

Proverbs 16:1-9

Everyday Wisdom:
Wise Decision Making

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Prudence is married, **she** has **three children**, and lives in a **suburb of Boston**. Her oldest boy is a **freshman** in **high school** and is doing great. Her **youngest** is in **elementary school** and loves it; but her **middle child** is in **middle school** and isn't doing well. She's **hasn't** made any **friends**, sometimes gets **picked on**, is **bored** and **uninterested** with her **education**, and she's begun **acting out** more at **home**. Prudence is **worried** about her daughter's **education** as well as her **mental** and **emotional wellbeing**.

Prudence has talked with her **husband** about her **concerns** and he supports finding the **best education possible** where their daughter can **flourish**, so Prudence is **prayerfully researching** and **thinking through** all their **options**. Her **name**, "**Prudence**," means thinking through all the **options** and their **potential outcomes**. She intends to **live up** to her **name**. She **lists** her possible choices.

1. **Current School:** She could keep her daughter in her **current school** but lobby for more **attention** from her **teachers** or **pay a tutor**. She'd also have to talk with the **administration** about **bullying**.
2. **Different Public School:** She could try and transfer her daughter to another **public middle school** in town but there's **no guarantees** that could happen or would be any better.
3. **Charter School:** Although she's not as **familiar** with **charter schools** there is one nearby. She would have to do **research** to **fully understand** this option.
4. **Private School:** The youth pastor gives **chapel talks** at a **local Christian school**. **Several families** from the church go there. There's also a **non-Christian private school** nearby, but both are **pricey**.
5. **Homeschool:** Several families in her church also **homeschool** and **speak positively** of it. She likes the **specialized focus** it **offers** but isn't sure she has the **time** or **talent** to make it happen.
6. **Online School:** **One teenage** boy in the church is trying to become a **professional golfer** and is going to school online. She didn't have that option when she was a kid.

These are the options she lists but she knows **there** are **others**. Her **head** is **spinning** with all the **possibilities** and the potential **pros** and **cons** of **each**. Most of all she wants to make the **right decision** for her daughter, whatever that may **be**. Her pastor happens to be **preaching** a **sermon series** on **Proverbs** (what a **coincidence!**) and she **wonders** if she can **apply** some of what she is learning to this decision. Her pastor recently preached on the **Proverbs 31 woman** and this woman's **diligence** really **inspired** her.

Proverbs 31:27 (NIV)

She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

She's going to be **proactive** and make the **best choice possible** for her daughter. She **opens** up to the book of Proverbs and begins to **review** the **notes** she **scribbled down**.

“Make a good decision within the boundaries of Scripture.”

She remembers the **first thing** her **pastor taught** while preaching on **wise decision making** in the book of Proverbs. The Bible often **doesn't** tell us **what exactly to do**. **Instead**, the Bible gives us **boundaries of what not to do** and **what types of good things to do**. It lets us use our **wisdom** as we **prayerfully follow** any **promptings** of the **Holy Spirit**. One verse **warns of staying away from evil and pursuing good**.

Proverbs 14:22 (NIV)

Do not those who plot evil go astray?

But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.¹

In other words, whatever we choose we shouldn't **disobey God** or **commit a sin**. That's **not an option**.² Thankfully the **Bible (God's special revelation)** helps her figure out **right** and **wrong**.

Proverbs 29:18 (NIV)

Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint;

but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.

As far as she can tell there's **no scriptural mandate** for **how exactly to school** your kids outside of **disciplining** them to **follow Christ** (Deut 6:4-9). So none of these options are an **immoral choice** but neither is one option **prescribed**. This feels **freeing**, allowing her the **space** to **investigate what's best** for her daughter. Now to figure out **which one to take**. She reads **another note**.

“Talk to trusted mentors and friends.”

It makes sense to Prudence to talk to **people she trusts**, and as she **flips** to the verses in Proverbs she finds that this book, a book of **practical everyday wisdom**, recommends asking for **guidance** from **others**.

Proverbs 24:6 (NIV)

Surely you need guidance to wage war,

and victory is won through many advisers.

Choosing the best education does feel a little like **war**. She wonders **how many** people she should **contact**.

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV)

Plans fail for lack of counsel,

but with many advisers they succeed.

(See also Proverbs 1:5; 11:14; 20:18)

Proverbs encourages her to talk with **not just one adviser** but **many**. So she thinks of a **few parents** she knows who have their children in **each** option. She wants to hear from **each one** what they think the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of their current educational choices are. But Prudence knows that when you read **one Proverb** you should see what other **similar** Proverbs have to say. The next note says:

“Avoid getting advice from foolish people.”

While she can think of a list of **helpful people** who have **navigated** the school system already, she can also think of **several people** she's **not so certain** would offer helpful advice.

Proverbs 12:5 (NIV)

The plans of the righteous are just,

but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.

(See also Proverbs 6:18; 12:20; 15:26)

Prudence decides that although in the **past** she's gotten **helpful recommendations** through **Facebook**, for this **particular decision** she's **not** going to post anything **publicly**. **Why?** Because it might draw out some of her more **opinionated Facebook friends** and it may **embarrass her daughter**, neither of which she wants.

To make the **best choice possible** she **begins to talk to trusted mentors and friends** and **avoid getting advice** from foolish people. **As** she does her **research** she finds that it takes **way more time** than she **expected**. She's spending **hours and hours pouring over school websites** and talking with **program administrators** and **families** who are **currently** in each of the **options**. Her daughter **isn't doing well** and she feels like she's **getting nowhere**. But then she remembers another point.

“Don't rush it. Take your time to make the wise choice.”

Prudence feels as if the Lord has **brought this to mind** at **just the right moment**.

Proverbs 21:5 (NIV)

The plans of the diligent lead to profit
as surely as haste leads to poverty.

“Haste leads to poverty.” She doesn't want to **rush it**. She calls up **another mom** in the **church** for **encouragement** and she agrees to **meet up to talk and pray**. Prudence tell her how she's been **trying to apply** Proverbs and the **sermon series** but she's also **feeling anxious**. This other **mom** remembers **another lesson** from Proverbs that **really stuck out** to her.

“Examine your heart.”

Together they **flip to Proverbs 16**. Here Prudence finds a call to **examine her own heart** and **motives**.

Proverbs 16:1-2 (NIV)

1 To humans belong the plans of the heart,
but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue.
2 All a person's ways seem pure to them,
but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Her friend asks her a question, **“Why do you want to make this change?”**

“Because I want my daughter to have the **best schooling possible**” she says.

“Yes, but this passage seems to say there might be **something deeper** going on in your **heart**. What are you **feeling?** What are your **motives?** **Why** is good schooling **important?**”

Prudence takes a moment to think it over before answering, “When my kids **aren't doing well** in school or at home or with their friends I feel like a **failure as a mom**. I want my daughter to do well in school because I **really do care** about her education but also because I want to **feel like a good parent**.”

The other mom **nods**. **She feels it too**. They talk about **how easy it is** to base their **identity as a parent** on the **success** of their **child** and they commit to **encouraging** each other to find their **acceptance** in our **Heavenly Father's** love for them. Prudence **realizes** this decision isn't **only** about **her own heart**, it's also about her **daughter's heart**. She remembers the **foundation verse** her **church family** has been **memorizing** during this sermon series (**maybe together** we can help Prudence remember this verse).

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.

That evening she sits down to have a **heart-to-heart** with her daughter. She asks her why she's **feeling uninterested** in her **classes** and why has she been **acting differently** recently. Is it the **teachers**? Is it the **relationships**? Her daughter in a **moment of openness** tells her that she's always felt like the other kids are **smarter than** her. They just seem to "**get it**" **faster and better**, which makes her feel **embarrassed** and **depressed**. It doesn't help when they **joke** about her. Prudence tells her daughter she **loves her** and is **proud of her** and **they're** going to **work it out**. They **pray over** what her daughter is feeling.

Prudence walks away from the conversation feeling **encouraged** and now more than ever wanting to make the **right choice** for her daughter. That **evening** her **husband** brings up a **lesson** that has **resonated** with him from Proverbs along with one of his **favorite verses**.

“Trust in the Lord and his plans.”

The **next verse after Proverbs 16:1-2** says how to **deal** with **anxiety of the heart**, by trusting in the Lord.

Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)

Commit to the Lord whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans.

Prudence and her **husband** remember **Proverbs** are **not promises but principles**. It's **not as if** they **pray hard** and **dedicate** their daughter to the Lord that she will then end up at the **very best of schools**, but she does feel **reassured** that the Lord will work **through this choice** for her daughter's **spiritual good**.

She is **beginning to sense** the Lord is **more interested** in "**how**" she makes this decision than in making the "**right**" **decision**. Prudence and her husband **commit** to trusting the Lord **no matter what** they decide. A few verses later they read **another reminder** of **God's sovereignty over everything**.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)

In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the Lord establishes their steps.

(See also Proverbs 19:21; 20:24; 27:1)

Prudence remembers **her own education**. She thinks back to her **college years** when she wasn't sure what **degree** she should choose, but eventually decided on **nursing**. It **led** to her **meeting her husband**. She remembers all the **nights before** that decision to pursue nursing when she **tossed and turned** wondering if she was making the **right choice**. **And yet God was present all along working everything out through her normal everyday choices**. Prudence **felt at peace** as she thought about the Lord's plans for her daughter. His plans for her **may not be easy** but they **would be good**. He would work it out.

Prudence finally feels like it's time to make the choice. It seems like Proverbs approves of **prudence** but not of **procrastination**.

“It's time to make a decision without fear or pride.”

Prudence turns once again to the Proverbs 31 woman.

Proverbs 31:25 (NIV)

She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.

(See also Proverbs 31:28)

Here she finds a **strong, wise, capable woman** who makes her decisions **with joy** and **without fear**. That's the **kind of woman she wants to be** and the kind of woman she wants to **model for her daughters and son**. But at the same time she wants to be **careful not to act arrogant or prideful**.

Proverbs 27:1 (NIV)

Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring.

Prudence and her husband take the time to **pray** for a **humble heart** and to **make the decision without fear** or **anxiety** but **trusting** in the **Lord**. Even if the **next choice doesn't go well** they **have faith** the Lord will work it out. They're **grateful** he has brought them this far.

Prudence **reviews** with her husband everything she's learned:

1. "Make a good decision within the boundaries of Scripture."
2. "Talk to trusted mentors and friends."
3. "Avoid getting advice from foolish people."
4. "Don't rush it. Take your time to make the wise choice."
5. "Examine your heart."
6. "Trust in the Lord and his plans."
7. "It's time to make a decision without fear or pride."

She feels she can use this **advice** to apply to **other decisions**. In fact, she sees how these **principles** could be **helpful** in just about **any situation**, for her **family**, at **work**, on her **frontline** (the place where she **naturally** spends the **most time** with people who don't know Jesus yet). But she remembers how her pastor is **never done preaching until he talks about Jesus** and the **gospel**. She **adds** one more point.

"No matter what happens, remember the gospel."

They remember a **gospel-verse from Proverbs** from the previous Sunday's message.

Proverbs 16:6 (NIV)

Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.

Prudence and her husband are reminded **not of their own love and faithfulness, but of Christ's** and how he **atoned for sin**. **Atone** means to **pay for something**, to **make amends**. Christ Jesus **made amends** for **their sin** by his **death** on the **cross**. Now, **through** the **fear of the Lord**, which means a **humble relationship of trust in him**, they can **turn away from evil** and **turn to God**. No matter what happens, they are **forgiven**.

If the decision **goes well** and their **daughter succeeds**, Prudence is **not going to find her value, worth** and **identify** in the **success** but **in Christ**. And... If the decision **goes poorly** and her daughter does **just as bad**

after all this work, she's not going to **beat herself up** or feel **shame** but instead remember her **Heavenly Father's love**. **Because** of the **gospel** she **knows she should stand before God guilty** but instead **she stands before God forgiven**. Now that's **wise decision making**.

You may be **wondering** which **option** Prudence **chose**. What **matters more** is how she chose it. Let's pray.³

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through Apple podcasts or Google Play Music. Read the story of our church here.

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¹ In this sermon I draw much from Tremper Longman III's commentary on *Proverbs*. See his section on "Guidance/Planning/Looking to the Future" on page 557.

² I don't discuss whether or not we should cast lots to make decisions in this sermon. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." (NIV) I appreciate what [GodQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/casting-lots.html) says on this topic: "The New Testament nowhere instructs Christians to use a method similar to casting lots to help with decision-making. Now that we have the completed Word of God, as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us, there is no reason to be using games of chance to make decisions. The Word, the Spirit, and prayer are sufficient for discerning God's will today—not casting lots, rolling dice, or flipping a coin." *What was the practice of casting lots?* Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://www.gotquestions.org/casting-lots.html>

³ I've found this to be a helpful book for making decisions. *Decision making and the will of God* by Garry Friesen. https://smile.amazon.com/dp/1590522052/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_U_f1kQDbHsk8TFZ