

I. Read II Corinthians 1:15-20

- A. In this passage the Apostle Paul is attempting to explain to the Corinthians why his plans had changed. In the *Reformation Study Bible* note on verse 17, regarding the phrase “according to the flesh,” we read:

“Such plans would be unreliable, vacillating, and unpredictable. Opponents were discrediting the apostle by charging that his change in plans showed weakness of character and lack of integrity. They did not have all the facts, however, and were using these circumstances to attack someone they had already condemned.”

It is significant that even Paul did not know what the future held, thus he had to change his plans to suit changing circumstances at times. Read Acts 18:21 and discuss how Paul’s comment reflects this approach.

Paul wanted to return to Ephesus, yet it was more important to him to follow the will of God. At a deeper level, Paul was acknowledging that God’s will will be done ultimately, whatever our intent.

- B. Is it a good idea to make plans for the future, given the fact that you don’t know what the future holds? (See Proverbs 16:9; 20:18.)
Yes, of course. In fact, failure to plan ahead is irresponsible and reflects poor stewardship.

- C. Read the following verses and comment on how they reflect Paul’s perspective. Romans 1:10; 15:32; I Corinthians 4:19; 16:7.
They each reflect Paul’s conviction that Christians should seek to be in God’s will. Additionally, he is affirming that God’s will must finally come to pass, regardless of our choices.

- D. J. I. Packer writes in his helpful pamphlet, *Guidance and Wisdom*, that the “basic mistake” most believers make regarding the seeking of God’s will and guidance is “to think of guidance as essentially an *inward prompting by the Holy Spirit*, apart from the *written Word*.” Those making this sort of error often expect God to tell them which job to choose, where to live, who to marry, etc. These sorts of “vocational” choices, Packer explains, are not resolved through either inner voices or direct application of specific passages of Scripture, but through rational choices made within the *parameters* (God’s law and moral principles) of Scripture. Give an example of how the *parameters* of Scripture might be helpful in one of the decisions listed above. (Read II Corinthians 6:14-18.)
The II Corinthians passage makes it clear that a believer should not marry an unbeliever, though it does *not* make clear which specific person we are to marry.

- E. Read Romans 8:14 and discuss whether or not this refers to an *inner voice* or something else.
It is reference to the mortification of the flesh or the subduing of sinful desires, which results from being indwelt by the Spirit of God. In other words, those who have the Spirit of God will be *compelled* toward righteousness rather than sinfulness. This *compelling* is the meaning of “being led by the Spirit of God” (NAS). The *Reformed Study Bible* explains:

“This way of holiness is now further described as the leading of the Spirit and is specified as the mark of god’s sons. The language of “leading” is reminiscent of the “adoption” and leading of Israel in the Exodus and wilderness, which may be the background to Paul’s thought here.”

F. Packer gives six reasons why believers often become stalled when faced with important life decisions. Read the following Scripture verses, which support his six reasons, and try to list them. The first answer is provided to help you get started. Each will be prefaced with “An unwillingness to...”

1. Deut. 32:29(a)

An unwillingness to *think*. (“that they understand” [consider]) **Sometimes Christians are just too lazy to analyze a situation. They would rather God give them a special message of some kind.**

2. Deut. 32:29(b)

An unwillingness to *think ahead*. (“their future” [latter end]) **Christians should be good stewards, anticipating the future and thoughtfully planning and preparing for it.**

3. Proverbs 12:15

An unwillingness to *take advice*. (“listens to counsel”)

4. Jeremiah 17:9

An unwillingness to *suspect oneself*. **Anyone can deceive himself into believing a certain course of action is best.**

5. Philippians 3:2-6; 2 Timothy 3:5-9

An unwillingness to *discount personal magnetism*. **(Listening to advice of influential folks without discernment)**

6. Isaiah 40:31

An unwillingness to *wait*.

G. The Scriptures speak often of wisdom. What do Proverbs 3:7, 13 say about wisdom?
We should seek, hear, and receive wisdom, which God provides through His Word.

There are at least two prerequisites to receiving wisdom from God. What are they? (Read Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 2:13)

1. We must reverence God.

2. We must receive His Word.

H. What important truth helps believers face difficult decisions and the consequences of the poor choices they may make? (Romans 8:28)

God uses all circumstances, good and bad, to make us what He wants us to be. Even bad decisions can work for good ultimately. This should give believers the courage to make a decision and pursue a course of action, even in the face of doubt.

I. How does Paul’s willingness to change his mind about where and when he ministers illustrate the proper attitude toward the decisions all men face in life?

He had the humility to admit when he had been wrong and the wisdom to change his plan when a new course of action was warranted.

J. Think of a circumstance in your life which forced you to make a difficult choice, perhaps even suffering some sort of loss, as you purposed to obey God’s Word no matter the consequences.

*** Requires a personal testimony.**