would give them insight into the process of decision making, and that He would turn knowledge into Wisdom in our lives in this crucial area.

9- Examine your motives for buying what you buy during these two weeks to determine if they are Godly decisions. Keep a log and look for patterns to emerge in what motivates you to buy things.

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