

PERSONAL DECISION MAKING

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide assistance for making personal decisions and understanding the effectiveness or land mines associated with various approaches to making decisions

Personal Feelings

Personal feelings are conscious or unconscious subjective beliefs, impressions, or presumptions about oneself or others. They are simply perceptions of reality, not reality itself.

1. Feelings are based in the heart but are influenced by our thoughts, perceptions and beliefs.
The way we perceive self and others or interpret a situation results in corresponding feelings. The concern is whether or not our specific perceptions and beliefs are consistent with reality.
What consequences might you expect if your perceptions and beliefs are wrong?
Have you ever discovered that what you were feeling was based on incorrect information?
2. Our feelings can be influenced by others.
Our concept of self and the world around us is shaped beginning with childhood and continues into adulthood. If we consistently hear from others that we are dumb then we will eventually assume they are right. If we consistently hear from others that we are smart then we will assume they are right. Other people and culture have the ability to shape our perceptions and thus our beliefs and feelings.
How sure are you that what you believe about yourself is true?
Have you ever made a bad decision based on the influence of someone else?
3. We tend to suppress our feelings.
We may hide an emotional wound and the pain that it causes and become unaware of its presence or how it affects us. How many of us were taught to suppress our feelings when we were children? Have we continued to do this as adults? Suppressed feelings can have a large effect on decision making.
How can you identify suppressed feelings?
4. Our feelings can't be trusted.
Our heart-felt feelings are fickle and affected by sin. They lead us to do what feels right or good—whether or not it is considered righteous by God. We may have been manipulated by others to feel the way we do or possibly our feelings are based on wrong or incomplete information. In other words, our feelings may or may not reflect reality and are a poor basis for making decisions. On the other hand we are called to walk by faith ([2Corinthians 5:7](#)), not our feelings, knowing that our faith is founded on the infallible, certain, life-changing, authoritative Word of God.

Read Jeremiah 17:9. *What symptoms tell us that our heart is deceitful?*

Read Proverbs 28:26. *How should we proceed if our heart isn't trustworthy?*

Conclusions:

- Feelings may or may not be based in reality
- Feelings should be evaluated to determine their source and validity
- Decisions based on feelings alone are unwise and may result in negative consequences

Emotions

1. Emotions are not based on reasoned thought.

Emotions are like dash board indicators that tell us there is something we need to consider. They are an automated response of the nervous system as a result of details as they are perceived by the brain. What seems logical would be to determine the cause of the emotion before deciding what to do.

Have you ever jumped to conclusions based on your emotions?

Give examples when your emotions were inappropriate for the situation.

2. Emotions are impulsive.

Since emotions are linked to the autonomic nervous system, they are impulsive and often relate to a fight or flight response and would remain as long as the stimulus remains.

Have you ever acted impulsively and had to apologize for something said or done?

Read Proverbs 12:18. *Based on this verse contrast the rash person versus the wise.*

3. Emotions are intense.

An emotion can be intense and overpowering. The intensity of your emotion can overpower your reasoning when it comes to making the right decision.

Read Proverbs 13:16. *How does prudence protect your reputation?*

How can you prevent bad decisions due to strong emotions?

Conclusions:

- Emotions should be evaluated to determine their cause
- The cause of an emotion should be evaluated for validity
- Impulsive decisions based on emotions alone are unwise and may result in conflict or other negative consequences

Conscious and Unconscious Motives

Motives deal with why we make the decisions we do. Not all motives are conscious: some originate from subconscious drives that seek to be met, possibly influenced by buried feelings we might have.

1. The Biblical motive is to love God and love our neighbor.

Applying this to every decision is the best approach to maintaining positive relationships with God and others. Ignoring love will lead to strained relationships and other possible consequences.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." *Matt 22:36-40*

Read 1 John 4:19. *Can we truly love if we haven't experienced God's love?*

Read 1 John 5:3. *Express this verse in an if/then form and explain*

Read Romans 13:8-10. *Is love an obligation? Explain*

2. Our motives tend to be self-centered.

Putting ourselves first when making decisions without considering the impact on others is a recipe for strained relationships and future loneliness.

Read Isaiah 53:6. *How does our sinful nature affect our ability to love?*

Read Proverbs 16:2. *Explain the implications of this verse*

Read Mark 8:34. *What does self-denial look like? What does the cross imply?*

Read Philippians 2:3-4. *What prevents us from putting the interests of others above our own?*

Read 1John 3:16. *Sacrifice for others comes from _____ within*

3. Our motives need to be evaluated.

Just as we need to identify our feelings we also need to identify our motives and bring them into conformance with God's law of love. It's probably best to evaluate motives and feelings together since motives often arise from the feelings we have.

Take the time to evaluate the feelings and motives that went into recent decisions.

Were your motives consistent with God's law of love?

Cultural Influence

1. Cultural standards vary over time and location.

What is accepted behavior today may be frowned upon tomorrow. My decisions and behavior today may be criticized tomorrow because values and ethics have changed.

List problems you have observed that are caused from a lack of stability with values and ethics.

What do you think this lack of stability does to a person's concept of right and wrong?

2. Cultural standards don't necessarily reflect God's standards

Cultural standards are based on the feelings and desires of the influential who tend to dominate culture. The masses are expected to go along whether they like it or not. God's standards of values and ethics reflect His character and what will give us the most fulfilling and joyful life ([John 15:10-11](#)).

Why do Christians sometimes prefer cultural standards instead of God's standards?

What consequences might result from ignoring God's standards?

3. Cultural influence generates group think.

Instead of thinking on our own we conform to cultural standards of values and ethics whether we agree or not. Consequently, we make "irrational or non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform" [[psychologytoday.com](#)].

Group think is "a pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group values and ethics" [[merriam-webster.com](#)]

List examples of Group Think that you recognize in our culture today

Why do you think it's so easy to be deceived into conforming to cultural values?

4. Cultural influence is hard to disregard.

Making decisions contrary to cultural values may bring condemnation and ostracism. Going along to get along may often force you to deny God's standards causing internal conflict with what you know to be true.

Are you willing to face the consequences of ignoring cultural norms in favor of God's standards?

Human Reason

1. God gave us the ability to think and gain understanding.

Our ability to reason and solve problems is important, but we need to remember that the outcome of our reasoning is determined by the quality of information upon which it is based and the biases we have in our thinking.

2. Our ability to reason is hindered by the effects of sin.

As believers we are struggling to deal with the stubbornness of our heart. As we surrender more and more of our heart to Jesus we increase our ability to understand the things of God and reason more effectively. This process goes smoother if we choose to think about the things of God rather than the things of the world.

Read Ephesians 4:17-18. *How does hardness of heart product ignorance?*
Read Romans 1:18. *Why would anyone suppress the truth deliberately?*
Read Philippians 4:8. *Make a list of the benefits of doing what this verse says.*

3. Our ability to reason is hindered by a lack of understanding.
As we grow in Christ we begin to realize how little we really know and what we think we know is often wrong. Reasoning based on a lack of true understanding leads to wrong conclusions and decisions.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:12. *Explain how false confidence can lead to bad decisions.*
Read Galatians 6:3. *Explain how self-deception can lead to bad decisions.*

4. We should seek understanding and the renewal of our mind.
To make better decisions we need to expand our understanding of spiritual things which means the rooting out of false ideas and replacing them with what is true. God's word is the source of spiritual instruction.

Read Romans 12:2. *Why would conformance to the will of God result in better decisions than being conformed to the world?*
Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. *How does righteousness result in good decisions?*
Read Psalm 119:104. *How does understanding enable us to make good decisions?*

5. We should rely on God's instruction and direction.
When our thinking doesn't align with God's instruction we should trust God to know what's right. We are not smarter than God! We need to humble ourselves and submit to His teaching realizing that our understanding is limited and our perspective may be wrong. Ignoring His direction can lead to bad decisions that can cost us dearly.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. *Why is it hard to follow God's leading when we disagree?*

The Spirit's Direction

Decisions based on the principles of God's word as directed by the Holy Spirit will provide results that are pleasing to God and satisfying to the soul.

Read Ephesians 5:15-18. *Explain how wisdom is related to being controlled by the Spirit.*
Read Galatians 5:16-17. *Explain how emotional desires and feelings can be contrary to God's direction.*
Read Romans 8:5-8. *Why is what we think about important?*

Life Purpose

As Christians we represent God in this world. Our purpose is to bring glory and honor to God in how we live. Therefore, how we act and the decisions we make reflect back on Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. *Is there any room here for personal glory? Explain*
Read Ephesians 1:11-12. *Do others see God's glory when they see you?*

APPENDIX

Personal Feelings

1. Feelings are based in the heart

What consequences might you expect if your perceptions and beliefs are wrong?

Wrong perceptions and beliefs lead to wrong conclusions and actions. Decisions made on this basis can make you look foolish, can damage your testimony giving a negative example of Christ, and potentially damage your relationships.

Have you ever discovered that what you were feeling was based on incorrect information?

This is not uncommon. Our initial feelings about a situation are often wrong. That's why acting before we gather more information can be a problem. Wrong feelings about ourselves can be corrected by learning what God thinks about us from Scripture. Someone to counsel us can point us in the right direction.

3. We tend to suppress our feelings.

How can you identify suppressed feelings?

We tend to suppress feelings that we don't want to deal with. Such hidden feelings can produce a physical response such as muscle tension. Long term more severe physical issues can result. To identify your suppressed feelings it's important to be aware of your physical responses to things. It may sound too simple but you should ask God and even talk with someone you trust to identify your suppressed feelings and the situation you don't want to deal with. Dealing with the issue in an appropriate manner can then help in mitigating the feelings.

4. Our feelings can't be trusted.

Read Jeremiah 17:9. What symptoms tell us that our heart is deceitful?

We know our heart is deceitful when we practice deceit, either by direct dishonesty or through craftiness, cunning, duplicity and disingenuousness. When we deliberately mislead others it's a symptom of our deceitful heart.

Read Proverbs 28:26. How should we proceed if our heart isn't trustworthy?

Trust God, His word, and the leading of His Spirit. As we grow in wisdom we have a better handle on our heart but will always need to be careful that our feelings and emotions don't get the best of us. Taking regular inventory of our feelings and emotions will help us prevent making decisions we regret.

Emotions

2. Emotions are impulsive.

Read Proverbs 12:18. Based on this verse contrast the rash person versus the wise.

The rash person acts quickly with words that hurt but the wise speak to bring healing.

3. Emotions are intense.

Read Proverbs 13:16. How does prudence protect your reputation?

A fool acts from ignorance while the prudent acts based on knowledge. It's best to gain knowledge rather than displaying your ignorance.

How can you prevent bad decisions due to strong emotions?

Don't act rashly. Take time to get the facts and/or think through the situation and seek God's direction before acting or speaking.

Conscious and Unconscious Motives

1. The Biblical motive is to love God and love our neighbor.

Read 1 John 4:19. Can we truly love if we haven't experienced God's love?

Until we experience God's love we tend to love selfishly. That is, we typically expect something in return for extending love. Experiencing God's love teaches us to love unconditionally.

Read 1 John 5:3. Express this verse in an if/then form and explain

If we love God, then we keep His commandments. Keeping His commandments demonstrates that we love Him and willingly and happily follow His instructions.

Read Romans 13:8-10. Is love an obligation? Explain

Love is the natural result of being loved by God and is the fulfillment of the law. While the passage expresses the fact that we own love to our neighbor it is the expected result of God's love in us.

2. Our motives tend to be self-centered.

Read Isaiah 53:6. How does our sinful nature affect our ability to love?

We have gone our own way, that is, our heart is focused on our own direction and desires with little or no concern for others. When we don't have God's love in our heart we have little to give to others.

Read Proverbs 16:2. Explain the implications of this verse

We're often unaware of the hidden motive behind our actions. We think what we're doing is fine but God knows our heart.

Read Mark 8:34. What does self-denial look like? What does the cross imply?

Self-denial in this context involves disregarding your own agenda and replacing it with that of Jesus. If Jesus set aside His own desires and went to the cross in obedience to the Father shouldn't we put our selfish desires to death and following Jesus?

Read Philippians 2:3-4. What prevents us from putting the interests of others above our own?

Our selfishness and pride stand in the way of humility. Instead of honoring others and being concerned for their interests above our own we can be afflicted with selfish blinders that prevent us from seeing those around us.

Read 1John 3:16. Sacrifice for others comes from LOVE within

Is this activity or thought beneficial to me or to others?	1Cor 6:12-20
Will this cause another believer to violate their conscience?	Rom 14
Will this cause another believer to sin?	Rom 14
Am I putting my interests above others?	Rom 15:1-3; 1Cor 10:24
Am I putting my desires ahead of Christ?	2Cor 5:15

Cultural Influence

1. Cultural standards vary over time and location.

What do you think this lack of stability does to a person's concept of right and wrong?

By nature we want to know what the rules are and we don't want to be judged by others. If the rules are constantly changing we have to constantly be aware of what is current so we don't step out of bounds. Even what we said or did in the past can become a liability. Two obvious results come to mind, 1) we keep a low profile to prevent being targeted, and 2) we lose any distinction between right and wrong.

2. Cultural standards don't necessarily reflect God's standards

Why do Christians sometimes prefer cultural standards instead of God's standards?

Many believers don't know God's standards so they have no problem with what culture dictates. Some may disagree with God's standards which places them in judgment of God. Still others who know God's standards succumb to the pressure of culture and just want to get along and be liked.

What consequences might result from ignoring God's standards?

Ignoring God's standards separates you from any intimacy with God and testifies that you lack love for God ([John 14:21,23](#)). It may even result in discipline from God to correct your behavior and train you in righteousness ([Hebrews 12:4-11](#)).

3. Cultural influence generates group think.

Why do you think it's so easy to be deceived into conforming to cultural values?

"Go along to get along" is a phrase that describes our desire to part of the group, even if we have to set aside what we know to be right. We question ourselves and think that if the group is good with it then it must be alright.

Is this forbidden by spiritual authorities over me?	Rom 13:1-7; 1Pet 2:13-20
Will this thought or activity hinder my Christian progress?	Heb 12:1
Would the Bible define this thought or activity as sin?	Heb 12:1
Does this activity or thought have the potential to control me?	1Cor 6:12-20
Will this activity harm my body?	1Cor 6:12-20
Will this demonstrate my wisdom and fear of God?	Pr 12:8

Human Reason

2. Our ability to reason is hindered by the effects of sin.

Read Ephesians 4:17-18. How does hardness of heart product ignorance?

Hardness of heart disallows any consideration of spiritual things. Such a person is unresponsive to any spiritual input from others or to the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, because of their ignorance they are unable to see the world as it really is.

Read Romans 1:18. Why would anyone suppress the truth deliberately?

We see this a lot in our culture today. Sometimes the truth isn't convenient for them; it doesn't fit the narrative they want to spread. Sometimes they simply disagree with the truth or don't want to believe it because it would interfere with what they want.

3. Our ability to reason is hindered by a lack of understanding.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:12. Explain how false confidence can lead to bad decisions.

Relying on self instead of seeking guidance from God limits your options and perception to what you think you know. False confidence blinds us from obstacles and opportunities. God knows more than we do and knows the consequences of each choice so He is in a good position to give us guidance. False confidence demonstrates pride and a lack of wisdom which can take us to places we don't want to go.

Read Galatians 6:3. Explain how self-deception can lead to bad decisions.

Self-deception is actually part of false confidence. Instead of relying on wisdom and understanding we dismiss the direction we know to be right in favor of the direction we want. This is a recipe for trouble.

4. We should seek understanding and the renewal of our mind.

Read Romans 12:2. Why would conformance to the will of God result in better decisions than being conformed to the world?

Does the world know what's best for us or does God? God knows better than we do and has provided His word to give us understanding. His instructions are for our good and teach us what we need to know to live a positive and productive life. Conforming to the changing world takes us to consequences that can be emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually troubling.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How does righteousness result in good decisions?

Acting righteously implies consistency with God's commands and character. Decisions made on that basis would be considered good. We know that God hears the prayers of the righteous when seeking guidance and direction (*1Peter 3:12*). Acting righteously guards us from bad decisions (*Proverbs 11:5-9*).

Read Psalm 119:104. How does understanding enable us to make good decisions?

Understanding enables us to see through falsehood and make right choices.

5. We should rely on God's instruction and direction.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Why is it hard to follow God's leading when we disagree?

Our pride keeps us from believing we're wrong. Humility accepts God's direction even when we don't understand or agree. Over time we learn to trust God realizing He is always right. When we go our own way it usually leads to problems.

Making decisions according to the Spirit's direction

Read Ephesians 5:15-18. Explain how wisdom is related to being controlled by the Spirit.

Wisdom seeks God's will. Such knowledge and direction come from the Holy Spirit. Allowing ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit is an act of faith and of wisdom. Rejecting the Spirit's control is unwise.

Read Galatians 5:16-17. Explain how emotional desires and feelings can be contrary to God's direction.

Emotions and feelings are real and shouldn't be ignored. Rather, they should be evaluated in the light of what is true. Then our decisions and actions can be consistent with God's direction. Without evaluation our emotions and feelings can lead us in directions contrary to God's will.

Read Romans 8:5-8. Why is what we think about important?

It is said, "we are what we think." What we think about eventually results in our behavior. If we continually focus on negative emotions it will affect our disposition, rob us of joy and potentially harm our relationships. On the other hand, focusing on spiritual things brightens our disposition and brings us joy even when going through difficult times.

Life Purpose

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. Is there any room here for personal glory? Explain

No. Our lives on earth are to bring glory to God. When we arrive in heaven we will share in His glory (*2Thessalonians 2:14*).

Will participating in this activity demonstrate the character of God?	Matt 5:16
Will participating in this activity cause non-believers to dislike God?	Matt 5:16
Can I do this in Christ's name as His ambassador?	Col 3:17
Would Christ do this?	Col 3:17