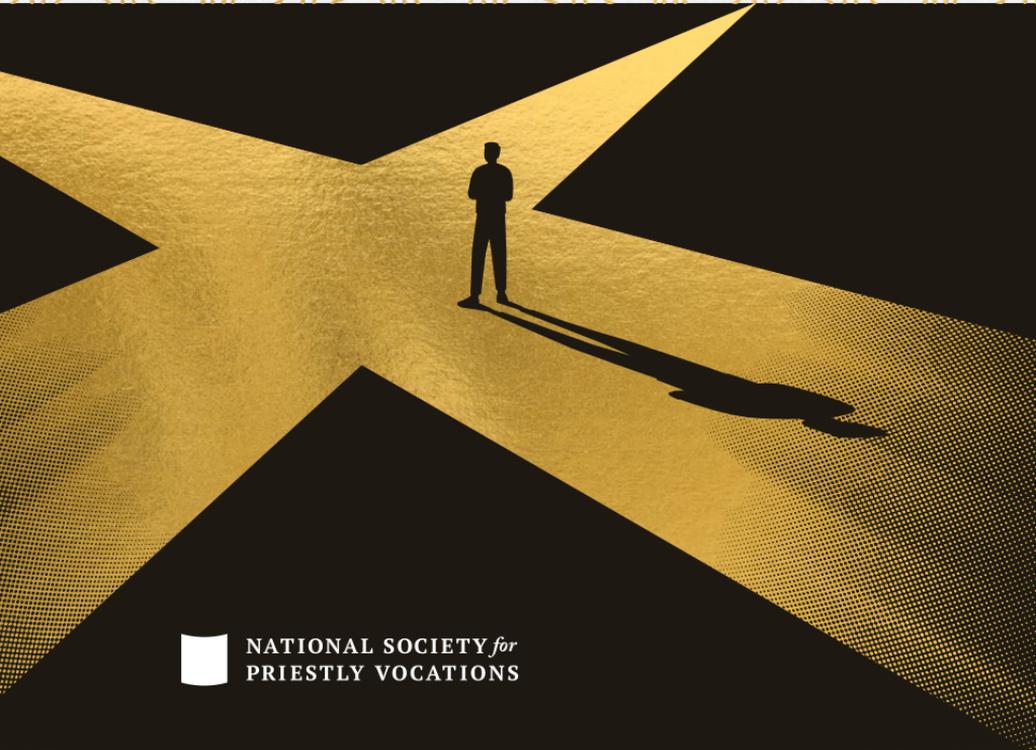


The Catholic Guide to
**PRAYERFUL
DECISION
MAKING**



NATIONAL SOCIETY *for*
PRIESTLY VOCATIONS



The Catholic Guide to

PRAYERFUL DECISION MAKING



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**LIFE IS
FULL OF
DECISIONS**

A husband and wife had a little game they liked to play whenever either of them was having trouble making a decision.

Let's say they were out to dinner, and the husband couldn't decide between two entrees. The husband would ask the wife to choose for him between a couple options. But here's the catch: It didn't really matter which option she picked. Because once she chose, the husband would know what he really wanted.

Sometimes she'd pick and he'd think, *Oh that sounds good!*
Sometimes she'd pick and he'd think, *Shucks, I really wanted the other thing!*
Either way, he'd always know what he really wanted and it would order it!

Wouldn't it be nice if all your decisions had the same degree of consequence as your food order? Wouldn't it be nice if the only factor that mattered was figuring out what you really wanted?

But life isn't like that. Real choices — the big stuff — take a lot more out of you.

Where should I go to school?

What should I do with my life?

Should I ask her to marry me?

Where should I send my kids to school?

Should I buy this new car or that new couch?

Should I take this new job and relocate?

Should I stay home with my kids or send them to daycare?

Is it the right time to have a kid?

The list goes on. These choices have real consequences. There's a lot at stake. What you want might only be one of many factors — if it's even a factor at all!

Making decisions is hard. It's complicated. Without a plan, it can go horribly wrong.

Some people's plan for making decisions resembles shaking a magic eight ball. Wonder about what they should do, shake vigorously, and hope everything works out. Some people just choose whatever feels right at any given moment. Some people just procrastinate until they only have one option left.

The truth is, in the end, only one thing matters when it comes to decisionmaking:

What does God want you to do?

If you're doing what God wants you to do, the rest will take care of itself. This book promises to share a tested process for inviting God into your decision making, asking what He wants you to do, listening, discerning, and acting.

This guide to prayerful decision making is written so you can read one chapter a day. It's a step-by-step guide. Each chapter explains the next step and gives you a homework assignment to complete.

But maybe you don't have a few days. Maybe you only have a couple hours. That's fine. Fly through the guide, do what you can, adjust it to your needs, and do your best. If you have four days, adapt it to four. It's your guide.

In the end, there is really one thing we're all really looking for when it comes to making decisions:

Peace and hope.

**“FOR I KNOW WELL
THE PLANS I HAVE
IN MIND FOR YOU ...
PLANS FOR YOUR
WELFARE AND NOT
FOR WOE, SO AS TO
GIVE YOU A FUTURE
OF HOPE”**

JEREMIAH 29:11







Step 1:

OPEN YOUR MIND TO GOD

A farmer lost his watch while baling hay in his barn. After searching unsuccessfully for a while, he recruited his kids to come help him.

They searched for over an hour with no luck. The kids lost interest and the farmer began leading them out of the barn. His seven-year-old asked if he could take one more look and ran back inside alone. A minute later, the boy came out holding the watch.

Amazed, the farmer looked at his son and asked, “How’d you find it?”

“It was easy,” the boy said. “Once everyone else left all I had to do was sit and listen for the ticking.”

The great poverty of the modern age is as obvious as it is unrecognized: silence. Our world isn’t descending into chaos. It’s descending into noise. It’s a diabolical plan. Diabolical in its simplicity.

Fill the world with noise so people can no longer hear God.

Have you ever heard a child ask for their parent's attention by saying their name over and over again — no matter what their parents are doing — until they finally respond? Sometimes the child is saying, “mom, mom, mom, mom...” so feverishly the mother doesn't even have a chance to answer them!

Prayer can be like that.

We say God's name over and over, pouring on more lavish titles with each rephrasing. We speak so much, explain so much, and emphasize so much. And don't forget we tell God a whole lot about how much we love Him.

Do you think God ever wonders when we will be quiet so He can answer us?

Just like any other child, we speak so much that God doesn't have a chance to give us what we need.

Later we think, “I just don't know how to pray the right way I guess.”

Here's another way:

1. Find a space for silence and solitude. Bring nothing with you.
2. Decide how long you will spend in silent prayer.
3. Set a timer on your phone, then set it aside. Keep it close enough that you'll hear the alarm, but outside of arm's reach and out of eyesight. It's also good to activate a "do not disturb" mode on your phone if that's an option
4. Open your prayer with the simplest of prompts. "Lord, I'm here today to hear what you think about X situation or to learn what you would like me to do about Y situation." You don't need to make it any more complicated.
5. Sit in total silence. Try not to move a muscle. Be still.
6. Your mind will wander. That's fine. When you catch it wandering, focus on your breathing to bring you back to a listening state. In for four seconds, out for four seconds. Over and over.
7. When the timer goes off, close your prayer however you'd like.

That's it. That's all you have to do. Just make sure you do it over and over again.

You've heard Luke 11:9,

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

But have you ever paid attention to Luke 11:8?

Jesus tells a short story of a man who receives unexpected guests late one night, so he goes to his neighbor to ask him for bread to offer to his guests. The neighbor tells him to go away because it's late. Then comes Luke 11:8, “I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.”

The Gospel is beautiful and practical. The lesson is pretty simple:

Sometimes the only way to get an answer to your prayer is to keep knocking.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

A quick word about the homework: Don't skip it. It's here to help you process the point, put it into practice, and slow you down.

Proverbs 21:5 says, "The plans of the diligent end in profit, but those of the hasty end in loss."

Right now, figure out a time and a place to pray, especially about your decision.

Time:

Place:

Now that you have figured it out, set an alarm for that time, create a calendar event and put it on your phone or online calendar, write it down in your planner, and put a reminder on your fridge. If you miss your appointment you won't get your prayer in, and if you don't get your prayer in, you won't be able to make a prayerful decision.

Plan to repeat this time of prayer daily until your decision is made.





Step 2:

**IMAGINE THE
POSSIBILITIES**

Do you hear the voice of God?

There was a time when man thought sickness was an omen and sunshine was a blessing. A time when people saw God at work in the world around them and interpreted their dreams as signs. A time when people didn't wonder whether or not God was speaking to them, but whether or not they'd be able to hear and understand what He was saying.

This booklet is called *The Catholic Guide to Prayerful Decision Making*, but it could have another title. It could be called *The Practical Guide for Hearing the Voice of God*.

There is only one prerequisite for hearing the voice of God:

Dreaming.

**If you want to hear the voice of God,
you have to dream.**

Look at the Bible:

God told Abraham in a dream that he would have a son and be the father of God's chosen people (*Genesis 15:1*).

God gave Jacob his dream of angels traveling between heaven and earth on a ladder (*Genesis 28:10-17*).

An entire Broadway musical was written about the Bible's most famous dreamer (*Genesis 37:1-11*).

God called Samuel over and over in his dreams (*1 Samuel 3*).

Solomon received his wisdom through a dream (*1 Kings 3:5*).

God told Zachariah about his future son, John the Baptist, in a dream (*Luke 1:5-23*).

God helped Joseph understand His plan for Jesus to be born to Mary through a dream. He later told Joseph in a dream to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt; then in another dream He told Joseph when it was OK for him to come back (*Matthew 1:20*).

God spoke to Pilate's wife in a dream and she tried to tell her husband to free Jesus—but Pilate didn't listen to her. (*Matthew 27:19*).

Ananias only allowed Paul—you know, that guy who was more widely known as Saul and was attempting Christian genocide—to enter his home because God told him to in a dream (*Acts 9:10*).

God speaks through dreams. And—before you think taking a nap is a critical step in your decisionmaking process— you should also note that there are even more examples of God speaking through the dreams we have while we are awake. The ones we normally call VISIONS.

God speaks through dreams. God speaks to people through visions. We can't say why, "For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?" (Romans 11:34). But here might be a reason:

God's a lot bigger than us.

"Lo, these are but the outlines of his ways, and what a whisper of a word we hear of him: Who can comprehend the thunder of his power?" (Job 26:14).

There's God's great vision, and then there's our meager ideas.

The young man discerning whether or not to ask the girl to marry him might ask:

*Am I attracted to her?
Are we compatible?
Do we have a life plan together?
Are we happy together?*

Yeah, OK, that's fine.

But imagine starting from God's great vision for marriage: a man and a woman joined together for life and helping each other get to heaven.

How different do the questions look now?

*What's our prayer together like?
Does she encourage me in my faith habits?
Does she help me to be a better man?
Will she hold me accountable when I'm off course?*

Whatever you're facing, take some time to get back to God's vision. Take some time to really dream.

Because God speaks through dreams.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

Take some time, apart from your time of silence and listening, to write down, in the simplest language possible, the decision you are trying to make:



What area of life does this decision fall into? (i.e. marriage, raising children, work and career, and so on.)



What is God's dream and purpose for that area of your life?



Jesus said, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (*John 10:10*). What would it look like if you had total abundance through this decision?







Step 3:

ESTABLISH YOUR PRIORITIES



One of the toughest parts of making any decision isn't deciding what to say yes to, it's deciding what to say no to.

The wise know: you can't do everything. You can try, but you will fail. Success is not an option in this arena. And, in the grand scheme of things, saying yes is easy. It's saying no that's hard.

The thing is, with all these big life decisions you are never deciding between good stuff and bad stuff. It's not like you are deciding about stuff that is unimportant.

The choices you are struggling with—the choices that keep you up at night—the things that you waffle back and forth over for days and weeks, that occupy your mind and distract you and torment you, they are always choices between two (or more) good things that are really important!

When you struggle to make a decision about something that's unimportant, you're just being indecisive. You don't need to prayerfully consider what Netflix show to watch tonight.

When you struggle to make a choice between a good and an evil, you're just being tempted. You need grace, not prayerful decision making.

It's all those other important and difficult choices that require prayerful decision making.

Enter Step 3: Establish Your Priorities

First off, take your time. Urgency is always a sales tactic, and in God's economy it's the devil's attempt to take God out of your decision.

Remember the story of the raising of Lazarus? Jesus meandered around for days after he was told his friend was dying. By the time he arrived, Lazarus had already been dead for four days.

“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (*John 11:21*).

We all know how that story played out. Take your time.

Second, ask yourself this question:

Is this helpful or life-changing?

It's all important. Getting a new car is important. But choosing whether or not to take your family across the country to accept that new job? That's life changing. Get clear on the difference.

Last, get really clear about the fact that there is a big difference between doing the right things and doing things right.

Efficiency is doing things right.

Effectiveness is doing the right things.

Focus your attention on the matters in life that are life-changing. Focus on doing the right things.

You might need to sacrifice the helpful. You might have to sacrifice doing things right. But if you want to make great decisions, you might have to take a risk, trust, make a leap of faith, take your time, or make a sacrifice.

The old song says nothing in life is free. That's a lie. Nothing good is free. It always takes at least a little bit of sacrifice.

So sacrifice the helpful and sacrifice doing things right in pursuit of something greater.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

This assignment is a little involved, but it will really help you establish your priorities.

Step 1. Start with an Our Father (it might be a good idea to emphasize the phrase “THY Kingdom come, THY will be done”).

Step 2. Ask God to help you see what is really important.

Step 3. List all the relevant factors of your decisions.

Let's pretend you are trying to decide whether or not to relocate for a new job.

Factors:

More money

Career advancement

Getting a new house

Better weather

Being near friends and family

Step 4. One at a time, choose which factor is most important to you relative only to one other factor. Place a checkmark next to the winner.

Example:

More money vs. career advancement, more money vs. being near friends and family, more money vs. getting a

new house, more money vs. better weather. Then career advancement vs. being near friends and family, career advancement vs. getting a new house, and so on all the way down the line.

Step 5. Put each factor in order based on how many check marks it has next to it. If two have the same number of check marks, decide between those two which is the winner.

Step 6. Pray with that priorities list.

Step 7. Thank God for His wisdom and guidance and close with a Glory Be.





Step 4:

DO SOME RESEARCH

Everyone loves a good story. Whether it's a movie, a great book, a television show, or just sitting around the dinner table sharing life with friends or family, we all love to laugh, or have our hearts moved, or see good overcome evil.

And even though not everyone would say they are a great storyteller, everyone is great at telling themselves stories. In fact, most people can convince themselves of just about anything if they come up with the right story to tell.

What's the problem with this?

Proverbs 18:2 says,

“Fools take no delight in understanding, but only in displaying what they think.”

As humans we have a deep-seated ability to tell ourselves a story until we believe it wholeheartedly. But what if the story you're telling yourself is a lie?

Enter Step 4 in making your prayerful decision:
Do Some Research.

Proverbs 18:15 says,

“The heart of the intelligent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

How do we go about seeking knowledge to make sure the story we are telling ourselves is true? Here are five tools you need in your research toolbox to get the job done:

1. READ BOOKS.

Reading is to the soul like air is to the body. Search for articles, find the books those articles reference, or read suggested books off of Amazon on the topic.

2. MAKE A FACTS LIST.

Facts are not opinions. Consider the various factors involved in the choice you are trying to make, and list facts (not opinions) about the topic.

3. CONSULT AN EXPERT.

There are experts about just about anything. Even experts on prayerful decision making!

4. VISIT AND EXPERIENCE.

Whenever possible, gain experience. Visit the new school, drive through the new neighborhood, visit the office of the new job, and so on. Get in the weeds. See how it feels. You'll never regret a visit.

5. LOOK FOR REFERENCES AND CASE STUDIES.

Someone out there has made the decision you're trying to make. Guaranteed. Find someone else who has blazed the trail before you.

Research is the area where some people—not all people—cut corners. Emotions get the better of them. They start telling themselves a story based on what they think, rather than what they know.

But you're not going to be that person.

May the stories you tell yourself always be true!

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

Get a legal pad, a spiral notebook, whatever, and write the five research tools—one per page—at the top of five pages.

Then take the time—because research is good old hard work—and fill up those pages. You can decide when enough is enough in terms of how much you fill up, but shoot to get at least something written down on each page.

Let your research fill your stories with truth because, after all, Jesus did say, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (*John 14:6*).

MONDAY
MEETING
w/ KATI
@ 9AM

DON'T FORGET

CALL SARA
THIS

!

TUESDAY / 02

JANUARY 2018

WEDNESDAY / 03

THURSDAY

9:00 - 9:30
PICK UP
FROM
SANDRA

12:00 - 1:00
LUNCH
TEAM
MEETING

12PM - 2:PM
LUNCH W/
ALLY @
NOSH

3:00 - 5:00
DRINKS
SARAH +
RACHAEL

6:00 - 8:00
DRINKS W/
ALEXA @
CHARIBAR



Step 5:

RUN THE NUMBERS

Have you ever heard the story of Jephthah? If not, it's worth going over to Judges chapter 11 and reading the whole thing. It'll only take you five minutes. For now, here is a quick synopsis.

Judges 11:1 “Jephthah the Gileadite was a warrior...”

Jephthah led the Israelites into battle against the Ammonites because they were trying to take the Israelites' land. Before going into battle, Jephthah made this prayer:

“If you deliver the Ammonites into my power, whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return from the Ammonites in peace shall belong to the LORD. I shall offer him up as a burnt offering”

(Judges 11:30-31).

After inflicting a “very severe defeat” on the Ammonites, Jephthah returned home. And running out of his house — the first person out the door — was his daughter, his only child.

Jephthah tore his garments and told his daughter about the vow. To her credit, she told him he couldn't break the vow. In the end, “he did to her as he had vowed”

(Judges 11:39b).

It's not a very pleasant story. And the moral is probably pretty obvious:

Don't hastily make vows without considering the cost.

That's Step 5 in prayerful decision making: Run the Numbers.

And that doesn't just mean finances. There are four limited resources you should consider:

The first is energy. No matter how many espresso shots you add to your day, you can't get more energy.

The second is time. There are only 24 hours in a day.

The third is attention. Despite our obsession with multi-tasking, you only have so much attention to give.

The fourth is money. It's the crudest, but also unavoidable.

The wise man — or woman — treats all four of these limited resources in the same way: she invests them. Spend them now for a greater return down the road. The fool wastes them away.

Your decision is going to place demands on your time, energy, attention, and finances. The best decision will be an investment in the things that matter most (see Step 3). A poor decision will be a pure expenditure.

So ask yourself: *Is this an investment or an expenditure?*

Could doing something else cost you less?

Would you be ashamed of telling others how much of your time, energy, attention, or money you are spending on this decision? It says a lot if you don't want people to know how late you're working, or how many soccer games you're missing, or how much your mortgage payment is.

Time. Energy. Attention. Money. You only have so much. Spend them wisely.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

There are 168 hours in a week. How do you spend yours?

Take a look at this list:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Parenting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social life
<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical well-being
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spirituality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional well-being
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intellectual well-being
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marriage
<input type="checkbox"/>	Career
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>

Draw an arrow next to each category indicating if you think the amount of time, energy, and attention you can spend on each category will increase or decrease based on how you make your decision.

How many categories will improve? Are you OK with the areas that will suffer? Do they align with your priorities?



Every big decision costs something, but does it cost too much?







Step 6:

GET GOOD ADVICE



A young man was getting ready to go out with a girl for the first time and he was nervous he wouldn't have anything to talk about.

He went to his dad for advice. "My son, there are three subjects that always work with women. Ask about any one of them and they will open up and lead the conversation for the rest of the night."

"What are the subjects," the young man asked.

"Family, food, and philosophy," his father told him.

He picked up his date and they set off. By the time they were seated at the Italian restaurant where he had made reservations, an awkward silence blanketed their dinner table.

Remembering his dad's advice, the young man asked, "So, do you have any brothers?"

"No," his date told him. Then she took a sip of water.

Panicked, the young man looked around the restaurant and asked, "Ummm, do you like Italian food?"

"Actually, no," the girl replied.

Now he was starting to sweat.

“If you had a brother, do you think HE would like Italian food?”

Sometimes people don't like asking for advice, but scripture says asking for advice is a fairly good idea. Proverbs 12:15 says, “the way of fools is right in their own eyes, but those who listen to advice are the wise.”

Step 6 in making a prayerful decision: Get Good Advice.

Like the father in our humorous opening story, everyone's got an opinion. So we have to establish some best practices for not just getting advice, but getting good advice.

The first thing to avoid is what's called confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is a human tendency to interpret new facts or ideas in a way that supports what you already believe. Basically, you hear what you want to hear.

If you're going to avoid confirmation bias, you have to do two things.

First, you're going to have to let go of what you want.

Second, you're going to have to learn to ask good questions.

You can't just ask, "If I make this decision, will I be much happier, or the happiest I've ever been in my entire life?" Ask better questions, get better answers, get better advice.

Here are some question prompts that will help you get better answers:

Can you tell me your thoughts about . . . ?

Explain what you mean by . . . ?

What would it look like if . . . ?

What is most important about . . . ?

What would work best for . . . ?

If I do _____, what do you think will happen?

What would make _____ possible?

What do you see as . . . ?

Paint a picture for me of what it would look like if I did _____.

Avoid asking how someone feels about something or what they'd do.

If you frame your questions around emotions and experiences, you're less likely to get good advice. No one will feel the same as you or react the same as you. Stick as close as you can to issues, factors, and facts.

Now that you have the right questions, you have to ask the right people.

Start with friends and family. They love you and care about you the most.

Next, find someone who doesn't share the same values and beliefs as you and ask them. They'll be most likely to help you see things in a different light.

Next, find someone who has made a similar decision to the one you are trying to make. Experience is the best teacher.

Last, find someone who is NOT emotionally invested in your decision. Emotions can cloud judgement.

If you get advice you don't want to hear, don't throw it out back like an old car tire. It's not useless. In fact, it might be just the thing God wants you to hear.

Listening to advice takes humility. Plain and simple. Humility is hard, but this is a promise:

You'll never regret acting in humility.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

Using the list of question prompts, formulate five to ten questions about your decisions and write them below.



Now, write down the names of people you will reach out to for advice. You can list three family members or friends, but then move on. Some people might fit into more than one category (*i.e. maybe a family member has different values or beliefs than you*).

Family and friends



One person whose values and beliefs are different from yours

One expert

One person who is NOT emotionally invested in your decision

Now that you have your list of people and the questions you will ask them, it's time to reach out. Don't be afraid to do this right now! Send a quick text or email and ask someone if they can grab coffee sometime soon or hop on a five minute phone call. Tell them you need to ask their advice.

There is no time like the present. Don't procrastinate. Do it, right now.





Step 7:

DO A PRE-MORTEM

On December 24, 2013, NASA Astronauts Rick Mastracchio and Mike Hopkins embarked on a space walk to install a new ammonia pump on the International Space Station. Without the pump, the ISS solar panels could overheat, causing a whole list of other problems. Merry Christmas ISS, you're fully functional again.

Here's a question for you: Where'd they get the replacement pump?

The answer: redundancy.

In engineering, redundancy means the inclusion of extra components that are not strictly necessary to functioning in case of failure in other components. NASA, which routinely deals in scenarios where failure could cost billions of dollars — not to mention people's lives — builds redundancies into nearly every aspect of their missions. What's the lesson here?

Prepare. For. Failure.

Proverbs 22:3 says, “The astute see an evil and hide, while the naive continue on and pay the penalty.”

Here is a quick, but important, truth about whatever it is you are trying to make a prayerful decision about:

Things will not go according to plan.

**There will be failure. Things will go wrong.
Your plan will not run perfectly.**

The writer of Proverbs makes this pretty clear, and shares simple wisdom. See problems before they come and do your best to prepare for them.

If you get in a place where you feel like things are going to be perfect and nothing can go wrong, you're in deep trouble. "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what any day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

So how do we fight off the rose-colored glasses and see problems before they get to us?

Step 7: Do a Pre-Mortem.

A pre-mortem is a simple — and incredibly useful — exercise.

Imagine you've made your decision. Now imagine it's six months from now and everything has gone horribly wrong. It might take some time, but get yourself in that mindset.

Once you've gotten yourself into that frame of mind, ask yourself: What got you there?

Use your imagination and creativity as you wonder about the question.

Figure out what could go wrong so you can figure out how to be prepared for it.

Problems are inevitable. Nothing goes according to plan, so it's not pessimistic to say you will face problems. It's just a reality.

Make your plans now so you can make a bold prayerful decision fully prepared for the obstacles that may come your way.

Can you prepare for every possible pitfall? Of course not. But not knowing the test questions doesn't mean you shouldn't study.

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

Get together with some trusted friends, your spouse, etc. who will help you imagine everything that could possibly go wrong. You can have fun with this.

It's best if you have something to write on, like a dry erase board or something similar. Write down the decision you're trying to make, then explain the idea of the pre-mortem.

Paint a really horrible scenario. Everything's gone wrong.

Now, figure out why together. Write it up. Figure out how you would deal with it.

Now is the time to prepare your contingencies.

Last note, you might have a complicated decision with lots of options. If that's the case, just pick the two or three options you're currently leaning towards. Do a pre-mortem on those options.

A post-mortem is all about figuring out why something died. A pre-mortem is figuring out what could kill it and preparing. Do the pre-mortem. It might save your decision's life.





Step 8:

TRUST



If you've made it this far, it's clear you're serious about this well-discerned, prayerful decision. You're putting in the work. You aren't messing around.

You're not figuring out how to make a prayerful decision, you're doing it. You might even be feeling a little bit confident in your ability to make a prayerful decision. I've got two things to say about that.

If you are feeling confident, here is one last warning. If you aren't feeling confident, here is one last encouragement.

God wants you to have confidence. The first part of Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and steadfast; have no fear or dread of them . . ." But you can't have the confidence of the first half of the verse without the wisdom of the second half, "for it is the LORD, your God, who marches with you; he will never fail you or forsake you."

Be not confident in yourself, or in the process, or in your wisdom, or in what you've done, or in this guide, or in your assignments. Be confident because God is with you.

**“BE STRONG AND
STEADFAST; HAVE
NO FEAR OR DREAD
OF THEM FOR IT IS
THE LORD, YOUR
GOD, WHO MARCHES
WITH YOU; HE WILL
NEVER FAIL YOU OR
FORSAKE YOU.”**

DEUTERONOMY 31:6



If you're not confident – if you're worried, if you're afraid, if you're anxious – take heart. It all comes down to this one thing:

Step 8: Trust.

Trust in the Lord. Trust in a God who keeps His promises. Trust that when He says He marches with you and will never fail or forsake you, He means it.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; In all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths.”

Trust. It's not a suggestion. It's not a polite request. Trust is a command. It's a clear and undeniable call from the Lord. But trust is especially difficult when it comes to prayerful decision making for a few reasons:

1. The mindset that it all depends on you.
2. The mindset that there is only one possible choice you are supposed to make, and if you don't make the right one God will abandon you, you will experience epic failure, and life as you know it will cease to exist.

Let's deal with these in order.

First, whatever prayerful decision you are trying to make, it is NOT all on you. Remember Proverbs 3:5-6? Trust in prayerful decision making has nothing to do with your abilities, efforts, wisdom, or any part of your equation. Trust comes from knowing that you have a God who keeps His promises.

Second, there can be a trap when it comes to prayerful decision making in believing that there is only one specific thing God is calling you to do, and if you don't figure it out everything will be in shambles.

When you get caught up in the idea that there is only one possible outcome God wants from you, the pressure can be overwhelming. It's like God has three doors (or more) before you, places your perfect future behind one of them, and says "go ahead!" Then He sits back and bites His fingernails and watches to see if you'll get it right.

That's silly. God's a good father. A good father helps and supports his children when they are trying to make a decision. As long as all the options are good, the good father is going to do everything he can to help his children succeed.

Just love God, ask for His help, and know that He is a good father who loves you back.

**“WE KNOW THAT
ALL THINGS WORK
FOR GOOD FOR
THOSE WHO LOVE
GOD, WHO ARE
CALLED ACCORDING
TO HIS PURPOSE”**

ROMANS 8:28



TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

Some of your assignments have been a bit of work. This one, while simple, needs to be added to your daily routine. You can tack it on to the end of your daily time of silent listening if you'd like, or say it first thing when you get up in the morning. Fit it in wherever it works for you, but say this prayer every single day. It's a prayer written by Thomas Merton, and it applies to your prayerful decision making pretty well:

*My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*



BROOKS



Step 9:

GO



One of the best Bible stories comes from Acts chapter one. You've heard it before.

Around 500 disciples looked on as Jesus was literally raised up off the ground into the sky, ascending into Heaven, until they lost sight of Him behind the clouds.

“While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven’” (*Acts 1:10-11*).

Sometimes the Bible is pretty funny.

Can't you see it? The crowd of men and women standing in silence staring up into the sky, the blank stares and the unspoken question hanging in the silent air around them: “Now what?” When two men (angels by the sound of them) walk up out of nowhere and are basically like, “Uh, hey, guys? What are you doing? Go on now. He's not coming back for a while.”

There comes a time when we have to stop looking up at the sky and go do what God has told us to do.

Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

That verse is popular for many reasons, and the most important word in the verse might be “go.”

Seriously, sometimes you just need to go. As much as we’d all like God to come down and take us by the hand and tell us exactly what to do, at a certain point we have to realize that it’s probably not going to happen. There comes a time when you must end your prayerful discernment and GO.

The important question to ask is “when.” When should you go? And of course the answer is tricky, which is why perpetual discernment looks so warm and fuzzy compared to the dark and cold reality of stepping outside your comfort zone and making a commitment. So how do you figure out when to make the leap and make your decision? There is a period of time used by the earliest Christians for prayer and discernment: nine days.

Nine days to make a prayerful decision. And, if you notice, our guide here happens to be nine steps.

If you've been working through this guide diligently and doing the exercises everyday, you should have been praying about your decisions for nine days at this point. Guess what? It's time to make your decision.

If you were an over-achiever and you read through the whole book in one sitting, no worries. Don't be hasty, just start counting from today, maintain your daily prayer of silent listening, complete the assignments that go with each step, and on the ninth day make your decision.

Nine days to listen to God, imagine his plan, prioritize, research, calculate, seek advice, prepare, and trust. Nine days to make a prayerful decision. And then GO.

At some point you must say, "God said he would be with me always. I've given this entire decision over to Him. I believe this is where He is leading me. I'm all in."

You can choose to do one thing, choose to do another, or choose to refuse to choose. You can't escape the choosing, so go boldly forward knowing that God will be with you.

Go. It's the most important part of making your prayerful decision.

A photograph of a rocket launch. The rocket is positioned in the upper center, moving upwards and leaving a thick, white, conical plume of smoke and fire. The background is a sky filled with large, white, fluffy clouds. The overall color palette is muted, with greys, whites, and a hint of yellow from the sun in the top right corner.

**+
GO**

TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT:

You are probably facing one of a few possible realities right now.

1. You read this whole thing on day one and haven't done any of it yet.

Great. Your job is to start now, go through the exercises over the next eight days and on the ninth day, complete today's assignment.

2. You can't wait nine days. Some factor is forcing your hand.

No problem. Adjust the assignments to fit your timeline. If you only have an hour, do what you can in one hour. If you have four days, condense it to four days. Right now is your chance to tailor the plan to whatever time frame works for you, including your last assignment below.

3. You've been starting and stopping, so even though you haven't reached this part on day nine, you also haven't been diligent in your daily listening or completing the other assignments.

That's OK. Use this very moment as a starting over point. Commit to making this a priority for the next nine days, then complete today's assignment.

4. You've been diligently reading this guide and doing the assignments. You are on day nine right now.

Great. You get to do the last assignment right now.

The last assignment is this: Prayerfully commit your decision to God. It's time to make your decision. The angels are standing next to you and whispering, "Go."

If you're making this decision with someone else – like a spouse or friend – get with them and pray this prayer:

*Lord, I trust that you are "with me always."
I don't always know the right thing to do,
But I'm trying to do my best,
Not by trusting in myself,
But by giving my decisions over to you.
Lord, I've been praying about (say whatever decision
you've been trying to make).
I know that you have a plan for my life,
And that plan is for my happiness and joy.
I can't know your designs perfectly,
But after praying about it I believe you want me to
(Say your decision).
Please guide my actions, guard my heart, and protect
my trust in you.
I give this decision to you and entrust it to your care.
I know that you are with me always.
Amen.*

THE BEST YOU CAN

Nothing is perfect.

Nothing and no one can guarantee you'll make a perfect decision.

The wise among you already knew that. You already knew that nothing can guarantee you'll always make the perfect choice. We're imperfect and the world is imperfect and things almost never — read, never never — turn out the exact way we think they will.

So, when it comes to decision making, it's best not to hope for perfection. It's best to hope for something like this:

That at the end of the day, when the decision is made, you can truthfully, honestly, confidently say, "I did the best I could. I made the best decision I could make."

Because that's the best any of us can do.

At the end of the day, most people just want to be able to say they did the best they could.

You won't be perfect. This guide to prayerful decision making doesn't guarantee perfect. But, if you have gone through the process with honesty and vigor, completed the exercises with patience and determination, know this:

You're doing the best anyone could ever expect you to do.

And that isn't bad. Not bad at all.



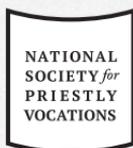
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SHOULDN'T BE
A WELL-KEPT
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