

How Do I Know?

A Simple Approach to Complex Decisions

SESSION 1: CONFRONTING YOUR DECISIONS

Opener

What do you do when you're staring a decision right in the face?

The goal of this study is to give you a filter to process daily decisions, including the big decisions you will face throughout your life.

Make it personal: What is a decision you are facing right now?

Digging Deeper

Read Psalm 46:1.

Why can we have confidence in bringing our full and real selves to God, including our struggles with decisions?

The first part of the filter that we will focus on is: **TURN TO THE WORD.**

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-4.

Even though these words were written many years ago, what sounds familiar about them?

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

What has been your experience with the Bible?

Did anyone teach you the Bible, or was that not a part of your background?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

What have been some of your struggles/obstacles in regularly turning to the Word of God?

Why are these verses so critical in trusting the Bible to be true?

Now look at the following passages.

What does each of them teach us about God's Word and God's action in that Word?

2 Peter 1:20-21

Isaiah 55:11

"I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20b

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33b

Read Acts 17:10-12.

What is noteworthy about how the Bereans respond to Paul?

What can we learn from their practice?



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Putting into Practice

“We must know the Scriptures first and foremost for the sake of our salvation. But besides this, there are ample reasons that make this requirement exceedingly urgent. How, for example, shall we ever attain certainty and confidence in our personal and church activity if we do not stand on solid Biblical ground? It is not our heart that determines our course, but God’s Word. But who in their day has any proper understanding of the need for scriptural proof?” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 54-55

Read John 8:32.

Why is it so important to know the truth?

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SESSION 2: CONNECTING THROUGH THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

Opener

Invite everyone to think about these questions for two minutes: Who was your childhood best friend, and what did you enjoy doing together?

Now consider the benefits of making a decision on your own (without asking friends, parents, youth leaders, teachers, coaches, etc.). What are some of the benefits?

Digging Deeper

The second part of the filter is: **REFLECT WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE.**

Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

What is the “confession of our hope?” If you need help, look at Hebrews 3:1.

Why is encouragement from others so important?

How important is “meeting together,” in your opinion?

Read the following quote, and discuss this question:

When have you helped someone by speaking the Word to them? When has someone helped you by speaking the Word to you?

“The more we learn to allow others to speak the Word to us, to accept humbly and gratefully even severe reproaches and admonitions, the more free and objective will we be in speaking ourselves... But the humble person will stick both to truth and to love. He will stick to the Word of God and let it lead him to his brother. Because he seeks nothing for himself and has no fears for himself, he can help his brother through the Word.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 106-107

Read Proverbs 15:22. This is a **MUST MEMORIZE** verse. Type it into your phone, write it on your bathroom mirror, and say it aloud a lot.

When have you seen this to be true in your life?

When have you ignored the wisdom of this proverb, and suffered negatively because of it?

The third part of the filter, but equally important in this connecting process, is: **UNPACK YOUR MOTIVES.** Read Psalm 119:9-11. The Psalmist asks a really **REAL** and honest question in verse 9.

How does the answer to the question enable a believer to live a God-pleasing life?

WHAT ABOUT REALLY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES?

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

What are the most important words in those verses?

Why is it important not to try and understand God based on circumstances, but rather on the reality of the empty cross and Christ’s sitting at God’s right hand?

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Read Romans 8:31.

How do Paul's questions help believers to think about their response to God's work of salvation for them?

Now read Romans 8:34-39.

What happens when we view life through the cross of Christ?

Putting into Practice

Are you reflecting with the right people?

Are you in the right places to know those people?

Who are those right people in your life?

When you listed those "right people," were you able to include 5 people?

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SESSION 3: CONTEMPLATING BEFORE COURAGEOUSLY STEPPING OUT

Opener

As a group, play a game of “This or That.”

Digging Deeper

The fourth part of the filter is: **SOAK IT IN PRAYER**. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4.

What needs of others are on your heart today? Hit “pause” on this Bible study and take them to the Lord in prayer.

Now read Nehemiah’s prayer in 1:5-11.

What is significant about the way Nehemiah begins his prayer? Where is his focus?

Read Nehemiah 4:7-9.

In addition to prayer, what else did they do? Why is it important to pray AND keep living as God calls?

Read Philippians 4:4-7. We are invited to speak with God at His invitation.

What are some of your prayer practices?

What are some of your greatest obstacles to a consistent prayer life?

Who in your life models a consistent practice of prayer?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Notice that these words are near the end of Paul’s letter.

How does prayer also connect to gratitude?

The Explanation of the Small Catechism asks a series of questions and then answers them. Those are especially helpful here:

What should be the content of our prayers?

In our prayers we should ask for everything that tends to the glory of God and to our own and our neighbor’s welfare, both spiritual and bodily blessings. We should also praise and thank God for who He is and what He has done.

Read Psalm 136:1.

Why should we give thanks to the Lord?

How does God answer prayer?

God hears the prayers of all Christians and answers in His own way and at His own time.

What is comforting about this, and what is challenging about it?

Some people struggle with “how” to pray. Thankfully, Jesus gave us the Lord’s Prayer. Read Matthew 6:9-13.

How do the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer provide a helpful outline to keep us focused in our prayers?

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These models or outlines might also be helpful to you, especially if you struggle with knowing what to say or how to say it. Remember, God is inviting you to speak, and He promises to listen!

ACTS Model of Prayer

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication

PRAY Model of Prayer

- Praise
- Repent
- Ask
- Yield

TACOS Model of Prayer - who doesn't love tacos?

- Thanksgiving
- Adoration
- Confession
- Others
- Self

Collect Model of Prayer

Address: Addressing God, "Gracious God our heavenly Father..."

Ascription: The "Who" statement, "Who lifted up Your Son to Your right hand..."

Petition: The "Grant" statement (or whatever), "Direct our minds to things above..."

Purpose: The "so that" statement, "so that we may ever be anchored where true joys are to be found..."

Doxology: "Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Putting into Practice

For many of us, the practice of prayer sounds great in theory, but is hard in reality.

"I don't know what to say."

"It feels weird to talk to someone I can't see."

"How can I be sure He is listening, or even cares?"

The Psalms are a prayer book. As you put into practice and take a next step from this study, PRAY Psalm 46. That's right. Put your Bible in front of you, slow down, read slowly, and even pause between lines. When you get to the end of verse 11, before saying "Amen," add other prayer requests, personal concerns, needs of others, or words of thanksgiving.

You may also do the same with other Psalms, especially Psalms 8, 13, 51, 95, 100, and 121.

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SESSION 4: CONTENT IN YOUR IDENTITY

Opener

As a group, play an “Unpopular Opinions” game. Divide into groups, and then each group must convince another of their unpopular opinion. Here are some popular “unpopular opinions,” but feel free to also come up with your own.

- Pineapple on pizza
- Winter is the best season
- Milk in the bowl first, then cereal
- Puzzles are fun

Digging Deeper

The fifth and final part of the filter is: **TAKE A STEP OF FAITH.**

Read Galatians 5:16-25.

How does a believer in Jesus Christ walk by the Spirit?

Hint: in the original language of the New Testament, Greek, “walk” means to “be in line with” or “keep in step with.”

What is challenging when the desires of the flesh are involved?

Write down the fruit of the Spirit, found in verses 22-23. Look at your study Bible or find a good commentary.

Why is it important NOT to understand this list as a check list or a long list of things to do?

Read verse 25.

After everything we have studied over these past weeks, what does it look like to “live by the Spirit?”

Read Psalm 40:1-3.

When have you felt like you have waited patiently for the Lord?

What new song can God put into our mouth?

Remember this statement: Every decision is an opportunity to TRUST in Christ alone.

The theme of the 2019 National Youth Gathering was Real. Present. God.

In your decision making, why is it important to be REAL?

In your decision making, where is God present?

In your decision making, what do you know about God?

Go back to Galatians 5:25.

What confidence do baptized believers have regarding the Holy Spirit?

As you TAKE A STEP OF FAITH, be content in your identity.

You are loved.

You are valued.

You are who HE says you are.

Rest in the assurance of your identity in Christ, even when the results of your decision may not go as planned. God is far bigger and stronger and far more personal that we’ve ever dreamed of. God is all powerful and all personal and this God is for us in Jesus.

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Putting into Practice

What is a decision you are facing right now? Write it down

Now, walk through the filter we have studied these past weeks:

TURN TO THE WORD

REFLECT WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

UNPACK YOUR MOTIVES

SOAK IT IN PRAYER

TAKE A STEP OF FAITH

If you're comfortable, share with others in your group, or share with your leader, how you used the filter to help you with a decision you are facing right now.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalm 46:1

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" Psalm 46:10