

The Wisest Decision You Can Make
Sermon Series: Otherworldly
1 Kings 3:5-14; James 1:5

Introduction: There is a very famous quote that most of you have likely heard or read at some point in your life. It's given in the form of a prayer:

GOD, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

**Courage to change the things I can,
And Wisdom to know the difference.**

There are two parts of life that every New Year brings. There are things that we cannot change and things we can.

On the one hand, there are no guarantees in life. I cannot guarantee you that you won't get cancer, lose your job, be involved in an automobile accident, or even be alive at the end of this year. There are things that we simply cannot change, but the challenge we all will face every day in this New Year is confronting the things in life we can change and making the right decisions about those changes.

The biggest difference between people who flourish in life, who have great relationships, and those who don't is not how much money you have. It's not talent or good looks or IQ. Basically, it's wisdom. It's the ability to make really, good decisions.

If you're an average person, according to one study, you will make about 70 conscious decisions every day. A lot of what we do we do by habit, but today, tomorrow, and every day in 2023 you will make about 70 conscious decisions. That's 25,550 decisions a year.

STORY: [Back near the end of my Air Force career....](#)

Life is a series of choices. God has given us the power of choice. We make choices every day. Some decisions have far reaching consequences and

other decisions are not so important.

But our choices determine the character, direction, impact, and eternal destiny of our life.

There are choices we make that are literally choosing life... choosing wholeness... choosing closeness to the God who made us and sent His Son to redeem us. And there are choices we make that are literally choosing damage and destruction. Heaven is a choice. Hell is a choice. People will say, "I didn't choose Hell, but to not choose heaven is to choose hell."

You put all that together, and basically that's your life. Life is the sum of all your choices. You are where you are today because of the decisions you have made in the past. You are becoming what you are becoming right now by the choices you make. Life really comes down to making decisions.

Today, I'm beginning a New Year's series I'm calling "Otherworldly."

The dictionary says Otherworldly means: *relating* to or *resembling* that of a world other than the actual world. It sounds very science fiction and alien-like doesn't it, but that's who we are or who we are supposed to be as believers in Christ; we are not of this world; we are **Otherworldly**.

I'm getting this title from Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John, chapter 17: **15My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. 20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message..." (NIV)**

Jesus did not ask the Father to take His followers out of the world. In fact, Jesus commissioned them to go into the world as His ambassadors. Instead, He asked the Father to protect them from Satan and his schemes, to guard them from temptation, and to make them holy through the truth of His word. **This is what they needed to fulfill their commission.**

Did you notice that Jesus' prayer was not just for those handful of disciples?

Jesus included you and me in that prayer – “those who will believe in me through their message.”

You’ve probably heard a thousand times that Christians are supposed to “**be in the world, but not of it.**” But what does that look like?

It’s a lot like a boat in the water. The boat is designed to float on the water – to be in the water and surrounded by water on all sides. But it’s not a good thing when water gets in the boat. **Our goal as followers of Christ is to actively engage our culture with the Gospel without allowing the culture’s ungodly morals, values, attitudes, and behaviors to infiltrate our lives.**

3 Ways I See Christians Relate to the World

1. Separate from the World

Some of people take their boats out of the water all together. We want to protect ourselves and our families from the sin of the world. It’s easier to live by God’s standards if we remove ourselves from the influence of the world. But there’s one big problem with that. We also remove the influence of Christ from the world.

2. Compromise with the World

Others launch their boats out in the culture in surrender without even trying to live by God’s standards. But the majority of Christians compromise little by little. Often, we don’t even realize it’s happening. Sometimes, we compromise with God’s holy standards in an attempt to be “relevant.”

3. Live in the World by God’s Standards

Being in the world but not like it can be like paddling our boat upstream.

So how do I live as otherworldly? I’m in this world, but I’m not of it. I’m not supposed to love the world or be like it.

It all comes down to decisions. There are only two types of decisions you can make.

From a human perspective, we could call them either good decisions or bad

decisions. But from God's perspective, you will either make wise decisions or foolish decisions. God wants us and has sent His Holy Spirit to help us making wise decisions, so that we can live as **Otherworldly**.

Bad decisions can cost people their marriage, health, financial well-being, relationships, your children, your career, your happiness, even your soul.

This is what Solomon says in the book of Proverbs: "People ruin their lives by their own foolishness..."

Think of all the decisions you have ever made. All the money you decided to make or to spend or to save, the food you decided to eat or not to eat, the words you decided to say or not to say, what you've done with your time, your relationships, your habits, your thought life.

Anybody here ever make at least one decision you later regretted? Just raise your hands. Let's admit it, we've all failed at this.

Now the main truth I want to talk about today is you do not have to face making decisions on your own. Let's Pray

A man by the name of Solomon became king of the nation of Israel. He realized he was in way over his head. Then he had an amazing opportunity. In 1 Kings, chapter 3 beginning with verse 5; ***"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (NIV)***

**In other words, "Solomon, blank check. What do you want?"
Imagine you had that kind of opportunity. What would you ask for? If you could have anything you wanted, what would it be?**

6Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. 7"Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David.

But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.

8Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people,

too numerous to count or number. 9So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (NIV)

Solomon could have asked for anything in the world that he wanted, but what he asks for is a discerning heart. In other words, his first decision was to ask God for the wisdom to make right decisions.

Key Take Away: The wisest decision you can make is to seek God's wisdom for every decision.

Notice God's response. I love this. 10The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 13Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

God seems to be saying if you pursue wisdom, many other aspects of well-being generally follow. Financial well-being...Physical well-being...Honor, having a good name. All this is part of what wisdom does.

No wonder Solomon would go on to say, **"Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. 8Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you."** Proverbs 4:7-8 (NIV)

Decisions are never made in isolation. Bad decisions lead to other bad decisions; but good decisions often lead to more good decisions.

In the time remaining, I want to walk through how you can make great, God-honoring, life-giving decisions?

I. Admit You Need It

Solomon had just been inaugurated. He's in his early 20's. His office furniture hadn't even been moved in yet! He hadn't appointed anyone to his cabinet, but he already realizes something is missing from his resume, so he says this, **"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."** (I Kings 3:9, NIV)

Remember, Solomon was highly educated. We know he went on to become a prolific writer. Growing up, he watched his dad, (who when he died was the greatest king who had ever lived) do a tremendous job governing Israel. Solomon was the popular choice to follow King David, but he was humble enough to realize two things.

First, he did not have what it took to make the kind of wise decisions a king must make. **Second**, he knew God did.

In fact, later, as an older man, Solomon wrote a book called "Proverbs" which was a letter to his son, on how to live a life of wisdom.

The first step to living Otherworldly, to having the wisdom you need to make wise decisions is to admit that you need it.

Once you admit that you need wisdom then you must also admit that only God is the source of ALL wisdom. In fact, God has a monopoly on wisdom.

His wisdom is so far above human wisdom that it makes human wisdom look like foolishness. The Apostle Paul said, **"The foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom."** (I Corinthians 1:25, NIV)

Think about that. If God were capable of a foolish thought, that thought would still be wiser than the wisest thought that a person could imagine.

So often, the reason why we make bad decisions is because we stubbornly refuse to admit that we need to ask for advice, both from God who gives wisdom, and from others, who are wiser than we are.

Admitting you need wisdom will save you a lot of heartache. One of the advantages of being a professional golfer is that you have a caddy. The caddy doesn't just carry clubs. He is there to give you advice and make the wise decision about hitting the best shot. That is why I love this story.

STORY: Tommy Bolt won a lot of golf tournaments, but he had one major flaw. He had a volcanic temper, and he was very prideful. One year he was playing a tournament in Southern California. He had a bad round the day before and he was still ticked off. He thought his caddy had not done a very good job, so he told his caddy to not say one word to him the entire day.

Bolt hit his first tee shot and it came to rest behind a tree. He asked his caddy if he thought he should hit a 5-iron and then thought better and said, "No. Don't say a word to me." He hit the 5-iron and made this unbelievable shot that landed on the green. He turned to his caddy and proudly said, "Okay. You can say something now. What did you think about that shot?" He looked at the golfer and calmly said, "Tommy, that wasn't your ball."

God doesn't give wisdom to the people who think they know it all. He only gives it to the person who admits he doesn't know enough.

II. Ask for It

1. Solomon's request was right to the point and pretty bold, "***So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.***" (1 Kings 3:9, NIV)

The order that Solomon put those words is very important. There is a tremendous difference between wisdom and knowledge.

We are living in a world that is drowning in knowledge, yet it is starving for wisdom. The amount of knowledge that we have at our fingertips today has led to a phenomenon called "information overload".

The information you can read today, online, has more information than a person living in the 17th century would have come across in their lifetime. If we have learned anything, we should know by now that knowledge is no substitute for wisdom. Someone once put it this way.

The reason that Solomon asked for wisdom first and then knowledge is that

wisdom is the ability to take the knowledge that we gain and use it to make wise decisions.

Wisdom is knowing there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad!

The point is you can do exactly what Solomon did. Anytime you want wisdom you can ask for it. You don't have to be a king to need wisdom and you don't have to be a king to get wisdom. The same deal God made with Solomon He will make with you.

James, the brother of Jesus wrote, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** (James 1:5, ESV)

Just so you know, God's primary will for your life is not the things you do or the things you get; **it's the person you become.** God's primary will for your life is that you become transformed in the image of Jesus.

Now we all understand that, especially if we're parents. Would you want the kinds of kids where you always telling them their whole life long, "Wear these clothes. Take this class. Go to that school. Apply for this job. Marry that person. Purchase this house," and you always have them do exactly what you tell them to do their whole life? Would you want that? **The correct answer is, No!**

You must admit that you need wisdom and then you ask God for wisdom,

III. Apply It

You can admit you need wisdom, but wisdom won't do you any good and if you don't apply the wisdom that you have.

Wisdom is not abstract knowledge that you keep in your head. Wisdom is practical action that you take with your hands. Solomon went on to write this about wisdom, ***"Turn your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding."*** (Proverbs 2:2, NIV)

Wisdom is more than intellectual knowledge. Wisdom is practical hands-on living. The word for "apply" literally means to "extend or to hold out". Wisdom is something you extend to every area of your life.

Solomon did not ask God to make him smart enough to make a living. He asked God to make him wise enough to make a life. The word that is used for "wisdom" literally means "skill."

That brings us to the definition of wisdom. Wisdom is seeing life through the eyes of God and living life in the will of God. Wisdom is realizing how important decisions are in your life and how important it is to make wise decisions in your life.

There is an old saying that goes like this. There is a choice you must make in everything you do. You must always keep in mind the choice you make, makes you. Who you are today, what you will be tomorrow, and the influence and legacy that you leave behind after you are gone will all come down to the decisions you make in life. If you don't think living OTHERWORLDLY is a big deal, listen to these insightful words of C.S. Lewis.

"Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. Taking your life, with all your innumerable choices, you are slowly turning this central theme into a heavenly creature or to a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, with others, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other."

We all know there are consequences to every decision that we make. The difference is consequences have a back-end price. Wisdom has a front-end price. Wisdom teaches you the lesson before you make a mistake.

Consequences demand that you make the mistake first and then it teaches you the lesson. Wisdom puts up the fence at the top of the cliff. Consequences put you in the hospital after you go over the cliff.

Wise people pause when they're making decisions and ask, *"God, would you show me in this moment, not just what would feel good, but will be the consequences tomorrow, next month, next year, in 10 years? God, help me to remember when I'm making this decision what do I value most? How do I make this decision considering the kind of man, the kind of dad, the kind of father, the kind of worker and follower of Jesus I most want to be?"*

There is a world of difference between deciding based on what would feel good to me right now and deciding based on, "What kind of person do I most want to be? What kind of values do I most want to emulate? What kind of decision will lead to a life God will bless?"

And remember one last thing, the way of a fool seems right to the fool. There is a fool inside every one of us, and ironically, one of the greatest violators of this, years later, was Solomon himself. Solomon, who one day asked God for wisdom. Later, we're told in the same book, 1 Kings, ***"He [Solomon] had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray."*** No kidding.

Part of what Solomon's life tells us is the battle for wisdom is never over. You can have wisdom and make a lot of good decisions, but we all have a weakness, and blind spots.

So how are you going to live this coming year? How are you going live the rest of your life? It is going to be one decision after another, and you will either make wise decisions or foolish decisions. You will either suffer the consequences of foolish decisions or enjoy the fruit and blessings of wise decisions.

In the Gospels, at the very end of Jesus' life, He is hanging on the cross. There is a guy next to him who has made a lifetime of terrible decisions. He is a thief. His life has been immoral, deceitful, and greedy. He was correctly found guilty and sentenced to death.

This guy has made a lifetime of terrible decisions, but the last decision he makes is to cast his life into Jesus' care. He says, ***"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*** Jesus says, ***"I will. This day you'll be with me in paradise."***

With God, the decision that matters most is the one you make right now.