

8

DECISION-MAKING IS NOT ABOUT YOU

A SURVEY WAS MADE BY *MSN Sidewalk Online Guide* about decision-making in the family. They discovered that Americans make an average of 73 decisions each day regarding work, purchases, home, and family. Men are more driven by technical, automotive, and career decisions. Women influence household matters, travel, family, and entertainment.

I wonder what this survey would look like if it were conducted with ministers and their families. In fact, I would be very curious to see what it would look like with ministers alone concerning their decision-making in their churches. I guarantee the results would be very interesting and the number of decisions made daily would escalate dramatically over the other survey.

The challenge of decision-making in ministry is the influence of the rising tides that surround us. We are pressured to make decisions due to specific situations. The persuasive argument is to make it relative to where you are in a given situation. We are pressured to make decisions due to our feelings. The pressure

comes at this point both externally and internally, calling us to “feel” our way in decision-making. We are pressured to make decisions that will lead to the greatest results. Special interest groups within our churches push and shove us, attempting to intimidate us into getting involved in every issue that comes down the pipeline, all in the name of obtaining their own desired results pertaining to the issue at hand.

TWO FACTS

As ministers, we can get ourselves into some real trouble when we make our decisions in ministry based upon situations, feelings, or even desired results. There are two facts about decision-making in ministry that I want to share with you.

#1: Decision-making in ministry will only be right, consistent, and best when the decisions are made upon the basis of the authority of Scripture, God’s Word, the Bible.

As ministers, we must be compelled to make decisions that are right, consistent, and best for everyone involved. Therefore, situations, feelings, and desired results cannot be the criteria. Decisions can only be right, consistent, and best when they are decisions that God desires.

These decisions must be based upon Scripture. A minister forfeits his right to make decisions based upon anything other than the authority of Scripture or by its principles for decision-making.

#2: Decision-making in ministry will only be harmonious when a common authority is agreed upon. This authority must be the Bible.

Decision-making cannot be driven by the will of a church member, a staff member, or even a pastor. Decision-making in ministry has to be driven by a common authority, which is Holy Scripture. When a church determines that Scripture will

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be the ultimate criteria for their decision-making, they set themselves up to be in agreement. They desire to do the will of God by the Word of God.

While situations, feelings, and desired results will be considered with great sensitivity and wisdom, our ultimate guiding star in decision-making must be the Bible. This is the map we must travel by in ministry and church life. If we do not follow Scripture as our ultimate guide, we will see some trouble along the way. However, if you want God on your side, you had better ensure you are on God's side. I would rather go down doing it God's way with His leadership, than go down trying to please or accommodate others and at the same time displease God.

It is very difficult to navigate your way through decision-making in ministry. Permitting the Bible to guide you will give

you greater clarity in most areas. Moral, social, and many ministry decisions are somewhat easy and clear for us in the Bible. However, the challenges come in those day-to-day decisions in ministry in regards to calendar, budgeting, schedule, or even personnel. These may not always be found in the Bible with a chapter and verse, and principles may not pertain specifically to some of them.

THIS I KNOW

There is one thing I know with great conviction and passion concerning decision-making in the church: *Decision-making is not about you.* I believe it is imperative for a minister to believe this about making decisions in his ministry. If he does not, then wars and rumors of wars will occur continually.

Jesus has called us to be servant-leaders, not selfish-leaders. Jesus has called us to be willing to lay our lives down, not to take our lives up. We are called to sacrifice and death, not rights and declarations.

I want to ask you to always remember this: *Decision-making is not about you.* As you keep this in your heart, it will assist you and your church in various decisions that need to be made. As this becomes your passion and conviction, it helps as you evaluate and work through the matrix for decision-making in ministry.

THE MATRIX

Decisions about personnel, calendar, schedule,

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budgeting, and some other things need to be processed. If the Bible does not speak to them with chapter and verse, what do you follow? Is there a matrix to follow in church or ministry decision-making? Is there anything that could make some of these “delicate decisions” easier? For several years, I have believed there is a matrix, form, mold, or grid to follow. Let me introduce to you the key and sequential questions to ask in the matrix for ministry decision-making. The order is significant and cannot be ignored.

Q 1: What is best for the church?

There are so many battles and skirmishes that could be eliminated if this first question was answered unselfishly and honestly. Since decision-making is not about you and since a local church or ministry employs you, this question should drive your decision-making. Jesus wants what is best for His church.

Best is determined by what is biblical and long term, not by what is personal and short term. Refuse to let the pressure of others or the delicate nature of the situation drive you away from what is best for the church.

The church needs to be protected from knowing all, but at times the church needs to be informed. Pertaining to matters of church discipline, this can become quite delicate, yet we have practiced church discipline at various levels with members and employees alike. We have even gone to the church on a Sunday morning to deal with an individual publicly. No, it was not easy, but the decision was made because we felt that in the long term, it was best for the church. Of course, church discipline

at various levels is also biblical. The intention must be both to correct and to restore.

Concerning matters like budgeting, scheduling, personnel, and other similar things, this question should drive the decision process. What is best for the church is rather clear on most of these kinds of issues, unless silo thinking is occurring.

Silo thinking is when you contain your thinking in a particular cylinder of ministry. For example, if you believe God is leading you to do a financial campaign over a 60-day period of time, then having a major musical or pageant at the same time would not be wise. Therefore, what is best for the church? You cannot and should not do everything. There is nothing wrong with the pageant, musical, or the financial campaign. Yet if you have sensed God's leadership because long-term growth will be influenced by the building you need to build with the monies you are raising, then the pageant or musical may not fit into the church schedule this year. It does not mean it is bad or wrong, but it may not be best for the church at this time.

Silo thinking on a church staff team is detrimental. Silo thinking by various ministries cannot be permitted to exist. Silo thinking will eventually create division and strife.

Every pastor and minister on a staff team needs to teach the church and all of the various ministries the importance of this matrix. The first question of the matrix is most pivotal of all: What is best for the church? If it is biblical it is an easy choice, really not even a choice at all, because it is best for the church. If it is big-picture thinking rather than silo thinking, it is best

for the church. If it is a long-term decision for the future of the church, it is better than a short-term, crowd-pleasing decision.

In the long term, the best for the church is always best for everyone associated with the church. A minister or lay person who cannot grasp the importance of this first question in the matrix will prove to be detrimental to the fellowship of the church.

Q 2: What is best for the office of the pastor?

If the decision has not been reached after the first matrix question has been addressed, then the next key question in the matrix is this: What is best for the office of the pastor? Why is this important? Is this not a little selfish? It is very important and not selfish at all.

The office of the pastor is the ministry office that serves the church. You will not find in the Bible the various staff minister titles we have today. This does not make them wrong, but it makes us ask, which are in the Bible? We know the pastor-teacher is a gift that operates the ministry of the local church. We know it has unique and distinct value. The Scripture esteems the office; therefore, we should esteem the office. Any staff member serves at the will of the pastor and is an extension of his calling as pastor-teacher of the church.

Let me make something very clear to you. I am not speaking of a particular or specific pastor; I am speaking of the office of the pastor. This is something much holier than a man.

In our nation, the office of the president is highly esteemed. While some presidents may be less popular with the American people than other presidents, this does not jeopardize the office

of the president. One of the unique ideals in American government is the distinct value of the office of the president. When the media or fellow governmental workers or the American people demean the president, the office becomes jeopardized to a degree. If anyone would ever demean the office itself, a coup could occur in the land. America must never permit the office of the president to ever lose its esteem in any way.

A pastor is not a president, and you cannot compare the office of the pastor with the office of the president. One is a governmental office while the other is a spiritual office. My point is simple: Anytime the office of the pastor is jeopardized, demeaned, or lowly esteemed, you are on the brink of disaster in your church. Again, this is not about a man, but an office.

The pastors, staff ministers, and lay members must always work to esteem the office of the pastor. Compromise in any way will only lead to an unhealthy church and poor decision-making.

The matrix for decision-making in ministry begins with: What is best for the church? It continues with the question: What is best for the office of the pastor? If the decision has made it through these two pivotal questions, it now comes to the third criteria in the matrix.

Q3: What is best for a specific ministry?

It may be best to use an illustration at this point of the matrix. Let's imagine that a student pastor desires his student camp to be moved this year to a different location and date. As he worked through the matrix with his supervisor, he knows where he has been going is just not best for the church. It was okay, but just

not best per location or calendar. Therefore, he is changing to do what is best for the church.

With a great spirit, he has led the way in this transition. As he has navigated it through the proper matrix questions, he knows what may be best for the church may not be best for his ministry. In fact, most of those who had attended camp loved the location and time. Yet each summer it was a strain because of geographic location making the expense too big a factor for the greatest number of students to attend.

He also knows that what is best for the church will prove to be best for the office of the pastor. Additionally, his pastor had asked him to prayerfully consider a possible transition without destroying his own student ministry.

Since the matrix was established and worked through by a Spirit-controlled student pastor who understands it, he is transitioning the location of his camp because it is best for the church, and his pastor had requested him to prayerfully consider it. The student pastor understands that what is best for the church and the office of the pastor is always best in the long term for the success of his ministry.

With this illustration, do you understand the matrix and how it works? I hope so, because if you have established this matrix and operate by it, you will be blessed and cover a multitude of sins in the process.

Q 4: What is best for you?

In my 30 years of serving as a pastor of a church, this question in the matrix is usually the first one in the minds of pastors,

staff ministers, and lay people. A “what is best for me” mindset destroys fellowship in the church every time it is exercised.

Ministry decision-making is not about you. It is about the Bible and what God says. It is about what is best for the church. It is about what is best for the office of the pastor. It is about what is best for your specific ministry. It is then about what is best for you.

When you return in your mind to the student pastor in the illustration I used a moment ago, perhaps the location for the camp or the new date was not his personal preference. Perhaps it was far away from his family or friends, yet he was willing to die to himself and his dreams.

THE OUTCOME

This kind of humble spirit honors God. It also endears others to you. Trust me, it always comes back greater to you later when you exercise godliness before others.

Thank God for men and women of God and ministries of a church that understand and operate by this ministry matrix for decision-making. Is it that important? Yes, it is!

This kind of matrix, when established and followed, will result in church health which leads to church growth. Relationships are lost on this altar more times than you can imagine. It is senseless, even satanic.

We need to take the high road. If we desire the anointing of God upon our own lives as ministers and upon our church,

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we cannot sacrifice it on the altar of decision-making. One day, when it is all said and done, many of these things will really not matter at all.

You can go through the proper decision-making grid in life and have both positive and negative outcomes. Of course, we love the ones that end in the positive column. It is difficult to talk about the ones that conclude in the negative column.

When I walked through my first 40-day time of fasting and prayer, that was a decision that was not easy to make nor a decision understood easily by others when I was forced to explain. A few misunderstood it, but most were intrigued by it. In 1995, this was not regarded in the norm of the Christian life nor in the life of the leader. Yet, the result was God-sized. The work of Christ within me was revolutionary. The work of Christ through our church was God-sized. To this day, the work of Christ through my life and our church is a result of that decision to enter those days in fasting and praying. Without question, it was a defining moment for all those connected to me and this ministry.

At the same time, I have gone through the exact spiritual grid and been convinced something is right under God, but the outcome would be credited to the negative column. Was the decision right? Yes. Just because you do what God wants you to do, it does not mean you will always win or succeed. Remember, *obedience is greater than sacrifice*. At times, the sacrifice may be your obedience.

When I wrote the book *The Gay Agenda*, I did it with the right heart, at the right time, and in the right way. Yet in spite

of those things being done right, I am criticized to this day for standing in favor of the biblical model of marriage between a man and a woman. The book served as a spiritual and moral compass at a time in this culture when even the church cannot navigate its way with clarity. While a few may have desired for me not to have spoken to the issue, I wrote the book holding the truth of God in one hand and the love of God in the other hand. It was written with compassion, after much sacrificial research and study. Compassion reigned in the book, sharing about how our own church ministers to those struggling in the gay lifestyle. I believe that what we discerned God led us to do was credited by God and His people who love the Bible and all people as positive, but to a few it has been regarded as negative.

What is the lesson you learn from this? You can do what God wants, when God wants it, and in the way God wants it, but the result may not always be perceived as positive by people. In fact, read the 11th chapter of Hebrews again or look at the life of Paul, or even Jesus himself. As a minister, remember, your audience is one . . . God himself. More than anything in life, we want to be in His positive column. The outcomes are in His hands.

Remember: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths”* (Prov. 3:5–6).